EPHESIANS

A series of sermons on the Apostle Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus by Pastor David Legge

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Turn with me in your Bibles to Paul's epistle to the church at Ephesus, the book of Ephesians. And we'll take time this evening, we're going to look at the introduction of this little epistle and the salutation that we find in verses 1 and 2, we're only going to look at these two verses - because it's important as we look at any book that we lay are historical and contextual foundations of the book. In order to interpret any book of the Bible properly, it's important that we understand who it's being written to, who's writing it and what situation it's being written to. So we need to have a backdrop for this book of Ephesians to understand all the truths that are held therein. But in order to get the context of what we're going to be looking into the weeks that lie ahead, let's look and read the whole of chapter 1 of the book of Ephesians. If you want to shout 'Hallelujah' in the middle of any of these verses, you feel free to do so! I can't because I'm reading.

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all".

We're looking this evening at verses 1 and 2 of this chapter, let's read them together again: 'Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:
Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ”. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the hymnwriter, wrote these words about the book of Ephesians - he said: 'It is the divinest composition of man'. The most beautiful letter, the most beautiful words that have ever been penned by any human being - but as we sit this evening and study these magnificent words, as we read them, we say that they are not simply the divinest words of a human being, but as we read them they testify very clearly that these are the words of Almighty God. Go home this evening and read these words - for perhaps they're the profoundest that have ever been written by any man. You can see the grandeur, the majesty, the dignity, the richness and fulness, the peculiarity of these words among the whole of the New Testament and the whole of the word of God - there is power in these words! This, perhaps, is not the longest of Paul's letters - but perhaps it's one of the profoundest, the most powerful, the most significant of his works and writings, humanly speaking.

Look at the book for a moment. The book naturally splits into two parts, two sections. The first section is chapter 1 to chapter 3 - 1, 2 and 3 deal with doctrinal belief, in other words: what believer's wealth is. What we believe, our doctrines of our faith that we build our life and build the church upon - 1 to 3 is doctrinal. Then chapters 4 to 6 are practical - not simply the believer's wealth, but the believer's walk. Because of what we believe Christ is, what He has done for us, what we have as our foundation - how then should we behave as Christians: our walk in Christ. Now the two key verses in both of these sections are found at the start of each of the sections - look at chapter 1 and verse 3, this is the key verse in the first doctrinal section of the book of Ephesians: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ'. And then the second key verse, for the second section, the practical section, is found in chapter 4 and verse 1 - the very start of the section: 'I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord', Paul says, 'beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called'. He outlines, in chapters 1 to 3, all that you are in Christ, all that we have, all the riches that we have inherited through the blood of Christ - and then in chapter 4 he says, 'Now, this is what you've been called into, now practically speaking you've got to walk worthy of your vocation of your calling'.
What is the theme of this little letter of Paul's? The theme is simply this: the mystery of the church of Jesus Christ. It's a mystery because it never, ever was revealed in the whole of the history of Judaism. This mystery was something that only came to being at Pentecost, in the New Testament when the church of Jesus Christ was formed. You can see it right throughout every chapter of the book of Ephesians. Look at chapter 1, for in chapter 1 and verse 11 we see there, a mystery: 'In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will'. Chapter 1, we have the mystery of the will of God. If you look at chapter 2, and you read it when you go home, there is the mystery of the church of Jesus Christ - how Jews and Gentiles, all sorts of pagans and barbarians, and the Pharisees even, and the Scribes, no matter what background you're from - how that God has wrought in Christ a reconciliation, and that God has broken down the middle wall of partition and has made the two, Gentiles and Jews, one in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you go to chapter 3 and verse 4, you see there the mystery - as Darby translates it - the mystery of Christ, the mystery of His person, the mystery of His being, the mystery of who and what He is at this moment in time in heaven. Go into chapter 4 and you read about the mystery of the unity of the body of Christ, all across this universe. You go to chapter 5 and you have some practical rules about how masters should relate to their servants, servants to their masters, husbands to wives, wives to husbands, children to parents, parents to children. But you remember, after Paul says that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church, he says that this is the mystery - he speaks of the relationship between the Saviour and the saints, the Bridegroom and the bride, the Lord Jesus Christ and His church. And then, when you go into chapter 6, you see the mystery of the Gospel - look at chapter 6 verse 20: 'For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak'.

The message of this little book is the present dynamic relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ, risen, exalted, glorified in heaven! The message is His dynamic, real, powerful relationship today with the church, His first love. It's quite similar to the book of Colossians, you see the book of Colossians speaks of the 'cosmic Christ', the Christ as He is today - not as He was, not as He was upon the cross, not even in the resurrection, but ascended, risen, exalted as He is now. But Ephesians differs in this respect: that it speaks not specifically of the 'cosmic Christ', but how the church has a 'cosmic' present role as the body of that same Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I want us to do a bit of work this evening - because we've got to think, we've got to understand the situation and the circumstances that this letter - and remember, it is a letter - that was addressed to the church at Ephesus [was written in]. Ephesus was one of the largest Mediterranean cities. It had approximately a quarter to half a million of a population, and for those days that was very large. But this city of Ephesus was richly blessed from hand of God, for this city had been touched with the preaching of Paul the apostle - and if you look on the back of your sheet, your handout, you'll see there the three missionary journeys of the apostle Paul. But Paul the apostle came across this city of Ephesus in his second missionary journey, en route from the land of Greece to the land of Syria - you can read about it in Acts chapter 18. But as he came across Ephesus on his second missionary journey he did not stay there long, he only stopped over there for a few nights - but as he was hurrying through that city of Ephesus, on to Jerusalem, he found time to debate with the Jewish leaders in the local synagogue. The word of God tells us that they were so impressed with what Paul was teaching and preaching, that they begged for him to remain with them in Ephesus - and he said that he would come back again one day if it was the will of God for him. Therefore, we read in the book of the Acts, that on his third missionary journey he made sure, he believed it was the will of God, that he would go again to the city of Ephesus and there, the word of God tells us, he spent three years.

Now, I want you to understand Paul's strategic way of his missionary journeys. He did not go 'willy-nilly' and decide, 'We'll preach here, we'll preach there, we'll go to this city, to that city', or wherever the path took him, there he preached - that wasn't the way he worked. Now remember that Ephesus was perhaps the largest city in Asia Minor, and Paul knew that if he could break the [impregnable] walls of that great city - where
people travelled through, where businessmen came to, where cultural people came to in the arts, and music, and writing and so forth - that he was going to plant, as it were, a gospel 'atomic bomb' that would spread to the whole province of Asia Minor. Do you see his thinking? And therefore he comes to Ephesus, the biggest city - and we read in the book of Acts that for three months he resumed his confrontation with those Jews that he had talked with on his second missionary journey. He debated with them over and over, every day for three months until he had some opposition - and when he had the opposition he removed himself with his converts and went to a lecturing theatre and hall of Tyrannus. And there, day after day, morning after morning for two whole years he debated, he preached, he exhorted these men and women to trust the Lord Jesus Christ.

What faithfulness Paul had in the Gospel. So much so that there was a riot in the city of Ephesus - and you can read about it in chapter 19 of the book of Acts. There was a man called Demetrius, and because his livelihood was threatened - he made little idols, replica models of the temple and of Diana of the Ephesians - and because Paul was preaching the Gospel and idolaters were being converted, he was going to go out of business. Leonard Ravenhill has said that you can't have revival without a riot. Ten years later Paul decides to write a letter to the church of Ephesus - and if you go to the very end of this book, you'll see in small writing - it's not inspired - but there we have: 'Written from Rome unto the Ephesians by Tychicus'. Paul, as he wrote this letter to the Ephesians, was under house arrest in Rome. He was imprisoned; he was awaiting the outcome of the appeal that he had made to Caesar. But I want you to notice, as you've already read the first chapter - and I hope you've read the other chapters of this little book - he is imprisoned for the cause of Christ, but he's not moaning! He's not whimpering, he's not grumbling, he's not griping - but perhaps this letter shows unbelievable, explosive joy that this prisoner for Christ had in his Lord and his salvation!

Sure, if you read many of the books of the Bible, some of the greatest of them were written in prison. And well might the Psalmist have said in Psalm 76 verse 10, that God makes the wrath of man to praise Him! You'll find within the New Testament, that three of the books that we have were written where Paul is at this moment - in prison, house arrest, in Rome. The book of Colossians, the book of Philemon, and the book that we read this evening - the book of Ephesians. We only have to look down church history, don't we? We go to the Reformation and we read of men that were imprisoned: Sivonna Roli (sp?) in Italy, Tyndale in England, Anne Askew - why was she imprisoned, a woman? She was imprisoned because she rejected the popish doctrine of trans-substantiation, she declared - had the guts to say - 'This is only bread, this is only wine', and she was thrown into prison. And before she was burned at the stake in Smithfield, do you know what she could write in poetic language?

'I now rejoice in heart
And hope bids me do so,
That Christ will take my part
And ease me of my woe'.

Madame Guyon, the French saint, as she lay in a cold prison cell - do you know what she could write?

'My cage confines me round,
Abroad I cannot fly,
But though my wings are closely bound,
My heart is at liberty.
My prison walls cannot control
The flight, the freedom, of my soul'.

Paul was in prison, but it didn't affect his spirit. Paul was in jail, he couldn't go out, he couldn't preach, he couldn't witness, he couldn't sing out in the open or with the children of God - yet he rejoiced in his Lord!
Are you in prison this evening? What is it? Is it illness? Is it persecution? Is it your family? Is it friends? Is it your husband or your wife? People at work, your boss? And you feel that you're in prison, you feel that you're sealed in, you can't get out, you're kept! Listen: Paul, the prisoner of Christ, could rejoice - and so can you!

We read in the word of God that Paul was allowed some visitors, we read that there was a man called Epaphras - he would come in now and again and he would keep Paul posted with what was going on within the church of Jesus Christ at large. But Epaphras had come to Paul and disturbed him a little, because he had brought to him news that there were heretics in Colossae teaching that Jesus Christ was not who He was. That bothered Paul in jail, so he got started and he wrote the letter to the Colossians. And then, while Paul was in prison, he befriended a slave called Onesimus - he was a renegade fugitive, he had offended and frauded his master and his owner. But when he came in contact with Paul he was gloriously saved and converted, and Paul had the burden of this soul, Onesimus, upon his heart and he decided to write a letter to his master who was a believer, Philemon, and send him back to his master - hoping that he would be pardoned. The man that stayed with him much of the time in prison, was a man called Tychicus - he was the man who was going to take Onesimus back to Philemon with the letter. He was the man that was going to deliver the letter to Colossae. But he was also a native of the city of Ephesus, and he was going to be travelling through Ephesus, and Paul couldn't resist writing a letter to the church at Ephesus, and he took it with him.

Now look at verse 1, it says: 'Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus' - some manuscripts don't have the words 'at Ephesus'. Now that doesn't really matter, because we know that this letter was going to Ephesus - but what many believe is this: that this was not simply a letter for Ephesus, but it was an open-ended letter that was to be a circular letter that went round all the churches of Jesus Christ. I want us to notice three things about these first two verses that will give us an introduction to this great letter - I don't know about you, but I'm excited about it! It's full of spiritual dynamite, spiritual meat - and if you go away starving this evening there's something wrong. The author is the first thing that I want you to notice: 'Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God'. Now, there's three things I want you to notice - I want you to notice the author, secondly I want you to notice his authority and thirdly the source of his authority.

Look at the author: Paul. If you were to look at letters that were written - ordinary secular letters from friends and family and relatives - in the same age and day that this letter of Paul was written, you would find that they all began the same. They started with the name of the person that was writing - the author - and then the second name or place that you would read would be the addressee - the person being written to - and then the third thing you would encounter is the greeting - the salutation of the person, the author, writing to the addressee. That follows the same pattern and the same model here as we see. He says, 'Paul' - the author sending the letter. Now I want you to notice that he doesn't say 'Father Paul', he doesn't say 'Apostle Paul', he doesn't even say 'Elder Paul' or 'Pastor Paul' - he says 'Paul'. Paul was his Roman name, and we find throughout the epistles that Paul, he was the apostle to the Gentiles and whenever he was speaking as the apostle to the Gentiles he used his Gentile name 'Paul'. Remember what he said? He was [a Jew to the] Jew, he was a Gentile to the Gentile, he was everything to any man that he might bring them to Christ. That's what we need to be, that by all means we would save some.

You know, and you heard last evening, that he was called Saul before his conversion - probably because he was from the tribe of Benjamin, and King Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin, and the mother of Saul christened her son after the great King. But when he was converted, his name was changed. He became the apostle to the Gentiles, and what a work he did, but his name was changed from Saul to Paul - do you know what Paul means? This staggers me, it means 'small', small. That lion that ravaged, that breathed out murderings and cursings and threatenings against the church of Jesus Christ, that Pharisee that was
instrumental in the murder of Stephen whose face was as an angel - that lion was brought down to size, made small by the Lord Jesus Christ. And the one who arrested Christians, on the road to Damascus was arrested by the Son of God and converted! It's amazing, God cut him down to size, but it was his smallness that became the medium for God's bigness. He said, 'When I am weak He is strong...His strength is made perfect in my weakness'. Do you know that, Christian? Maybe you're going through weakness today, maybe you're experiencing it, maybe God is bringing you down to size by some means - listen: His grace is sufficient for you. Cherish His grace, cherish the work that God is doing in your life and see that He is honing, He is digging. He is excavating in your life, maybe even in your flesh, a channel by which He will flow the life of Christ through you.

Paul, just Paul, that's the author - but what is the authority of the author? Look at verse one: 'Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ' - he is an apostle, now that's not a title, it was his role. We find this word 'apostle' throughout the whole of the New Testament, what it's doing here is simply giving an official stamp to the letter that is being sent to this church and to all the churches. But here, in this verse, it's used in a restrictive sense - what do I mean by that? Well 'apostle' simply means in the Greek, literally: 'sent out one', but there are many meanings for 'apostle'. For instance, to be a missionary in the New Testament could be classified as being an apostle, sent out from the church. Indeed, we read within the word of God of one Epaphroditus, who was called 'your apostle', simply because he was chosen by the church to be their servant. But the word 'apostle' here is not used in that sense, but used in the restricted sense of one who has been chosen directly by God, for God, to be a foundation member of the church.

Turn with me for a moment to Ephesians 4, Ephesians 4 and verse 11, and we have here what God has in mind when He calls Paul an apostle: 'And [God] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ'. Turn to chapter 2 and verse 20, the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone. When Paul calls himself an apostle here, he's using it in the restrictive sense of the twelve disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ and Paul the apostle here. Given gifts, given powers, many of them not with us today - many now, not all - to lay a foundation for the church of Jesus Christ. That's his authority, he was an apostle - he had seen the risen Lord Jesus Christ, which was a requirement to be made an apostle by the hand of the Lord there on the road to Damascus.

His authority - but what is the source of his authority? 'Paul', verse 1, 'an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God' - it's amazing to me, that Paul is banged up in prison but he accepted it as the will of God for him. I would have gone daft! Can't preach, can't read my books, can't run around, can't do what I want to - how can this be classed as serving the Lord? Many people that are laid up in a hospital bed, or locked at home, or are sick, or are ill - they think to themselves, 'How can I serve God? Lord, if you'd just make me well I'd go to the four corners of the earth for You!'. But he saw being banged up in prison as the will of God for him. All God wants us to do with His will is accept it! I wonder is there someone here this evening and you're battling, you're striving, you won't accept the will of God for you? See Paul, he accepted God's will - and I want you to see that he didn't become an apostle, he didn't bring it upon himself, he didn't choose that ministry, he had no aspiration for it, there was no usurpation of another apostle and he took his place - I want you to see this: that there was no democratic nomination of him! But there was a preparation of God, and a choosing and election of God.

This was God's doing - and let me say this, Christian: if you're to be strong, if you're to be calm when the storms of life come across your path, if you're to be an effective child of God - you must know God's will! And know that it's God's will and not yours. There are preachers in the pulpit and they cannot preach, there are missionaries on the mission field and they cannot evangelise, there are men and women as elders, deacons, ministers, members in works and it is not their gift - it is not God's will for them to be there, many a
time it's their own will! Oh, make sure it's God will. You see when the storms of life come in, you need to know it's God's will. And I thank God, that when I was being called into the Lord's work, at the specific moment in time when I felt the call, someone said to me, 'Now God's speaking to you through the word of God, take a pen, take a piece of paper and write it down! Write what God is doing, for there is a day coming when you will despair at everything that is happening in your life, and you will think: 'I wonder was this God's will at all?'". Many a time I've looked back and I've opened those pages, despairing, discouraged, but I've rejoiced because it's the will of God that counts - that's all that counts!

There's the author, but then secondly there's the readers - for he says in verse 1, 'Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus'. 'To the saints', that's the addressee, the person that he is writing this letter to - the saints. Now who are saints? Are they dead people? Are they dead people who have reached the top 10 of their field in Christianity, and they're the best so some church comes along and sticks an 'St' in front of their name and canonises them - is that what means? Does it mean after you die that the elders will come along and scrutinise your life, and if it's beyond reproach they'll canonise you as a saint? Or as some church teaches, that after two miracles you can become one? No, that's not what the Bible teaches. Even the dictionary has got it wrong - for if you look at chapter 1 and verse 1, you see saints are mentioned, look at verse 15 of chapter 1, '...unto all the saints...', verse 18, '...his inheritance in the saints...'. Let me say this: saints are alive! Not dead!

Look at chapter 2: 'You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins: wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others' - we were dead! But saints are alive, they don't perform miracles - have you ever performed a miracle? You haven't, have you? But saints have miracles performed on them - that's what a saint is! Not someone who performs miracles, but people who have experienced it - look at verse 4, chapter 2: 'But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ' - that's a miracle! Huh, my friend, a saint is simply a believer, a saint is simply - and this is what it literally means - a set-apart one for God, one who has been taken out of the world spiritually speaking and placed, as Paul says, in Christ Jesus. As the Lord said in John chapter 17, 'You are in the world but not of the world', that is a saint. It's like the scuba diver: he exists in an alien environment because he possesses special equipment, isn't that right? And we exist here because we have the Holy Ghost!

It's the saints in Ephesus that are addressed, look at verse 1. This place of Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus there - and you see, Ephesus was so blessed because not only had Paul preached there, but Apollos had preached there after Paul preached there, Timothy preached there, and then at the end of his life John, in the first century, the last living apostle John preached and lived there and used it as a base. But not only was this city great geographically speaking, but the word of God clearly teaches us that this was a city great in iniquity. In fact the Bible calls it the site of total iniquity, the throne of Satan, the seat where he sat in the whole of Asia. If you had went into Main Street, Ephesus, you would have seen there the great temple, the site of the great temple of Artemis - and if you had went in through the doors you would have seen there the great statue of Diana, the goddess of the Ephesians that was reputed to have come down from God in heaven down to there. It's one of the seven ancient wonders of the world, and that city was a great city - it had an amphitheatre of 25,000 of a capacity. But the word of God - no matter what history says about this city, or films portray about it - says that it was Satan's very headquarters in Asia. You know, they had a book called 'The Books of Ephesus' - not the book of Ephesians now, but the books of Ephesus - and they were magical books through which they did divination and necromancy, this was an iniquitous core of the earth. It was a lucrative place, it had a great trade and selling about it, and they ran around the city selling little silver models of the temple and of Diana - that's why Demetrius got so upset when Christ was being exalted!
You remember that Paul faced two oppositions. You remember in Acts chapter 19 there were the seven sons of Sceva in Ephesus. Oh, they were into necromancy, they were into witchcraft and they thought - they saw this man Paul doing great miracles, and casting out demons - and one of them said, 'I think I'll do it'. You remember he went to do it and the demon said, from the man: 'Paul I know - but who are you?'. He faced it from a devilish world, he faced opposition from the economic, materialistic, commercial world - the whole of the commercial city went into a riot because their trade was at stake because of Christ. Do you know what A.B. Simpson says? 'A Gospel that goes down to the heart of Wall Street and turns business upside-down must have some power in it!'. Huh, it has power in it alright. Do you know something - and I want you to get this, for I believe this is for someone: you can be a saint in Ephesus, filled with iniquity, and your home is filled with iniquity, your work is filled with cursing and blasphemy - day by day you face it from your nearest and dearest and your loved ones, but you can be a saint in Ephesus! It's like carbonic acid, it's very heavy - carbonic acid gas sinks to the bottom of a cave - and if you're to survive, if you're not to let the contamination and the pollution into your system physically speaking - do you know what you have to do? You have to stand up straight and hold your head high! If we're to survive in this world, and if you're to survive in your Ephesus, you've got to look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith. You've got to hold your head up high - not in pride, but looking to Him and seeking Him - and then you'll survive!

It's to the faithful, 'the saints', verse 1, 'at Ephesus...in Christ Jesus'. Didn't Paul love that? Every time you read an epistle of Paul, you ring those words: 'in Christ'. He talked about 'in Him', 'in whom we have', 'in the beloved' - and that's all that matters, to be faithful, and that means to exercise faith in Him, to have fidelity in Him, to be for Christ and Christ alone - and to be in Christ, that's all that matters! Then thirdly, and finally: we have the author, we have the readers and then we have the salutation. This is his greeting, look at verse 2: 'Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ'. You know that grace, the word 'grace' - 'karos' (sp?) in Greek - was the Greek greeting, it was like 'Hello', the way we would say 'Hello', they would say 'Karos' to one another. 'Shalom', in Hebrew, means peace - that was the Hebrew greeting. And Paul here in verse 2 says: 'Grace', that's the Greek greeting, 'be to you and peace', that's the Hebrew greeting, 'in Christ Jesus' - do you see it? Do you know what that means? Look at chapter 2, chapter 2 and verse 12: 'That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace'.

How else could you have an ex-Roman Catholic and - I say this - an ex-pagan Protestant standing on a platform together united in Christ? You'll not get it anywhere else. You'll not get it in Stormont. You'll not get it in South Africa. You'll only get it in Christ! Grace for the Greek, peace for the Jew - and there's no distinction in Christ! I wonder do you know the peace of God? That peace that passeth all understanding - do you know how you know it? Verse 2: 'from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ' - those blessings, grace and peace - they come in that order now, you must experience the grace of God in Christ through faith and salvation before you'll have any peace in your heart. Don't try and work at peace, you've got to have grace first, but it comes from our Father. And what Paul was saying here, as he links the Father with the Son here, is that they are both the same, they are both equal, they are both God, co-eternal, co-equal!

I want to finish with this: 'Grace be to you, to and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ'. That's His title you know: 'the Lord Jesus Christ' - He's the Lord, He ought to be your Lord, that means master, that means you're not your own, you belong to Him - you can't do what you want, you can't say what you want, or think what you want, you've got to do what He says because you're redeemed by blood - you're not your own! He's the Lord, Jesus, He's the Saviour. He shall save His people from their sins, and if
you don't know Him by faith, He can save you now! Christ, He's chosen of God. He is God's Man, God's Prophet, Priest and King - glory to His name!

She was put down in history as the greatest miser in the whole of America. I don't know whether the greatest miser in all of Ulster is here, but she was the greatest miser in all of America. And when she died, she left an estate of 100 million dollars - and when she died it was found out that she ate cold oatmeal for her breakfast, her lunch, and her dinner because she didn't want to spend the electricity bill on heating it up. It was said that her son suffered an amputation because she delayed in looking for a clinic to treat him freely, and because of that he lost his leg. She was wealthy, yet she chose life of a pauper. In these next few weeks we're going to look at the riches and the wealth that we have in Christ, and I want to ask you this as we look into it in the future: Christian, are you living in His riches - it's all there - or are you living as a pauper?

Our Father, we thank Thee for all the riches that we have in the Saviour - and Lord, we've inherited it all. Nothing of ourselves, but through His death it has become ours. Lord, we must claim it by faith - Lord, we're going to see many things in these weeks that lie ahead, of what we have and what can be ours. Lord, help us not to be like children that look into the toyshop window, and we despair that we can't afford what we want. Help us to realise that it's been bought and all we need to, by obedience and faithfulness and fidelity in Christ, is to claim it in His name. Lord, help us to be what You want us to be. Lord, do Thy deeper work in us, we pray, and bless us now as we part from one another, and may that grace and that peace, that is found through the Lord Jesus Christ and His Father, go with us now. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - October 2000

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Ephesians - Chapter 2
"Praise The Lord! - Part 1"

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Ephesians 1:3-6

1. Praise The Lord For Blessings (verse 3)
2. Praise The Lord For Election (verse 4)
3. Praise The Lord For Predestination (verse 5)
4. Praise The Lord For Christ (verse 6)

Now let's come to the word of God and turn with me to the book of Ephesians, we've studied two verses of this little book so far - and I'll confess to you before we begin that I intended studying verses 3 through to 14, because if you have a Bible that splits the passages up into sections with themes you will see that verses 3 to 14, is a theme, it's a section of itself. But I couldn't do that, and then I tried verses 3 to 6 and I intended up to today to doing that, but I couldn't do that either. We're only looking at verse 3 and 4 this evening, there is so much in this little book, so much in these verses, that I think it would be wrong of me to pass by the riches that we have in our Lord Jesus Christ.

So let's look at chapter 1 of the book of Ephesians and we'll take time reading the whole of this section together, beginning at verse 3: "Blessed be God the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the wellbeloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory".

Let's read those two verses again that we are going to study this evening, verses 3 and 4: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love".

We said at the first week of our study in the book of Ephesians that chapter 1 is split up into two sections, if you just look at it for a moment. You see in verses 3 to 14, the passage that we read together this evening, praise of spiritual possessions that we have in Christ. In other words Paul is writing here, and he is writing and there is an outflowing, an overflowing of praise to God for the possessions that we all possess in Christ if we're in Him by faith. And then in weeks to come we'll see, verses 15 to 23, look down at it, there's not praise for spiritual possession but there is prayer for spiritual perception - an overflowing of prayer. From
Paul's spirit of an outpouring of praise, he falls on his knees before God and he asks God that in the light of all that he has in Christ that he would come into the realisation, the reality, of the riches of God's grace in Christ. Now, as in previous Pauline letters in the New Testament, we saw a few weeks ago in verses 1 and 2 that this letter starts in the same way as any letter in these days was written. It begins by the writer's name, then it says who he is writing to, then he gives a salutation in verse 2: 'Grace be to you and peace from God our Father'. And then in the line of the style of writing of those days of a letter, Paul continues and he writes, in verse 3, a blessing, a wish that he has for all the readers.

Now in those days, if it was an ordinary letter, the writer perhaps would wish for good health, for wealth, for whole well-being for the person receiving the letter. But we see in verse 3 that Paul is not writing about physical health, Paul is not writing about financial riches, but Paul is writing about the spiritual blessings that we all have in heavenly places in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Like all of Paul's letters the first section is doctrinal, and then the second section is practical and we're going to focus in this evening on the beginning of the section verse 3 to 14, where Paul is homing in on the doctrine of what Christ has done, what God has done for His world through the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 3 to 14 is a blessing. Verse 15 to 16 is a thanksgiving. Verse 17 to 20 is an intercessory prayer. But this section that we're going to look at this evening, verse 3 through to 14, it contains one of the most glorious and most symmetrical doxologies to be found in the Holy Scriptures.

If you have a Bible that breaks the passage up into paragraphs - and I would advise you to get one of those at least - you'll see that this section, verse 3 to 14, is split up into three poetical stanzas. Each concludes by a repetition of the phrase that we find in verse 6: 'To the praise of the glory of His grace'. Then look at verse 12: 'That we should be to the praise of the glory of His grace'. Verse 14: 'Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory'. And each of these sections emphasises a different reason that we, as the children of God in Christ, should praise our God. Each of these sections emphasises a different Person of the blessed holy Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In its scope it covers the entire sweep of redemption from the beginning, before time in the election of God, to the total consummation of redemption in the receiving of our inheritance, when the world is burnt up and a new world comes to pass.

Now, I want you to note that while most English translations don't show this, this section from verse 3 right through to verse 14 is an unusually long sentence. In the Greek New Testament there is no punctuation of a full stop, from verse 3 right through to 14 there is this glorious sentence full of rhythm, recurring phrases, exalted theology - making this doxology one of the greatest of Paul's writings and indeed in the word of God, totally. It is a hymn of exalted praise and majesty to God, the God of our salvation. Now I want you to notice this, that Paul's worship in verses 3 to 14 is theocentric. What does that mean? 'Theo' means God, 'centric' means central - and all of his worship, his praise and his adoration had God in focus, he was looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of his faith. He wasn't taken up with his problems, he wasn't taken up with his circumstances - and remember that, as Paul is writing here, he's in prison in Rome - but he is so taken up with God - and that is worship! - that he forgets about himself. He concentrates on Him and he worships Him. Oh, that we would get there - a change of perspective. You see we are the primary movers in our world, everything centres around us and moves around us, and we think the world rotates around us - but, oh, that we would get our eyes off ourselves and get them fastened on Christ! I hope that as we study this book that we'll go out with such a Damascus road vision of the Saviour that we will sing as we go in worship and praise and adoration to His name.

Genesis, the first book in the Bible, is a book of beginnings. Matthew is the book of the Kingdom. Galatians is the book of freedom. But Ephesians is the book of the Christian's riches in Christ Jesus. I want you to see this, that lovely figure of a man, bruised and beaten, hanging upon a Roman gibbet, expiring on the tree, in
agony, in sweat and blood, the God-man dying for sins - and when He bows His head and gives up the ghost, He leaves a will for you and for me. I believe the book of Ephesians is that written will of the dying Son of God. All the riches, the blessings, the treasures that we have in Him!

Let's look at them this evening. Verse 3 is the first thing that we're going to look at. I've entitled my message, 'Praise the Lord!' - and we're going to praise the Lord for the blessings that we find in verse 3. Let's read it slowly together, and look at every word as you're reading it: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ'. Verse 3, it's the phrase, it's the part of this passage that the rest of the chapter revolves around. Someone has said that in its structure, its poetical structure, it is a state of controlled ecstasy. Can you not see it? Can you not see Paul on his knees, with the chains around his arms and his feet, crying to God? 'Blessed be God for the blessings that He has given to me in Christ Jesus our Lord, praise Him!'

Notice it says: 'Blessed be God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. Now this blessing, 'Blessed be God', in Old Testament days was used exclusively of God the Father. You might find it in the Old Testament, and the Jews even today use it: 'Blessed be God, blessed be God'. It's a typical introduction to a Jewish ascription of praise to God Almighty. But here look at it: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. Distinctively Paul, as he gives this blessing, makes it a Christian blessing. The God who blesses the Jews in the past is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. If you were to look at a Hebrew version of the book of Ephesians you would find that it's written in the form of a Jewish blessing, this passage that we're looking at, a Jewish beracah. And here Paul is taking the form of a song and a prayer of praise that the Jews used to 'blessed God' and he uses it to 'blessed God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. And if you go into the book of Deuteronomy you will find that the beracah, the Jewish blessing, 'blessed be God', is used usually and primarily for material blessings and possessions. It was used for material blessings such as long life, abundant crops, protection from enemies. But Paul here, in his overflow and outflow of praise, exclusively praises God for all spiritual blessings in Christ - blessings that were achieved by the death and by the resurrection of our glorious Lord. Now I want you to see this: God blesses us with all spiritual blessings! And because God blessed Paul with everything that he talks about in this chapter in the book, he turns around and responds to bless God!

There is a deficiency of praise in our world today, in our church. You don't hear the 'hallelujahs' as much, you don't hear the 'praise the Lords' and the 'Amens'. But, oh, if we are receiving from God blessings from heaven itself, should we not praise Him? Should we not bless Him? 'Blessed be God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ', now see the next bit, 'Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places' - He has blessed us with blessings. John Paul Geddy (sp?) is one of the richest men in the world. Do you know how much he's worth? 1.3 billion. The weekly income of some of the oil sheiks runs into the millions week after week. Yet all those are pennies compared to the riches that Paul exhorts us to praise God for that we have in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Harry Ironside was asked on one occasion, 'Have you got the second blessing?', and he answered saying this: 'My friend, I'm into the tens and the hundreds of thousands of blessings'. Because we are in Christ, and our God when He sees Christ He doesn't give us little, He doesn't give us a bit now and a little bit later, but He gives everything, because He gives us Christ. Now it's one thing to have the blessings and it's another thing, an entirely different thing, to make those blessings yours. Think of it, the robe of righteousness, that when God looks at you - and once you were full of sin, covered from head to toe with sores putrefying, oozing, before the face of a holy God because of your iniquity and your transgression - now when He looks on you in Christ, you're as pure as the driven white snow. Praise be to God for the robe of righteousness in our Lord Jesus Christ. Praise be to God for our heavenly citizenship that we have. Praise be to God that we don't need to get entangled with all the nonsense in Ulster and the world, because we're of another country! Our citizenship is in heaven, in glory. Think of it, we have a place, we have a purpose and we ought to have a
practice, within the body of the living Christ, the church. What a blessing to be heirs with all the riches that are in Christ Jesus our Lord, yet some of us - me included - live like paupers when we should be like millionaires.

Look at the verse again. What kind of blessings are these? 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places', or better translated, 'heavenly realms'. Do you know where your proper home is? If you're in Christ your proper home is heaven. Hard to think of it sometimes, isn't it? But you will never be at home until you are in heaven, for wherever Christ is, wherever God is, that is your home. It might seem strange because we've never seen it - but do you know what God has done? One of His greatest spiritual blessings in Christ is: He has come in, and He has implanted within the depths of our being, a new nature - a new person in Christ Jesus that can never ever be at home in this awful world. Isn't that why, when you walk along life's path, and when you look at the television, and when you read the newspaper and you see things that turn your stomach and there's like a tug at the string of your heart heavenward, because there is someone in you, a nature that you have, that can never be at home here.

If you look at the book of Ephesians, you see that this subject of the heavenly realms is intrinsic to the whole of the message, you see it in verse 3. Look at verse 20 of chapter 1, talking of the blessings and the power of His greatness towards us: 'Which he wrought', verse 20, 'in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places'. What blessings do we have in Christ in heavenly places? The blessing of a resurrected, eternal life with Christ - sure we could spend all night on that! In chapter 2 and verse 6 you see another one: 'And [he] hath raised us up together, and made us to sit together in heavenly realms in Christ Jesus' - that we have actually a citizenship and by our spirits we can rise heavenward, though we don't do it in body, we can be there in fellowship with Christ. Look at chapter 3 and verse 10: 'To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God', we have victory over the demons and the devil because we are in heavenly places with Christ. Chapter 6 and verse 12: 'For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high', or heavenly, 'places'. Our battle, our war, our struggle is in the heavenlies, but praise God we have Christ on our side!

Do you remember the Lord in the upper room? In John chapter 14, and He looked into the disciples that He loved and what did He say? 'I go to prepare a place for you'. I've heard it said: 'That place is being prepared now for us. If God took six days to create the world what's that place going to be like when He's taken 2000 years to prepare heaven for us?'. But, my friend, that's not the case, you see the Lord said to those disciples: 'I go to prepare a place for you', and that place is not being prepared, but that place today is ready - because the Lord Jesus was saying: 'I go the way of death and resurrection to prepare a place for you'. And now He has died, and now He has risen again and that place is prepared, as it ever will be, because our place is where Christ is.

Do you remember when God created the world? The Lord Jesus Christ, who was His instrument and indeed the Person who created all that we see around us, in His creation Christ fitted His creatures for the environment that they were to inhabit. He gave the birds of the air feathers and wings so that they could fly. He gave the fish of the sea scales and gills so that they could breathe. But God - Ephesians says - God is doing and has done a new thing, for He is able by His grace to take the filthy, vile sinner out of his environment and change him miraculously inside to take him to a new environment! How we are blessed. And we are called by Paul, and I call each of you - I hope by the Spirit of God - to this evening rise and every day from now on, rise by our spirits to our heavenly citizenships and draw upon the resources there for you and I to conquer day by day.
Have you ever heard it said after a great prayer meeting, maybe the man that's closing the meeting will pray and say, 'Lord, we thank You that we were in heavenly places this evening and we felt that we were there!'. That man knows little about it. You see we consider ourselves in heavenly places when we feel that we're in heavenly places. But, friends this evening, it's got nothing to do with feeling. Paul says, 'We are, God hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings'. It's not a question of feeling, it's a question of fact. You might say, 'David I don't feel like I'm in heavenly places, I feel like I'm in hell!'. It doesn't matter what you feel, what matters is this: that if God the Father has given His only begotten Son at the cross at Calvary for you to save you, how much more shall He not freely give us all things! And one of the things that He gives you is this: everything! There is not a thing that He will or He can withhold from you.

Now I want you to see that the apostles as they wrote the New Testament, they were men and they were men inspired by God. But I wonder whether Paul in this cell, was groping in his vocabulary and language for a phrase that would describe what it was to have such a rich relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We would have come up with all the theological phrases of the day, maybe we couldn't have come up with anything, maybe wrote a book on it. Look what he calls it: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ'. Doesn't that epitomize it all? It sums it all up. That we can have nothing, nothing in this Christian life without Christ. God has blessed us by giving us and by putting us in Christ. There's no stronger identification than to say that we are in Christ. Because it means that Christ is our environment. Like Patrick of old could say, 'Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ above me, Christ beneath me, Christ in me, Christ outside me'. You see it's more than the indwelling Christ. It's more than the size of an inch that fits in your heart - but it means that your whole being, your whole existence, your whole environment is Christ.

If you're sure you're in Christ this evening, can I ask you are you living as Christ is your environment? Do the things that you do fit in with Christ around you? With Christ above you? With Christ behind you and before you, seeing all that you - and bringing, as Paul says in Corinthians, Christ into what you are doing? But let us not look at that. Let us look at the security and the controlled ecstasy of knowing that because I am saved, I am anchored in Christ. Praise the Lord! Let's hear it. Praise the Lord for His blessings!

Well here's a strange one: praise the Lord for election. I don't know what all the smiling's about, but verse 4, look at it: 'According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love'. This, believe it or not, is one of the spiritual blessings that we have in Christ. But when you read that, perhaps as a Christian, you wince at the word 'election' - because in our language, election conjures up some ideas in our mind. It suggests merit to us, it suggests value, it maybe even suggests votes - that the person that achieves more will be the person that will be elected. It suggests accomplishment. Well, in the Greek language and within the context of the Old and the New Testament, this word 'chose' in the Greek language is in the aorist tense. That means this: it means that what God is talking about here, how He hath chosen us in Christ, that it is a once for all action, never to be repealed. It has before it in the New Testament in Greek, a prefix, preposition the word 'ek' (sp?), it means 'out of'. So if you put the two together you have this sense, 'chosen once for all out of'- and it is in the middle voice in Greek, which has the sense of choosing for ones self. Put it all together and you get this: chosen out of the world, chosen once for all, chosen to be God's own as a peculiar treasure.

Now we're going to spend a little bit of time understanding this doctrine. What does it mean to be chosen? I've already said that I've tried to deal with too many verses this evening, so what I did was, I took out of the twelve or so verses - eleven - I took two verses, and we're now looking at one verse out of the passage, and that is the literal meaning, that one has been taken out of the many - chosen. Now don't think of this word negatively, because Paul in the language and in the context, literally speaking, of this verse is speaking positively, because he says: 'we are chosen in Him'. He is speaking positionally. We are rooted and grounded in Christ. He speaks chronologically of this choosing: that this choosing was before the foundation of the
world. And he also speaks of the purpose of this choosing: that we that are chosen should be holy and without blame in the sight of God.

Now, I want you to praise the Lord for election. And therefore I want you to see this: that the person perhaps you are sitting beside, or the person that has gone on to glory before you, you're life's companion, that is a person that you have chosen to be with you, to go with you all the way of this life. But think of it - wonder of wonders, God has chosen us! He has chosen us to have the atmosphere of love, the atmosphere of kindness, compassion, the atmosphere of His love. And whatever you do - and you may go away this evening not agreeing with what I'm going to teach on this - but whatever you do, go away rejoicing in this fact: that somehow, no matter what way you want to put it, God has chosen you...and you are special to God. You are valued to God, you mean something to God!

But we must deal with the problems that this doctrine portrays for us. If you were to turn - and we haven't time to look at these verses - but if you were to turn to 1 Thessalonians 2 verse 13, you would find this: that the Bible teaches that God chooses men for salvation. That is in the word of God, 1 Thessalonians 2:13. It also teaches that we are elect according to the foreknowledge of God, 1 Peter 1 verse 2. It then goes on to teach that those who fear and believe the Gospel can know for sure that they are the elect of God in the Christ of God, 1 Thessalonians 1 verse 4 to 7. You can't refute it. You can't get around it, it is there, it may be uncomfortable for our puny minds to think about it, but it's there. But let me say this, the Bible never and nowhere teaches that God chose men to be lost. God never condemns men that deserve to be saved. Did you get that? God never condemns men who deserve to be saved, because there are none.

If I had half a dozen eggs and I got one of the brethren to go up to the choir box there, and he opened a box of eggs and I came below - now many of you might love to do this - but, I came below, and he threw all the half dozen eggs over the choir box and I caught two. What way would you describe what has happened? Would you say David Legge broke four eggs? Did he? David Legge saved two. And in the same way we can never say that God chooses to condemn men, because we are all condemned! We'll all done under sin, lost, all on our way to hell, but God saves some in His mercy.

Now we have to understand this. Let's turn to Romans chapter 9 - looks like I'm not even going to get through these two verses - Romans chapter 9 and verse 22: 'What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction' - speaking of lost Israel -' and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory', notice the difference verse 22, verse 23. He says that the vessels prepared unto glory were prepared afore time. He doesn't say that of those fitted for destruction. He may choose those that are saved, God prepares them for glory, that is true. But if they're damned, they fitted themselves for it.

Can I say this? Do you see election as a blessing? Now be honest. Because Paul saw it as a blessing, that's why he was coming in praise within this book, he saw it so much. Someone has said that election is one of the most hated doctrines and words of the whole Bible. But the hymnwriters could praise about election, listen to some of them:-

'Tis not that I did choose Thee,  
For Lord that could not be.  
This heart would still refuse Thee,  
But Thou hast chosen me'.

'Jesus sought me, when a stranger  
Wandering far from the fold of God.  
He to rescue me from danger
What is the doctrine of election? Two little boys were talking in the playground and one came up to the other and said, 'Have you found Jesus yet?'. And the reply from the other boy was this, 'I didn't know He was lost. But I was and Jesus found me'.

Isn't that what it is? Like He said to the disciples: 'Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you'. If it wasn't for God we'd still be in our sins. He was the first mover in all of redemption. Spurgeon said, 'God certainly must have chosen me before I came into this world or He never would have done it afterwards'. Bunyan said this - boy, he rejoiced in it! - 'Oh, the Lamb of God! He had a whole Heaven to Himself, myriads of angels to do His bidding, but those could not satisfy Him, He must have sinners to share it with Him'.

You say, I don't understand this doctrine, well neither do I. But do you know what God says to you and to me? He says, 'My thoughts are not your thoughts. And your ways, Christian - no matter how intelligent you are - are not My ways'. Someone has said that the truth of election - what we're looking at this evening - is a family secret within the church of Jesus Christ. It's not something that you present to the world. The Lord said, 'Don't cast your pearls before swine', you're not to proclaim it as part of the Gospel in that sense. But it's something that God whispers into the ears of His beloved: 'You were Mine before the world was'.

Let me illustrate it for you. It may seem like a contradiction, it may seem that it doesn't make sense at all. But I want you to see this, in all that we study in election throughout this book, throughout the word of God, I want to say this categorically: the same Bible that teaches the sovereign election of God of His saints, is the Bible that teaches human responsibility. No one can use - and I know some people that do use the doctrine of election as an excuse that they're not saved. No church or Christian can use the doctrine of election for not preaching the Gospel of God's grace, because God makes a bona fide offer of salvation to all men everywhere, every man can be saved by repenting from his sins and believing the Gospel - and if he is lost, he is lost because he chooses to be so. Now I believe the both of them and you might say how can I - I don't know how I can, but I believe them. If you think for a moment of a broad road and it leads to destruction and they're all going down it on their way to hell and there's one man Evangelist, he's standing with his hands clasped. He is shouting, 'Repent!'. He shouts, 'Whosoever will may be saved, whosoever will let him drink of the water of life freely. Whosoever will let him come'. But they all go headlong into hell and they are responsible and most of them don't come, and he shouts 'Ye will not come that ye might have life'. But then there's one or two and they turn and they walk through that door that says: 'If any man', whosoever will may come through that door. But you see them going in and then when they go in through that door and they shut the door behind them, they find written inside the door: 'Chosen, before the foundation of the world'. You see he couldn't see it until he got inside.

D.L. Moody used to say in his own quaint way: 'The whosoever will are the elect and the whosoever won'ts are the non-elect'. And if you trust Christ you can know, you can know that you're chosen of God. Never use it as an excuse not to be saved. But as we sit here as Christians, looking at the riches that we have in Christ, I implore to you, I plead to you, that you believe the both. Warren Wiersbe was given good advice by his professor when he said this: 'Try and explain election and you'll lose your mind. Try to explain it away and you'll lose your soul'.

I want us quickly - and we're going to take time to do this - Acts chapter 27 is a great illustration of how we must believe that God chooses men for salvation - how we know we cannot tell, we cannot work it out. Yet on the same, on the other hand, the other side of the coin, we have responsibility for trusting Christ. We haven't time to give the context and the background of the story here, but you'll know in Acts 27 Paul is sailing to Rome. He's about to be put in prison, the same prison that we're talking about in the book of Ephesians. But as he goes there's a great storm erupts in the sea and in verse 22 we see this, that Paul was given a word from the Lord and he turned to the men in the boat and he said: 'Now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before
Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee'. Now that was God's sovereign divinity speaking, that these men all in this boat would be saved and there's nothing that anything could do about it. The wind and the waves couldn't stop it. Paul's hand or their hands couldn't stop it. I understand that, don't you?

Now let's confuse ourselves a bit - verse 31. What happened was simply this: some of the men in the boat, some of the crew decided that they would have to save their lives and they got a little lifeboat, if you like, to escape with their lives and with their possessions. But Paul said to them in verse 31, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, 'Except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved'. Now, work that one out! God said, 'There's not one of them going to be lost', and that's what God said to Christ, and that's what Christ said to God. 'All that the Father giveth Me will come to Me'. Now that's God's part. But then Paul turned to them and he said 'If you get out of this boat, like Christ is the vessel, if you ignore the way, you're responsible, God'll not save you'. Just like John 6, 'All that the Father giveth Me, will come to Me; and him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out'.

Oh, it's hard to explain, because you can't explain it. Well let me ask you, do you believe the Trinity? Do you? The mystery of the Trinity's on our side, isn't it? It's not on God's side. He understands it. So believe election! Believe it, it's in the word of God. Believe it and rejoice in it and realize that, although you don't understand it, it's a fact. And we need balance in this issue - how do you get balance? You're in the playground and there's a seesaw, or in physics you call it a fulcrum, there's a wee triangle in the middle and then there's the plank along it - how do you get balance? The wee child maybe you say, now you get balanced and she'll go up to the middle, the middle and sit on top of the middle, is that balance? No, you need one on either side of the same weight. And balance, in the relation to God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, is not meeting somewhere in the middle and denying both, it's believing both extremes and rejoicing in them. Like Spurgeon said, it's like a train track and the two lines run beside one another, God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. They run parallel, but they never ever meet, they never come together, you can't make sense out of them, but you need both of them for the train to run - and you need both of them for the Gospel to work.

Look quickly, that this election, it's in Him. And you're chosen, my friend, because God sees you in Christ. Because He has placed you in Christ. It's all of Him and because He is accepted, we are accepted and this is the mighty thing that I want to bring to your attention this evening: that we are chosen, elected to be holy and blameless in His sight. There might have been a time when somebody came up to you and said: 'You can be holy in God's sight', and you would've said: 'Come on! That's a quare laugh, me holy in God's sight?' Yes. The word used for 'blameless' in the Greek here is the word that was used of the Old Testament lamb, without blemish and without spot. It's the word used of Christ, the Lamb of God in the book of Peter, that He was a lamb without blemish and without spot. It's the word used in Ephesians chapter 5:27 where it describes the church being handed to Christ in the end of times, being handed without blemish and without spot. And one day we will be without blemish and without spot. But here's the thing that Paul is bringing to us now: that we can be without blemish in the sight of men and women today. That's what he said in Philippians 2:15, 'That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world'.

Now here's the catch: if you claim to be elected of God, are you beginning to live a holy and a blameless life? You can't have both, this talk about, 'Well, I can do what I like because God's elected me and saved me and I can live like a reprobate now', that's not in the word of God. Because you find in 2 Peter chapter 1 and verse 10 these words: 'Make your calling and election sure'. Make sure that you're saved, by the works that you do.
When young Victoria, when she was a child she was shielded from the fact that one day she would be the next monarch. And when she was let discover the fact for herself by her teachers and her parents, this is what she said: 'Then I must be good'. Her life from then on would be controlled by her position and by who she was. brethren and sisters, you are children of the King, you're joint heirs with Christ. And even though you haven't entered into the heavenly throne room - just like the queen of England: even when she's absent from her throne, she's still the queen of England - and you are still blessed in heavenly places, even though you haven't got there yet!

Can you not say, 'Praise the Lord for election'. What love, what love. We often say it's a love that has no end, but you know it is a love that had no beginning because it was before the world began. An everlasting love and, as the word of God says, as high as the heavens are above the earth - and the astronomer is still trying to probe the limits of space, you can't make a scale model of the universe - no one knows the distance of the farthest star - and you can never use up the love of God.

'Could we with ink the ocean fill
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill
And every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry.
Nor could the scrolls contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky'.

Transcribed by Judith Watkins, Preach The Word - October 2000

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Ephesians chapter 1, Ephesians chapter 1, and true to form we're not getting too far this evening - only another two verses - but filled and packed with gospel truth that we can't ignore, and it would be criminal to skip over it just to get a passage finished. So let's read these verses together, and let's take note - this is important - that you take note of every single word that you find written here. Verse 1: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the well-beloved".

We've looked at verses 1 right through to verse 4, and we're going to look this evening at verses 5 and 6. If you have your handout with you from last week (maybe you don't, but maybe you got another one on the way in) you'll see that we only dealt with two of the points on that handout, and we're going to deal with the last two - verses 5 and 6. Now, let's read these verses again to get into our minds what we're going to be studying: "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the well-beloved".

One of the first revelations that we get of God is as the seeker. If you turn to the book of Genesis this evening, and chapter 3 and verse 9 - and we were thinking about the fall of man where the image of God in the creature was defiled - and right there when Adam sinned, and when Eve sinned, God knew what had happened. You remember there we see the first picture, as it were, of the saving God who is the seeker God. We read in Genesis chapter 3 and verse 9 these words: 'Adam! Where art thou?' - 'My child Adam, where are you? Where are you hiding? Where have you gone to? What have you done Adam?'. In commenting upon the question to his Bible class a teacher once said: 'You can never be a preacher, boys, if you read this verse as though God was a policeman. Read it as though God were a broken hearted father looking for a lost child'. Isn't that what it is? The heart broken of the Heavenly Father as He looks down upon His creature, upon the one He lavished so much love upon. He gave him charge over all the universe to name the animals - to be given charge over and rule over all of creation - but he lost it! And in his pride, and in the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, he fell and he did what God told him not to do - but, oh, how it broke the heart of God! F.B. Meyer says this, speaking of God's heart: 'God's heart is as true and tender as the heart of the sweetest, gentlest woman that ever pressed her child to her bosom. Nay, all the love in all women's hearts together compared to the love of His heart is as a glowworm's torch compared to the sun at noontime'.
Oh, the love of God! A preacher remarked once about when Mary and Martha sent Jesus their message concerning their dying brother Lazarus, and you remember that message - it wasn't: 'Lord, he loveth thee', but the message was: 'Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick'. It's not our imperfect love that keeps us close to Christ. It's not our terrible failing, faltering love that makes the difference where salvation is concerned, but it is His perfect - the love of God. Oh, I'm sure you can think of many verses this evening in the word of God from Genesis to Revelation that describe - maybe chapters, maybe whole books - that typify the love of God.

John 3:16: 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son' - what a verse! What about Romans chapter 5 and verse 8? 'God commendeth His love' - He demonstrates, He shows, displays His love - 'in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us'. The hymnwriters knew what the love of God in Christ was.

'There is no love like the love of Jesus,
Never to fade or fall,
'Til into the fold of the peace of God
He has gathered us all'.

Oh the deep, deep love of Jesus,
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free.
Rolling like a mighty ocean
In its fullness over me.
Underneath me, all around me,
Is the current of Thy love.
Leading forward, leading homeward
To my glorious rest above'.

Christian friend, do you know the full extent of the love of God for you? Because Paul, as he wrote this book and as he traces the whole plan and map of salvation from election in salvation, to predestination, to adoption, to glorification in the future - the consummation of all things, the whole plan of salvation - and because of the wonder of it all he falls and he sings this song of praise to God! That's what this is! He doesn't get taken up with the details and the intricacies of the theological issues, but he gets taken up with what a great God he has!

Therefore we see first of all: 'Praise the Lord for predestination!'. I want you to see this - look at verse 5 - now, we have to read verse 4 to understand verse 5: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will".

Now I want you to notice this: many translations take the last two words of verse 4 and start verse 5 with them, and I believe that's the way it should be. So that verse 5 reads this: 'In love having predestinated us unto the adoption of children'. What that does, and what Paul is doing in the Greek is this: he is emphasising the loving nature of predestination. James Montgomery Boice puts it like this: 'Any interpretation of this mysterious doctrine that detracts from the love of God is rightly suspect'. Predestination is rooted and grounded and planted and fertilized, originated in the love of God. It's all of love my friend. Don't have a cold religion whatever you do! Don't have a cold, dead theology! I don't care what spectrum it is or what camp it is - whatever you do remember it's all of love, all! God is simply saying that in love - listen: 'I must get these children - these human beings - out of the mire. I must pull them out', and I say this reverently, He says: 'I must pull my holy sleeve up and delve into the depths of the miry clay and lift them out. I must get them there. I must have these children come before me and they must have everything!'. What love! Is that
not why Paul exclaims that, 'He has blessed them' - those children - 'with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ'.

Now, I want you to see this: that the whole of the created universe never knew of these divine counsels of God before the world began. These are the deep, divine thoughts of grace and love toward us - you and me - but no one ever knew about it! If we were born in Old Testament days we would have thought that there was no hope for us: 'We're the Gentiles and God has His own people, the Jews, and it's too bad I was born - it's an accident of birth - in the wrong race and the wrong religion. There's no hope! We're not in the commonwealth of Israel. We're not blessed, being the seed of Abraham'. But the mystery of God's will to engraft into Himself the Gentiles is revealed in this book! Oh, how we'll praise Him one day for the plan of salvation! Can you imagine? When you get to glory and when you stare into His glorified face, how you'll praise Him when you see Him! To think that He looked at you and He looked at me in love, and He predestinated you and I to be holy before Him! What will it be like? Imagine this: when you're lying on your deathbed - I don't know what'll be wrong with you if the Lord tarries; what you'll die of - but you're lying there. It's the last hours and the cold sweat is coming upon your brow, and you feel that you're being taken, you're being plucked from this scene of time and, all of a sudden, you just drift into the presence of the Lord Jesus. You stand on that shore, and you look at His blessed face, and you see Him as He is. But, oh, to think that He planned that moment from all eternity! It began before the worlds began, it began before you were even thought of. His plan will come to pass, and we should praise Him for what He has saved us from.

I was reading this morning in my reading from Psalm 40. Psalm 40: 'I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and he heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord'. Do you know, do you really know, what the Lord saved you from? Some of you do because you were dirty, deep in sin, but some of you have been growing up in a Christian home and - we? - we don't really know! Oh, we need to praise Him for what He saved us from, and we need to praise Him for what He brought us to, and what He will bring us to one day - when we get to glory and when we see Him. It's no wonder that Paul praises Him so much in this chapter. If you look at verse 6 he praises the Father: 'To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved'. Who made us accepted in the well beloved? It is the Father. Then you look at verse twelve: 'That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ'. Christ: the praise of His glory! Praise be to the Father for the plan! Praise be to the Son for the execution! And then in verse 14: 'Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory'. The Holy Spirit! Praise be to Father, Son and Holy Spirit for our salvation, for our redemption, our regeneration, our justification and - one day - our glorification! Praise be His name! Can you say it? Praise Him! Oh, give Him the praise whatever you do!

This phrase 'in love', leads to this phrase, 'having predestinated us'. Now what does that mean? We spent some time last week on the subject of election, and this is another frightening phrase. But the point is this: whenever God says in front of it, 'in love', you don't need to be frightened. It no longer becomes a problem, but it becomes - this is what I want you to see - it becomes such a blessing! Predestination, or foreordination - and although it's closely linked in these verses, and in theological books, and right throughout the word of God it's linked with election - and although that's the case they aren't exactly the same. We saw last week that election pictures God's choice, and God's choice alone, of man to salvation. But predestination, it's an advance of this, it's the next stage - because to be predestined (and the word is 'destination', 'pre-destination') - you have to have a destination that has been preordained. Now I believe that, as we look through the word of God, that destination is not heaven - because that was decided at election - but the destination is a spiritual place of blessing. Turn with me to Romans chapter 8 for a moment - it's important that we understand these things - Romans chapter 8 and verse 29. Paul says, speaking of God: 'For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren'.

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You see, the purpose of predestination is to be conformed to the image of His Son. You're chosen in salvation in election, but predestination takes that choice a little further to the consummation of it when, one day, you and I will be like Christ. Isn't that an amazing thought? Do you know what this is? Do you know what predestination is? It's the guarantee that if we believe in Christ we know that, one day, we will be completely like Christ. Do you know what it does? It secures our salvation!

There's none of this 'saved and lost' nonsense - and that is all it is: it is nonsense! How could you be saved, and the hand of God come out and catch you and then let go of you again? How could that happen? How could it happen? When you think of the subject of predestination: that you are saved, and the moment you are saved a process begins for you to become like Christ - it has been activated - and that thing was decided before the world began! If it starts when you're saved how could it stop? It can't stop! No man can stop it, my friend, no devil can stop it, no husband or wife can stop it, no father or mother or child can stop it - and I say it reverently today: God can't even stop it, because He willed it! He willed it. That's what predestination is. If election was unto salvation, that we find in the book of Thessalonians, predestination is to bring us, one day, as the children of God into the image of His glorious Son.

Now I want to go deeper into this, because it says: 'Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children'. Now, there was no Jewish custom of adoption, this was a Roman custom where - under Roman law - boys and girls from other families might be legally adopted and granted full rights and responsibilities within a family. But even that Roman adoption, and our Western adoption that we know all so well, is not exactly what Paul is getting at here - it's something totally different. What he is getting at, first of all, is that this is a public attestation of adult sonship and the conferment of privileges belonging to sons who have come to the legal age. You remember the prodigal son: he went before his time out into the big bad world. But when he was going to come to age he would have got his father's inheritance. He would have been declared - it would have been conferred upon him that he was the son of his father; he was declared to be the son at that moment of time. But the spiritual truth that Paul has in mind here far outstrips his illustration within the word of God. Imagine the truth that we know: that we have been brought from the slave market of sin into the family of God. We now can call ourselves the sons, the daughters, the children of God! We've been made [part of] this family relationship, and we might think that that's where adoption stops: that we've been brought into the family. No!

Who was the natural Son of the Father? The Lord Jesus Christ. Just like our natural sons and daughters, Christ was by nature the Son of the Father. Who are the adopted sons and daughters? We are the adopted sons and daughters. We're unnatural to God, we're not like Him, we're not like Him in our nature - but the miracle of grace is this: through regeneration and through the new birth (that we were thinking about last evening) we are made the natural sons and daughters of God! You can go down to an adoption office today and you can adopt a child, and that child can become as your own child. Maybe you've other children [but], after a matter of time, you look at the two of them and you see no difference between them. You treat them both the same, and they're conferred with the same blessings, the same privileges, the same name - but no matter how much you love them and no matter how much you bring them into your home, into your family, into your life and into your heart, they will never be by nature [the same]. But wonder of wonders, we should be called the natural sons and daughters of God! That the Holy Spirit of God should enter the heart of a sinner and should so bring life into his bosom that He gives birth to the Holy Spirit of God in that man or woman's life - that they can be called naturally adopted! Biblical adoption! You know, God could have saved us without making us sons and daughters, but He chose to do both. We're not just saved, but the word of God says that we've become co-heirs, co-inheritors with Christ. Listen to Romans 8: 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.'
Take a moment, my friend, and savour this thought: as God sees you this evening, He sees you the same as Christ. Paul illustrates it in Galatians chapter 4, if you turn to it. This time he's talking to the Jews and you know that he's trying to explain to them the road that they've taken, and that the law and Moses and the prophets have been the schoolmaster to bring them to Christ. He's trying to show them that they've now to enter into this promise and leave the old behind - of the Jewish laws and rituals - and they've to take on this new sonship, but you can apply it to yourself today. Chapter 4: 'Now I say', speaking of an earthly scene, 'That the heir', the heir of a household, 'as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ'.

We're adopted now but, you know, there's an adoption in the future that the word of God speaks about. But I want you to grasp this - we look forward to that day, but whatever you do don't think that you're not a son of God or a daughter of God now! Listen to the word of God! 1 John 3:2: 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God' - now! - 'and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is'. Paul said it again: 'Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man; the things which God hath prepared for them that love him'. You're a child of God! You're a joint heir with Christ! You're an inheritor of all that Christ has in God! Is it any wonder that Paul could sing in a doxology of praise: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ'. In Isaiah 22 and verse 23 we read a little phrase that says this: 'a nail in a sure place'. What did Isaiah mean? Well, what I mean and what Paul means is this: adoption is a nail in a sure place. And what Isaiah was saying when he said 'a nail in a sure place' was this: he had, in his mind's eye, the Arab with his tent and a pole in the middle of the desert; and what he would do is he would take a hammer and a giant piece of iron, like a nail, and he would hammer it into that post. Everything that he owned - his baggage, his utensils, his property - was hung upon that nail...a nail in a sure place. My friend, if Christ falls, if Christ fails, everything for you and I is doomed and damned; but praise be His name - it's secure! It's sure! It's a nail in a solid place! We are in Christ - we are rooted, we are grounded, we are cemented, we cannot be extracted, for we are in the double hand of the Father and of the Son; and no man can pluck us out!

This is revolutionary - it should be in our lives. Did you know that Jesus never, ever referred to the Father in any other term except 'the Father'? There's only one occasion when He didn't refer to God as the Father, and that was in the Gospels where He was quoting Psalm 22, and He says 'My God, my God' - but every other time He says 'Father'. Imagine what that was like for the Jews! They'd never heard a man, let alone a Rabbi, speak of God in that way. They'd never heard of anybody praying to God in such an irreverent way (as they saw it). Because this word 'Father': it wasn't a formal word, it wasn't a religious word, it was the word 'Abba' - it was the word of a child to the father. If you want to put it in our day, without being irreverent, it means 'papa' or 'daddy'. What's it like my friend? I don't know what it's like, and I don't think I'm going to know what it's like for a wee while - but what must it be like for that little child, the first time, to say 'daddy'? Would you say to it: 'You're not addressing me in the right way'? Would you? No. Your heart would go out to that child of your flesh. And when we turn to our God, by our nature in us - the new nature in Christ Jesus - and we address Him as our Father; oh what a heart of love, full of the whole divine, sovereign plan of eternity! And He sees in a human sinner the consummation of His election, His predestination - everything that He has planned is fulfilled in that little word! Abba! Such a close relationship. Do you know that the Muslims have ninety-nine names for God, for the Supreme Being, the Creator? But there is none - not one of the ninety-nine - that resembles the closeness, the intimacy of the Christian's 'our Father'. Not one!
What a great God we have! Praise His name! The book of Romans [chapter] 8 verse 19, says that the creation waits - you don't just wait. One day you're going to be consummated as a son of God, risen from the dead, brought into the likeness of Jesus Christ, but don't think you're the only one waiting on it! The book of Romans says that the whole creation [waits]. Think of this! You might be here this evening and you think you're insignificant, don't you? You're a Christian and you know God loves you and all that, but you think no one notices you. You think that you haven't any gifts and you can't do anything for God, or anything for the church, or anything for your brother or sister - and you think that if you were gone no one would miss you. Listen to this! The whole of God's creation and universe is waiting for the day where you are revealed as a son and daughter of God! The creation waits for the sons of God to be revealed! Hallelujah!

Now let's look at the final phrase in Ephesians and verse 5. It says that we are 'predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will". Listen! The Son - never you forget it - the Son makes you a son! This is God's sovereignty, this is God's plan from all eternity: that He willed - that's what it says - 'according to the good pleasure of his will', that one day you would be like Christ. There's no room for human pride there, is there? Some of us are full of it - we're all full of it because we're all sinners, aren't we? We may have it under control more than others, but it's always there: that little seed of pride. Like the poet said - as we look at God's sovereignty and God's plan of the ages, and how on one day nothing to do with ourselves, He will bring us to the image of His blessed Christ and Son, we say with the poet:

'The more Thy glory strikes my eye,  
The humbler I should lie'.

Let's look secondly (or fourthly if you want!) and finally at verse 6. Let's read verse 5 to get the flow, for we find in verse 6: 'Praise the Lord for Christ!'. 'Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the well-beloved'. What does it say? 'To the praise' - look at the first phrase - 'To the praise of the glory'. Did you know that the primary aim throughout all of God's plan of redemption, from election to the total consummation in the book of Revelation - all of it is to bring glory to God and to His Christ? God's glory - His glory - in this verse, is said to be encapsulated in His grace. That's what it says, look: 'To the praise of the glory of his grace'. God's glory! Sure, we couldn't know God's glory if it wasn't for His grace. That's the only way we know it: [from] Him saving us - and it's alright me keeping on saying from the platform: 'You've got to appreciate God and Christ for who He is', but it's hard for us to do. We tend to only appreciate Him for what He's done for us because that's how He's been revealed to us. 'The praise of the glory of his grace': God's glory is His merciful dealings with men in salvation, and we ought to respond to Him in unlimited praise for it.

Do you praise Him enough? Do you? I don't. There's many-a-time I would love to shout 'Hallelujah!', but I'm afraid, sometimes I'm afraid of you. Isn't that right? I'm afraid of what anybody's going to think. 'He's a fanatic! He's lost his head! Shouting in the middle of a meeting?'. What do we praise God for? Do you praise Him in your heart? Maybe you don't have that ability to shout 'Hallelujah' or to shout 'Amen', but do you say it in your heart? Do you respond to God? Do you know what Kent Hughes says? 'Our theology must become doxology'. Doxology is simply a song of praise, that's what we're reading, the whole of chapter 1 is a doxology. And if you have theology, but you don't have a heart full of doxology, you might as well be dead! For you are dead if the truths of God don't warm your heart, and you don't praise God out of an appreciation of who He is and what He has done for you in Christ. Worship is important to our life! It's important to the life of the assembly of God here in the Iron Hall. Do you know why? Because it's the opportunity to express who we are to God because of what He has done for us. That's how you express it! Giving back to God! Blessing God! And men you take note, at the breaking of bread that's how you worship Him: blessing Him, praising Him, worshipping Him for what He has done for you!
You know, if you look around our world at any persecuted people, and you look into the history books, whether it be of the church or even take - for instance - the Negro race within the Americas. You've heard of Negro spirituals, haven't you? 'I'll fly away...when I die, hallelujah, by and by, I'll fly away...Swing low sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home'. Do you know where those songs came out of? They came out of the paddy fields, the cotton fields. They came out of the slavery that they were in, with the whipping upon their back and the sweat upon their brow - but they lifted their hearts to praise to a hope that one day they would be free. Many of them were hoping that they would die - get away from this awful world - die, and be taken to glory by the chariot of God. They expressed the feelings, the sentiments of their hearts - how? In song, in songs of worship and praise to God. Let me ask you again: do you praise God? See when you're singing, what do you do? Do you look around you? Who's got a new hat or a new coat? Or who's got a new girl? Is that what you look at? Do you look at what you do? Do you look at the words? Sure, some of us know the words inside-out, we could sing without a hymnbook, but do we appreciate them? Do we look at every line? 'Praise my soul the King of Heaven' - do you take that in? 'To His feet my tribute bring. Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven. Who like thee His praise should sing. Praise Him, Praise Him'. Sometimes I hear sisters say: 'There's not much for us to do in the assembly'. Some of you are poets, some of you are poets and you don't know it! But those that are poets, do you know (whether you're male or female) that there's a great shortage of hymn writing today? Hymn writing of a spiritual kind. Why not employ your pen? Why not employ your heart and your mouth, brethren, to shout 'Amen', to shout 'Hallelujah', to praise the Lord, to pray to the Lord, to bring a word of ministry to exalt the Lord?

But why do we praise Him? Look: 'The glory of his grace' - that's the message - 'to the praise of the glory of his grace'.

'Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that is greater than all my sin'.

You know, a woman once attempted to assassinate Queen Elizabeth - not our Queen Elizabeth. She dressed as a man-page and she hid herself in the Queen's boudoir - in all the clothes and dresses and garments. But the Queen's attendants would make it their careful chore to check all the rooms before the Queen would go into them. And before they brought the Queen into that particular room, inside all the skirts and dresses in her wardrobe they found this woman and they brought her out, and they took her to the Queen and she begged the Queen to have compassion on her. Queen Elizabeth looked at her quietly and coolly and said: 'If I show you grace, what promise will you make me in the future?'. And that woman looked up and said: 'Grace that hath conditions? Grace that is fettered by precautions is no grace at all'. Queen Elizabeth caught it and, in a moment, she said: 'You're right. I pardon you of my grace', and they led her away a free woman. That's what God's done for you! There's nothing to it on your account! You've done nothing for it - only accept it!

You stood there and God, by His grace, wonder of wonders, has given you everything in Christ!

That's the glory of His grace. Look further: 'Wherein he hath made us accepted in the well beloved'. Praise the Lord for Christ! Do you know what that phrase means? The King James Version actually paraphrases it: 'where he hath made us accepted in the well beloved'. It simply means this: that the grace which works such a response of wonderful praise, finds its focus in the person of God's beloved. He is God's love gift to men. He's referred to in Colossians 1:13 as the Son of His love. In Matthew chapter 3 and verse 17 you remember God opened and tore the curtain of the heavens to say: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'.

[Do] you know what this paraphrase literally means? Look at the verse: 'This is the grace with which he has begraced us'. This is the grace with which he has begraced us - it's not even a word! But he made it up to encapsulate what he meant: that God has clothed us in all that Christ is and Christ has. That's the amazing grace of the gospel, it's all in Christ! You never forget it, and if you're unsaved you've got to get it! It's of
Him, it's not of you - and if you're trying to strive after holiness, Christian, if you're trying to strive after the blessing of the Holy Spirit in your life - forget about it if you're striving! It's all of grace and it's all of Christ. And as we're saved by grace we're going to live by grace, we're going to be raised by grace, we're going to be changed by grace, we're going to be glorified by grace, we're going to rule with Him by grace! 'For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ' - no Christ, no grace. You see God could not have shown grace without Christ. No matter how powerful He is, He couldn't do it, for I am loved, I am accepted, I am blessed only because I am in Christ! Think of this, think of this, as we close - and I must urge you to grasp this. The poet said:

'The love wherewith He loves the Son,
Such is His love to me'.

The love wherewith He loves the Son? Is the love that He loves me? To all the extent, to all its depth, to all its width and breadth and height! To all it's volume and capacity and acuteness! He loves me and He loves Christ no more!

Where are you tonight, Christian? First of all, person, where are you spiritually? Are you saved? God loves you, God loves you! Where are you spiritually, Christian? Are you backslidden? Are you out in the mountains wild and bare? Are you in the far country? Are you eating the dirty food of the pigs, the swine? Where are you? God loves you like Christ! Where are you Christian? Are you in bereavement? Have you the waves of bereavement and sorrow pouring over your head? Listen to the words of God: 'I love you as my Son'. Have friends forsaken you - a husband or a wife? Is it your health that's failed you, or your employment, or your family? Whatever it may be, it is awesome to think that I have, day after day, hour after hour - whether I'm conscious of it or not - the love of the Father for the Son as my portion!

Go home and read the book of Philemon. And you remember that I said on the first week that Paul wrote the book of Philemon almost at the same time he wrote the book of Ephesians - in the same place and the same house that he was held a prisoner of the Roman Empire. Remember that! I like to think (now I can't prove it, but I like to think) as Paul was writing these words, he had Philemon and Onesimus in his mind when he said: 'in the beloved'. Remember what happened? Onesimus had offended his master Philemon, probably even stolen off him. He ran away and all of a sudden he meets (in Rome) Paul, and he's converted - Paul leads him to the Lord. Paul decides to write a letter - the little book of Philemon that we have - to his old master to tell him: 'Look, Onesimus has got saved! I know he's offended you. I know he's done wrong of you but he's been converted'. Listen to what Paul says - and this is what Christ says to God about you: 'If he hath wronged thee Father, or if he oweth thee ought my Father, put that to my account. I will pay it'. Listen to this! 'Receive him as You receive me'. Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Abba Father! We thank Thee for our blessed Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for all that we have inherited in Him. And Lord, if we don't praise Thee now as we ought, we thank Thee that there'll be a day that we'll praise Him as we should - when we see Him face to face and tell the story, saved by sovereign grace. We say: 'Glory and honour, blessing and power be unto Him that sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'. Amen.
Ephesians chapter 1, and we're looking this evening at one verse (we've narrowed it down now to one, we'll maybe be on half a verse next week!). One verse only, but we'll take time to read right down to at least verse 8 - we may go on a bit further, just to get the context, maybe verse 14. But let's read from verse 1 together: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained a inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory".

Let's read that verse together again, verse 7, and let's take note of every phrase and every word that we read: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace".

We're looking this evening, as your brochure says, for praising the Lord. We want to go out of this place praising the Lord for redemption. We've learned over the past weeks - I hope we have anyway - to praise the Lord for many blessings. Indeed, what the word of God says is, verse 3: 'all the blessings that we have, being in Christ Jesus'. In other words the whole span, the whole spectrum of all the promises of God that we have delivered to us by faith, because we are found in Christ. We learned how these were blessings that were signed beside our name before the world ever began. We thought of election - how Paul wrote to Timothy that we are elect before the foundation of the world in Christ to salvation. We looked [at] how God, before the beginning of the world, predestinated us, preordained us, chose us in His foreknowledge to be placed in Christ; and one day, wonder of wonders, to be like Christ! We learned last week how it's all because we are accepted in the beloved. We're accepted - nothing to do with ourselves, but because we are planted, rooted, cemented in Christ Jesus - now when God looks at us, He no longer sees our sin but He sees Christ! We have been adopted, not an adoption that we understand today, but we have been made through the engrafted word
by the Spirit of God to the regeneration of our souls. We have been changed from a sinful human nature and been given a holy nature, so that now are we called the sons of God. 'And it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is'.

Now, this evening, in verse 7, we see this: that the foundation of all these blessings that we've looked at (all the blessings in heavenly realms in Christ Jesus: election, predestination, adoption, being engrafted into the well beloved) all of these things rest upon a foundation that is found in verse 7: 'In whom we have redemption'. Now I want you to think about this for a moment - think of this! We will never ever again, in our lifetime or after it, have to turn to God and bow on our knees before Him in contrition, in repentance and say, 'Lord, take all my guilt away!'. We'll not have to do it. We'll not have to, with tears blotting an open Bible, or blotting the floor before which we weep, we'll not have to turn to God and say: 'Lord, blot out my sin!'. No more! We don't need to do that! We don't have to ask God: 'Lord, justify me!'. We don't have to wait until a day for the redemption of our souls, because if we're in Christ - listen to these words - it's been done. It's been done! There's nothing more to do because if we've trusted in Christ, if we've trusted in His death at the cross, His atonement, if we have believed in Him these things are blessedly settled forever. Forever! Forever and ever! That's why it says: 'We have now redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace'. So He not only fore-chose us and fore-fixed our destiny, but He bought us. And we're going to see this evening what a cost it was to Himself.

Now look at verse 7, because you'll see in verse 7, the Holy Spirit shifts our attention from heaven down to earth. He moves our thinking from the past: what God has done in election, in predestination, in all those things before the foundation of the world. He changes us from past to present. Not only does He do that, but there is a change of emphasis from God the Father to God the Son. We learned that it was the Father that elected us, it was the Father that predestinated us to be like Christ one day. But verse 7 is the change where it says this: that although the Father did all this, it had to be the Son who redeemed us. Of the ten times that you find the word redemption within the New Testament, seven times you find it within Paul's letters, and you find it three times within the book of Ephesians.

So let's look at this word 'redemption', this concept that we find within the word of God. Let's look at the first phrase of verse 7: 'In whom we have redemption'. Now I want you to notice this - that if you were to search the New Testament there are three ideas held for this word 'redemption'. The first is this: it is simply the idea 'to purchase something', 'to buy something'. When you spend money, you pay a price, you pay the cost, that commodity or object - whatever it is - becomes yours. You have bought it. That's what the word of God means when it says, 'We have been bought with a price, even the precious blood of Christ'. Let's meditate on this! We have been redeemed to God. We have been redeemed to God by Him. We have been purchased by God, by the Son. Therefore we say: 'We are not our own'. And there was a day that we were sold under sin, we were sold to the world, the flesh, and the devil. But praise be to God and His Son, that He has paid the price so that He could purchase us. Do you remember the day when you were sold under sin? Do you? Do you remember the day you prostituted yourself to this world for absolutely nothing? You were sold under sin, without money and without price, but He - Jesus Christ - has redeemed us without money but with His own precious blood.

That's the first meaning of redemption: to purchase something. But the second meaning is simply this: to buy something, to purchase something out of the market, out of somewhere else. That simply means what has been purchased - and this is beautiful - will never ever, ever, be put on sale again! Have you got it? Not only have you been bought out of the slave market of sin, but the second grasped meaning of this word is the idea that never again will you be found in the ranks of Lucifer. Never again ought the child of God to be found dabbling in the flesh. The history books tell us that when one went into the slave market and saw a certain slave that you wanted to buy for sale, and you looked at him and you said: 'I'm going to purchase you'. When the money changed hands and when you bought that
slave, you were at liberty as the buyer, as the redeemer, to take a piece of paper - a certificate - and place it in the hand of that slave: a legal piece of paper which guaranteed him complete freedom. He could go. He could go and live his life the way he wanted. He perhaps could go back to his father or his mother, or [her] husband] or his wife, and the meaning is this: that never again would that slave be in that position, because he had this piece of paper given to him by his redeemer. Never would his life be put in jeopardy again. It's the word - this second word and this meaning - that Peter uses in his epistle in 1 Peter 1, verse 18: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot".

The third meaning of redemption that we find within the New Testament is the one that's found in our verse, verse 7. It's a Greek compound. That means it's two words put together, and the first part is the word 'apo' which means 'away from' - to put something away from you. It entails the idea of not just putting something away, but putting something away from something else - to separate. The second part of the word is 'latrosis' (sp?) - and it means this: 'to be free'. To be loosed! So putting the two together it literally means this: to be loosed away from something. Christian, do you know what you've been loosed away from? Do you? Some of us forget about it, but - oh - it does us good to think about where we came from, what we've been saved from, what we've been saved to. The fact that we have been loosed away from the law, that we could not keep it, that we could not measure up to it, that the law condemned us and God condemned us by the law, but in Christ we have been loosed away from the law! We have been loosed away from the judgement of God, for by His holy law and by His holy person - His holy character of righteousness, His justice - we were condemned for all eternity, but because of Christ and our redemption we have been pulled away from His judicial wrath. We've been pulled away from the guilt of our sin. Does that not make you rejoice? Remember the guilt that you felt? That guilt that weighed you down? That guilt that tore into your life - every facet and being of it - that you couldn't get any peace? That guilt that crucified your nature? Do you feel it? Can you remember what it felt like: the guilt that you had before God where you saw Christ, and Christ was dying, and Christ had your sins upon Him, and you felt the guilt of it? Do you remember? As Ironside says: 'The question of our guilt will never again rise'.

Did you hear me? I don't think you did hear me! The question of your guilt will never rise again! 'There is no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus' - why? Because it was raised on a cross with Christ at Calvary - all of our judgement, all of the curse of the law, all that my guilt deserved. We can say:

'Death and judgement are behind me,  
Grace and glory are before me.  
All the billows rolled o'er Jesus,  
There exhausted all their powers'.

Can you not praise God for redemption? For the fact that you've been bought - you've been purchased? For the fact that you've been purchased out of something? Away from the slave market of sin of the world, the flesh, and the devil:

'Redeemed, redeemed from sin and all its woe.  
Redeemed, redeemed eternal life to know.  
Redeemed, redeemed by Jesus' blood.  
Redeemed, redeemed, O praise the Lord!'
the little boy that made the boat, himself, out of wood? And he made it, and he went out with his daddy, and he went out to sail it down the river. He put it in the water and he watched but, all of a sudden, to his amazement, he was terrified to see that it just went down the river, and he couldn't get it any longer, he couldn't reach it. It went out into the ocean, into the sea and he lost it! One day he was walking down the main street and he saw, in the window, that little boat. He looked, and he saw it, and he said: 'That's my boat!'. He went into the shopkeeper and he said: 'You've got my boat in your window!'. The shopkeeper said: 'No, that's my boat! If you want that boat you're going to have to pay for it'. And the boy bought his boat and as he was walking - now listen to this - down the street, holding that little boat in his arms like a child, do you know what he said to it? 'You are twice mine! I made you, and now I bought you'.

Do you remember what the Lord said to the children of Israel in Isaiah 43 and verse 1? Listen to this - and there are four phrases that I want you to grasp: 'But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine'. Do you know what God says to your soul, child of God, today? 'My child, you are twice Mine. I formed you and you were lost to Me, but I redeemed thee. Thou art mine!'. Now think of it: when the Lord Jesus Christ, and remember it was the Lord Jesus Christ that created this universe - when He created the universe, He only had to speak a word and the whole thing was done in a millisecond! But when He wanted to redeem you, He had to shed His blood. A word wouldn't do! A sentence wouldn't do! A lifetime of holiness and an example to the world of humanity that they had never seen before, the teachings that far outstretched every philosopher, every religious leader ever - that wouldn't do!

He had to shed His blood, and the extent of the redemption, and the greatness of the redemption is seen from our passage and from our verse in the very fact of what it cost - the price of our redemption. Look at it: 'In whom we have redemption,' - look at this - 'through his blood' - that's your second point. We have redemption, but never you forget this: it's redemption by His blood! What a price for our redemption! Think of it! Nothing else would do! The scriptures clearly testify that - that it had to be the blood of Christ, and the blood of Christ nothing more or nothing less. Why? Because as slaves in the bondage of sin - Romans chapter 6 and verse 23 tells us that the penalty of sin was what? Death! 'For the wages of sin is death' - and because that is the penalty only a substitute life would satisfy the righteous, judicial demands of God. He had to have someone die, it had to happen! Now don't you ever get this into your head that the grace of God, or the forgiveness of God, is simply God wiping the slate clean. It's not! For the slate was never wiped clean for Christ. For you it was, but God's justice cannot be ignored for His love or His grace. God had all these accusations against humanity and against you personally and they had to be dealt with - they couldn't just be forgotten about!

So a substitute had to come, and since the word of God tells us - and it's God's law and I don't argue with it - that the life of the flesh is in the blood; that means that what makes us live and be a living soul is the blood flowing through our veins. Therefore, Matthew tells us that 'The Son of Man gave His life a ransom'. The ransom payment could only be through blood. Now let's get this! There was no other way! God's justice had to be satisfied, but the amazing thing is this: the infinite, judicial wrath of a righteous, all-powerful God was satisfied! Can you grasp that? His righteousness - remember He's an eternal God; that means the righteousness of His eternity. He is an all-powerful God, that means the righteousness, and the holiness, and the wrath of a God who is stronger than anything - He epitomises strength! Oh, God help me understand it: that on that centre cross that all-powerful, unlimited, eternal God exhausted His wrath. Do you know what exhausted means? Like a damp sponge He wrung it out. Every drip, every drag of the anger that He had against the human race and against sin - hallelujah! - it was all exhausted on Him! It wouldn't do if there was one of my sins that wasn't laid upon Him, for I'd be on my way to hell. It wouldn't do if it was the same for you - it had to be: 'all my sins were laid upon Him'.
One of the early church fathers devised a doctrine that said that Christ paid a ransom, but He paid it to the devil. And that means simply this: that the devil had us (and the devil did have us) and that we were in his prison - and if God was going to get us free, Christ had to pay the ransom to Satan. Nonsense! That's not what the Bible teaches, because that would erase the remarkable thing about redemption which is this: the offended party, the one who's hurting, the one who's had the wrong done unto Him - the Father Himself - provided the way by which an irreversible sentence of law and justice that was our due could be placed on His own Son as our substitute. That's the amazing thing! Paul says in Corinthians that this is the amazing thing: that if you think of God and man with their back to back; in Christ, God's back (that's what it says) has been reconciled to man - turned around in the cross of Christ. That's what it says! God, the first prime mover in salvation, has done His due - He, the offended party, has come and made salvation - made a ransom for sin. The miracle is this: that He made the ransom for Himself. He was the one who needed the ransom paid to Him, and if I can say it reverently, it was from His own pocket.

I don't think we can ever enter into this: what God has done. What God has done in redemption; and remember that the gift of God to you, my friend, is not simply salvation or eternal life (although they are gifts) but in theory, the gift of God to His church is Jesus Christ! And everything - salvation, redemption, regeneration, justification, sanctification - all these things are in Him. Do you know what I love about redemption? That, because of the great price that had to be paid for it, it means that it's secure. It means that there's no doubt about it; that my salvation is not resting upon how good I am as a Christian, but how good the blood of Christ was to save me! That's what it's resting on. Now there are these people that believe - and some of them are dear brothers and sisters in Christ - who believe that one day you can be saved and at a later day you're lost. And I ask this question - and I'm being honest from the depths of my soul: is the blood of Christ not good enough to save to the uttermost? I ask another question: will the Father reject the paid price of His own Son's blood because I fall into sin today? Never! For He is as satisfied tomorrow as He was (as our brother reminded us yesterday) when that veil of the temple was rent in twain. He is as satisfied today and tomorrow as He was when He raised Him from the dead; when He took Him to glory; when He entered that heavenly tabernacle and temple by His own blood, and sat down - the work finished. Hallelujah! He is satisfied with Christ! Whether the world is matters nothing - for God is, and that's all that matters.

Have you ever thought about how precious that blood must have been? It's not just precious, like all our blood is precious because it's our life, but it is precious because of whose blood it is! It is the Beloved's blood, think of this! How great your sins are, think of that for a moment! How great wrong you have done in your lifetime! And I know that my sins and your sins are great enough to damn for all eternity, but - praise Him! - His blood is greater than my sin! His blood is able to save to the uttermost. And, oh, the scream and the shriek of my soul as it slides down into hell's fires if it was not for the blood of Christ! For it would have - and the sooner we remember our lot before the shedding of the blood of Christ, the better we would be as Christians in winning the lost, in realising what it cost Him, in realising what a gift we have in salvation. If we realised what the blood of Christ means to you my friend! The brethren writer Nicholl put it well when he said this:

'The more I know the wickedness of my sin,  
The more I know the preciousness of the blood.  
I see my sinfulness more today than ten years ago,  
Yet I value the blood of Christ more also'.

Can I say this? God save us from a bloodless gospel, because a bloodless gospel cannot save. My friend, if you preach or if you teach in any capacity, or you witness, and you find something within you that holds back when you think of mentioning the blood - there's something wrong. For the blood of Christ is everything, and I say this advisedly - and maybe you think it's harsh - but any man or woman that will not preach the blood, or see salvation by the blood - let them be damned! Do you know why I say that? Because
Paul the apostle said it in Galatians 1:8 and 9: 'But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed' - that means eternally damned forever! My friend, it's so serious that he repeats it, and he says: 'As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed'.

We don't take these things [seriously] enough. You know, it blesses my heart to think that this is what it says 'the angels desire to look into'. It says that this was the thing that the prophets, now - Elijah, Moses, Ezekiel and Daniel - this was the thing that they were all puzzled at. They couldn't understand it, because it is the mystery of redemption - and you will find out, as we go through this book, that a mystery within the word of God is not something 'airy-fairy, sci-fi'. That's not what it is, but it is something that hitherto has not been revealed. The mystery here is this: that God loved a world of sinners lost and ruined by the fall. Is that not a mystery to you? It's a mystery to me. How God loved me, how God came to earth as a man for me, and died for me, and shed every ruby drop of blood for me, and was buried for me, and raised from the dead for me, and ascended to heaven for me, and sat down beside God for me - that amazes me! Never let it cease to amaze you, whatever you do, or that's the end of your Christian walk my friend - you'll not be in hell, but at least you'd be a bit warmer if you were in hell! Never lose it my friend.

We read, in the autobiography of Dr. Joseph Parker, that he lost it. He was the great preacher during Spurgeon's day, in the city temple in London. And he says, within his autobiography, that he began to give too much attention to the modern theories of his day that tried to improve upon the fundamentals of the word of God, to make them intellectually respectable, and palatable to all those and sundry. We run into that danger today! Just believe the Bible my friend, that's all! Just say: 'God said it, I believe it, that settles it!' - that ought to be enough. One of them that he caved into was the doctrine of the atonement and redemption through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as he went through his life he didn't realise that these teaching were getting a grip of himself. Suddenly, down his life's pathway, tragedy struck and his wife took ill, and within a few hours she dropped dead. And he was standing there, with his life's partner just gone into eternity in a matter of hours. And it says that in the days and the weeks and the months that lay ahead, he was unable to share his grief with anyone. And he walked around his empty house, through the empty rooms, with a heart that was breaking, with pain that was in his bosom. And he tried to find a place of rest in his modern theories and beliefs, but there were none! And then he said, and I quote you his autobiography:

'In those hours of darkness, in those hours of my soul's anguish when filled with doubt and trembling in fear, I bethought myself of the old gospel of redemption alone, through the blood of Christ: the gospel I had preached in those earlier days - and I put my foot down on that! And my brethren, I found firm standing. I stand there today and I shall die resting upon that blessed, glorious truth of salvation alone through the precious blood of Christ'.

Isn't that why Edward Mote wrote those words that we sang:

'On Christ the solid rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand'.

Remember the old man that said: 'Any other rock is shamrock'. My friend it's only the blood of Christ that you can stand on, and this is what our verse says. Look at it: 'In whom we have redemption through his blood' - and here's the next thing that I want you to see: 'the forgiveness of sins'. Your first point, redemption: it is redemption by blood, it is redemption by blood that brings forgiveness. The Greek word for 'forgiveness' has this idea, again, of 'letting loose'. It's the idea - we don't have time to look at it but I would advise you to look at it when you get home - of Leviticus 26. There you'll read of Aaron, and he takes a goat, and he places his hands on the head of the goat, and it says that he confesses the sins of the people upon it. He imputes - puts onto the goat - all the sins of the children of Israel. It says that he takes it away into the midst of the
wilderness and he looses it - that's the word for forgiveness. He looses it! He let's it go - the scapegoat, our Lord Jesus Christ who took our sins, who let it go into the depths of the ocean, as far as the east is from the west, as high as the heavens above. He buried it into the ground. He put it behind God's back, so that He says now: 'Thy sins, my child, and thy iniquities I will remember no more'.

But in our verse - verse 7 - the reference is to sins (you'll note that): 'In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins'. Whereas if you were to turn to Colossians 1 and 14, you read this verse: 'In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins'. So in verse 7 of chapter 1 of Ephesians it's 'forgiveness of sin', and in chapter 1 verse 14 of Colossians it's 'forgiveness of sins'. Sin, here, is the Greek word 'Hamartea' (sp?), that's the word used in Colossians. But sins - 'parapatoma' (sp?) - is a different thing, because sin is the condition that we are in by our nature, being in Adam, the black spot of disease morally, spiritually speaking: our dead soul. But sins is not our condition, sins are the acts of our condition: the fruit of who we are and what we are. But listen to this: you put those two verses together, and God forgives them both in Christ. Isn't that wonderful? I hope you think this is wonderful, I really do. That dead soul of yours; Christ took the punishment, but not only for the root of the problem, the branch, the vine that all the sins that you commit stem from - not only did He take that, but everything that you do wrong in your life - Christ took it! Christ put it away! Christ let you lose from it! This is something beyond anything that a psychologist can do, this is beyond anything that a hypnotist can do - and you can have all the positive thinking that you like, and read all the books about it, listen to all the tapes about it, but they can't give you, through therapy, the forgiveness of sins. For only God, in Christ, can do that.

There are three distinct aspects of forgiveness that we find within the word of God, and it's important that we understand this because they're so often misunderstood. The first is eternal forgiveness, and what that simply is, is this: the man who says, 'Well look, if I trust Christ and His death on the cross, does that mean all my sins up to the cross, or all my sins up to now when I trusted Christ: they're forgiven? But my present and my future, what about it?' Eternal forgiveness means that all my sins - have you got that? - past (those skeletons that you still remember), present (the thing that you did today, and it's annoying you), future. 'For if we say that we have not sinned we deceive ourselves; we make God a liar and the truth is not in us', because we're going to sin, we're going to keep on sinning until we get to Glory - hopefully not at as great an extent as we are now, but we'll still do it. But praise God, in Christ we have redemption through His blood, even the eternal forgiveness of our sins.

And then, secondly: there's restorative forgiveness. This often confuses young believers; that they don't understand that if Christ has forgiven their past, present and future sins, why is it that if they slip up today they need to confess their sins again? It's simply this: that because you are a child of God, you are no longer in a relationship between God who is a judge and you who are a guilty sinner. Do you understand? That relationship's gone. It is now God who is your Father and you that are His child. Your sins are gone: past, present and future; but what you need is restorative forgiveness. That means this: that sin, when we commit it as Christians, goes between our fellowship and God - not our salvation, but our fellowship between us and God. That is why John says, in 1 John chapter 1 and verse 7: 'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and' - verse 7 - 'the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin'. 'And if we confess our sin' - what does that mean? Does that mean God's not going to forgive us as Christians? We're going to go to hell if we don't confess every little sin that we do? Do you know what confessing your sin as a Christian is? It's putting your hands up and saying: 'Lord, there's me again. I've done it again. Would You forgive me? Take it away. I don't want it to be between You and me. I'm Your child, You're my Father; just take it away. And I plead the blood, I know there's power in the blood to restore this fellowship to me as Your child'.

Then, thirdly, there's governmental forgiveness and I want you to note this. That is simply this - to give you an illustration and an example - a drunkard gets saved; and he's drunk for fifty years, hardly a day sober, and
his liver is like a sultana. Have you got it? When he gets saved, God, with giving him a new nature, won't give him a new liver. Sometimes we live with the consequences of our sin, that is what's called governmental forgiveness. Therefore we need to beware as Christians, because there are Christians running about and saying: 'Well, I'm forgiven in my past and my present and my future. And I'm a child of God and God's my Father and if I put my hands up and admit my sin, well then God's just going to forgive me'. That's true, but don't you think God can wipe away, or will wipe away, the consequences of what you do - for you'll live with them.

There's a legend about Martin Luther that he was very sick with an illness. As he lay on this bed it says that he had a sense of the evil one - Satan - entering his sick room, looking at him with a triumphant smile. And it says that, in his mind's eye, Satan rolled a big scroll on the floor. And as the fiend threw it from one end of the room to the other, it unwound itself and Luther's eyes read the long, fearful record of his own sins before his face - one by one. And his stout, courageous reformation heart quailed before the ghastly roll of his transgressions. Then suddenly, it flashed into Luther's mind and consciousness that there was one thing not written on that scroll. And he cried aloud: 'One thing you have forgotten! The rest is all true, but one thing you have forgotten: the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sins!' - and as he said this the accuser of the brethren and his heavy scroll disappeared. Can I say this: believers sometimes can be crippled with their past. You will never be what Christ wants you to be if that thing in your mind stays there forever as a skeleton to haunt you. But you need to take the exhortation of Paul to the Philippians: 'Forget it - those things that are behind - and press on!'. For we read in the book of the Revelation that they overcame him - and I'm telling him that tonight - you tell him it! Christ overcame him at Calvary with His own blood! And because His blood has covered me, I can overcome him by the word of my testimony.

But finally, not only do we have redemption by His blood that brings the forgiveness of sins, but it says this: 'In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace'. Did you know that our God is not a miser? Did you know that? He is not a miserly God. And although the word of God teaches stewardship and sensibility with your money and what God has given you, if you're a miser and a scrooge: that's not a fruit of the spirit. And I would vouch to say that you're not showing the proof and the evidence that you are a child of God. But listen to this, the poet put it like this:

'Stern justice can demand no more
And mercy can dispense her store'.

We are forgiven. We are blessed in Christ according to the riches of His grace. Do you know what this verse means? If you had some kind of measuring instrument to measure the depth, the volume, the area, of the love of God, of the gracious riches of God - you could never measure it! Yet it's all given to you. Do you dwell on that enough? Do you? Do you count your blessings enough? Do you name them one by one, what the Lord has done, what He has given to you? And listen: His grace - this verse tells us - is infinite, as His forgiving grace is infinite in the power of the infinite blood of Christ. Now notice the difference, it says: He gives according to His riches, not out of His riches. There's a famous photograph of the old man Rockefeller - scrumpled up face, thin, frail. He's giving a dime to a little waif on the street. He was giving out of his riches. One of the richest men that America has ever seen; but if he was to give according to his riches that young child would have a mansion, would have millions of dollars for himself. But God gives us, not out of what He has, but according to what He has because He has given all that He has! He has given Christ - and He says to you today, 'Here's a blank chequebook, My Christian friend. It's an eternal chequebook and you write cheques to Me as much as your heart is content. Just charge them up child! Like a fish in the ocean - drink until it's dry'.

I want to finish with this beautiful story. In a market place in Rotterdam in Holland stood, for many years in the old corner, this house that was known as 'The House of a Thousand Terrors'. And the story goes like this:
during the sixteenth century the Dutch people rose in a revolt against the cruel king, Phillip the Second. And Phillip, what he did was, he didn't like it and he sent a great army under Duke Alva (sp?) to suppress the rebellion. And Rotterdam sieged itself - it held out for a time - but finally it capitulated. And from house to house the victors went slaughtering children, men and women; the citizens being killed in their houses. And a group of men and women and children were hiding in this little corner house that is called 'The House of a Thousand Terrors'. And one young man said: 'I've got an idea'. He says, 'Here's a goat', and he slew it and he spilt out the blood on the floor, and he took a broom and he broomed it underneath the door outside. And when the soldiers came by that door one looked to the other and listen to what they said: 'Come away. The work is already done here. Look! The blood is beneath the door'. God says, 'When I see the blood I will pass over you'.

Our Father, we look forward to a day when we'll sing a new song, singing: 'Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof. For Thou wast slain and has redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation'. Lord Jesus, we thank Thee for shedding Thy blood for us. Help us never to lose the wonder of it all, Amen.

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Transcribed by Trevor Veale, Preach The Word - January 2001
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Ephesians - Chapter 5
"The Mystery of His Will - Part 1"

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Ephesians 1:8-14

1. The Mystery Made Known (verses 8-10)
2. The Mystery To The Jew (verses 11-12)
3. The Mystery To The Gentile (verse 13)
4. The Mystery To Both (verse 14)

That was good singing, let me welcome you to our Bible Study this evening. We hope and trust that, as we meet together around God's word, that the Lord will meet with us and speak to us through His precious inspired book, the Bible, as we study it together this evening. We're turning again to Ephesians and chapter 1, Ephesians chapter 1, and we'll take time to read from verse 1. We've been going quite slowly, but it's important that we do go slowly and we understand what we are reading, and we understand every blessing that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. But we're quickening up a little bit today, we're doing a few more verses than one or two.

Let's read together from verse 1 again: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly [realms] in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory".

Now we're looking this evening at verses 8 right down to verse 14. We mightn't get all the way down to it this evening, but we want to look at these verses. Look at verse 8 first of all. We looked last week in verse 7 about the redemption that we have in Him, through His blood the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace. And then Paul, in this long sentence without any punctuation at all, continues to reel off all the blessings that we have in Christ again. Verse 8: 'Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence', verse 9: 'Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself' - and so on, and so on.

We're going to look this evening at the subject: 'The Mystery of God's Will'. One writer has said: 'God has many counsels but only one purpose'. Think about that for a moment. God, in His heavens, in His infinite mind and wisdom and sovereignty, has many counsels but only one purpose. If you were to scour the whole
of the word of God this evening, from Genesis to Revelation, you would find many counsels of God within His word. There's His counsels with regards to the nation and the people of Israel. Then there are God's counsels concerning the Gentile nations and people. You remember that God said to Abraham - this was His counsel concerning the Jewish people: 'In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed'. God's counsels - that through the Jews there would be a special people that would be a light unto all the nations and, one day, in His counsels He would affect every nation upon the face of the earth through this one nation: the Jewish race. Then there are His hidden counsels. What are they? We have in the Old Testament His revealed counsels to Israel. But what we do not have in the Old Testament is what we read about within the book of Ephesians and, indeed, throughout all of our New Testament is the new covenant within the blood of Christ that all nations are brought into the benefit of.

We read about these things that were hidden throughout all of time, never disclosed, perhaps not even hinted at, but here we have it revealed through Jesus Christ, through the written word of God in the New Testament scriptures. There are His hidden counsels with regard to the reign of Christ upon the earth, that one day there would be a reign of the Messiah who would reign in holiness and righteousness and have everyone in every nation under His feet - and as the hymnwriter says: 'His kingdom shall stretch from shore to shore'. All of these counsels have different parts, but there is one purpose. Now I want you to get that before we begin to study these verses: God has many counsels but He has only one purpose. If you think of the Pacific Ocean, and all those mountainous valleys and all those little streams that go to tributaries that then go into a mighty river, and all those mighty rivers run into the Pacific Ocean - many counsels but one final Ocean of purpose!

We're going to look, first of all, at the mystery of God's will that has been made known in verses 8 to 10. Look at those verses with me. We'll look at verse 8 first of all. Now let's read it carefully: 'Wherein [God] hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence'.

'Count your many blessings,
Name them one by one,
And it will surprise you
What the Lord has done!'

Hasn't it surprised us? Over these weeks as we have looked - and we have looked at what we have in Christ: 'all spiritual blessings in heavenly realms'. We haven't to wait on them. We haven't to wait till the consummation of all things or the end of the age, or even till Christ comes back again - whether it's in rapture, whether it's to come to the earth to set up His millennial reign - we don't have to wait, because we have all spiritual blessings in heavenly realms now! Isn't that wonderful? We looked at the fact at how we have these blessings even before we were born. For we were chosen in Him, Paul told us, before the foundation of the world. Our purpose and our destiny was predestined in the person and the image of Christ to be placed, to be planted, rooted and grounded in Him, immovable!

We looked at how we have been adopted - taken from the slave market of sin: children of wrath, children of the devil - and brought into the family of God, adopted. Not just adopted in our sense, but our very nature has been engraved into the nature of God in Christ. We are new creatures in Christ Jesus! What a blessing! And then last week we looked at redemption and how we are bought with the blood of Christ - how our redemption and our salvation is secure; that there is nothing that can move it. And, outflowing from that redemption, there is the forgiveness of all our sins forever! Hallelujah! What a Saviour we have! What blessings we have been learning about! But here in our reading this evening Paul tells us of more than election, predestination, adoption, redemption. But now he testifies that the God who is liberal, that we read about in verse 7, that He gives us according - look at it: 'to the riches of his grace'. We learnt that he's not a niggardly God. He is not a God who is miserly, who is tight-fisted, but He is the God who lavishes all that
He has - everything is ours in Christ Jesus! So He tells us, in verse 8, how God has lavished His riches upon us: 'Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence'.

Now to explain this we need to turn to Colossians chapter 1. Colossians chapter 1, and if you ever happen to read (and I advise you to do so) the book of Ephesians in parallel with the book of Colossians, you will see that Paul writes about very similar things, and there are parallel passages between the two of them. And, if you like, the parallel passage to Ephesians 1 verse 8, within the book of Colossians, is Colossians 1 verse 9. Look at it: 'For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding'. It's amazing the blessings that we have in Christ, isn't it? I heard a story recently (and it could only happen in America) that a very rich man died and he left an estate of $20 million. No one could find the next of kin, there didn't seem to be a relative anywhere - couldn't find anybody. So the solicitor decided that he was going to hire a private investigator. And he rang the firm and the firm said: 'Well, we have one woman. She'll find out who it is. That's for sure'. And after a few weeks and a few months, in the private investigator's office he rang through to this young lady who was travelling all over the country, trying to find the inheritor of this $20 million. He got her on the phone and he said: 'Well, have you found him yet?'. She said: 'Yes!'. He said: 'When can he come into the office and sign the papers and claim what's his?'. She said this: 'As soon as we're finished our honeymoon!'. Isn't that right? That was her way of getting into that inheritance! But isn't it wonderful - isn't it? - that we don't have to get into our inheritance! We don't have to thieve it. We don't have to, like Jacob whose name means 'wriggler', to wriggle into the blessing of God, try to buy it, try to dupe or con God into blessing us, because we are blessed! It's just getting into the realisation of it.

One of the mighty blessings that we find in verse 8 is this: wisdom. Look at it: 'He has abounded toward us in all wisdom'. The Greek word is the word 'sofia' (sp?) and it simply means this: wisdom - sofia - is the knowledge which sees into the heart of things, which knows them as they really are. Think of that! God has blessed you and I with wisdom so that we see things, and we ought not to see things simply on the outward appearance - but He has given us His ability to be able to look into the very heart of things. Isn't that the difference between us and the world? Or it ought to be! That we simply don't look on the outward appearance, on the bright lights, on the attractive smell of the things of this world, but we can see deeper into the very venomous bite of the serpent Lucifer himself. He has abounded toward us in all wisdom...and prudence.

Look at it...that word prudence could be translated 'insight' or 'intelligence'. It's the Greek word 'fronessus' (sp?). It means this: the understanding and discernment that leads to right action. Understanding intelligence that will lead you to live aright, and live a life that is pleasing to Christ. Now let's put them together for a moment: wisdom and prudence - the God-given ability to look into the heart of things, not to be taken up by what men are on the outside, or what things are on the outside. And also the ability to have the discernment to realise what is needed to walk in holiness and a life that is righteous and pleasing to God. Christian, you have those things but are you walking in the reality of them? God knows that we need men of discernment in these days. We need women and young people of discernment. But let me say this: that discernment and the gift that it is can only be nourished when we saturate ourselves in the word of God. You see, if you do not saturate yourself and your veins become 'bibline' with Holy Scripture, you will never be given a knowledge of what the mystery of God's will is. God's will is in God's word.

Now to give you an illustration of what it is to have a spirit of discernment - and you all have it, you maybe don't cultivate it, or use it, in the way that you ought to - but you know what it is. When you come and you confront something that is unorthodox, and it's as if there's a tug within your soul and you realise (you can't put it into words), but there's a feeling within the depths of your being that there's something not right about that. We need holy disciners in these days. Now listen! I'm not talking about legalistic big brothers (we've got enough of them) but spiritual men who can see past the facade, spiritual women that can weigh up what
is spiritual and of God and not carnal of the flesh and of man. That can be summed up in this: absolute holiness. The New Testament writer put it like this: 'to have the mind of Christ'. What's your mind like? Could it be in any way conceivably described as the mind of Christ? 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus' - and if we are to be united and, Paul says, 'of one mind', the only mind that we have to be united in is not the pastor's mind, is not the elder's mind, but the mind of Christ, and Christ alone.

'He hath abounded', look at it, 'toward us in all wisdom and prudence'. If you put these two things together do you know how you could sum it up? Simply this: seeing things from God's standpoint. Is that what you do in life when you're confronted with things, when you're confronted with decisions - perhaps life-threatening decisions you may see it as? What way do we look at things? Do we crumble because we are standing in our own flesh - that we are standing in the rock of our feelings and our circumstances; and we're only happy and rejoicing in the Lord when things are going our way? Or do we look at things from God's standpoint? It's wonderful to read in this verse that it was in grace that God chose us. He chose us in Christ, in grace. We learned that it was in grace, and grace alone, that God predestinated us to one day be like His blessed Son. We learned that it is in grace that the blood of Christ was shed for us.

But there's more. Added to all of this - look at the verse - in grace, the riches of His grace, He has super-abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence. I want you to grasp this. This means that we have been trusted with the mind of God. We have been given His plans, His counsels, His revealed will and purposes for us and for the world that lies around us. He wants us to know His plans - the plans for us individually, the plans for His church corporately, and the plans for the cosmos universally. We thought it astounding - didn't we? - as we looked at election and predestination, that God should take a sinner like you and like me and should have us as companions. Do you remember that - that God would have me as a companion? And then not only that, but that God should have me in His family by adoption and should make me a son, and should love me as much as He loves Christ, and give me everything that He has given Christ! But more than all that: He has brought you and I into His confidence. He has shared with us the plans that He has 'for all things in Christ'. Do you know what that means? We not only ought to be saved, but we ought to know that we're saved. We not only ought to know that we're saved, but we ought to know how we have been saved. Not only how we've been saved but what we have been saved to do. Ephesians tells us in verse 8 that God has given us all that knowledge - how He saves us, why we're saved, what it took to save us - and therefore, as another apostle put it: 'We can know the things that are freely given to us'. Does that not make you rejoice? Does that not make you want to praise the Lord?

Can I ask you: do you appreciate what God has done for you? Now I mean really appreciate. That from the depths of your soul there is a cry of worship and praise and adoration that can't even be put into words, you can't explain what it is, but it's a burning within your soul continually. Even when you come to God, and you can't find words with which to speak to Him, but you know that He can read in the depths of your heart there is a spiritual gratitude. Do you have it? Because you need it. If you're going to be on fire for God, if you're going to be used by God, if you're going to know the power of God through your life and the blessing that is available at your disposal in Christ, oh, you've got to be moved by it! You know, the angels in all their might and (think of it) in all their awesome radiance and holiness - they are still learning the wisdom of God, but we have had super-abounded to us all the wisdom! All His plans! All His purposes! We are object lessons for the angelic beings as they look down and wonder at the fact that the Almighty God that they know all so well could love and redeem people like you! But, praise His name, He did it! And praise His name, He's still doing it! How did John describe this gratitude from within? This is what he says, 1 John 3 verse 3: 'Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure'. There's the two things: you are pure in Christ - you're in Christ! You're sanctified in Christ, but what we need to do is come into the realisation of what we have in Christ - and when we realise it, it changes us down here in this sinful awful world. He's pure, but as he gets to grip within his soul the purity of God that's in him, and what God has done for him in
the blessings of God in Christ, he purifieth himself. Praise the Lord that He hath abounded to us in all wisdom and prudence.

But then verse 9 - the mystery of His will revealed again. Verse 9: 'Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself'. This is the object and the subject of what He has abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence. This is what He has given, imparted, brought us into His confidence within: the mystery of His will. Let's look at it: 'Having known the mystery of his will'. Now I've said to you before but we need to really recap on it, that this word 'mystery' that we find so often within Paul's epistle here and throughout the word of God - it doesn't mean something mysterious. It doesn't mean something airy-fairy tale, something eerie, something spooky. That's not what it means, but it simply means a sacred secret that was previously unknown. Something, a treasure, that never had been opened, that humanity or God's people had never looked into or entered into or known even intellectually, whether or not emotionally - but now God has revealed it. That's a mystery. Something that was never known. Something that was hidden, but something that God has made known and God has opened and we - praise Him! - have found in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now this is the dominant theme of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians: the truth, the mystery hidden through all time, of Christ and Christ's relationship with His church.

There are many mysteries we read about within the word of God. You'll read within the New Testament about the mystery of the kingdom of heaven. Then there is the mystery of lawlessness and sinfulness that abounds in our nation today. There is the mystery of Babylon the Great - that world power, religiously, that will take over the world. Then there is the mystery of Christ and His church that we're reading about here. There's the mystery within Thessalonians of the rapture of the church: something that we do not read of in the Old Testament, that was not known to those Jewish people, but has been revealed to us in our day, in our time, through the Lord Jesus. There is the mystery of Israel's present rejection. You can read about it in Romans chapter 11: how God, for a season, has taken them out of the blessings and has engrafted we Gentiles into God's plan, into God's mysterious will.

All those things were things that were previously unknown to a latter day - but now, in Christ, we have been blessed through all the blessings in the mystery of God's will, revealed in Christ. That's why Paul says, in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 1, that we have become 'the stewards of the mysteries of God'. Not only has He taken us into His confidence, and He has given all wisdom and abounded it and lavished it upon us, and all the spiritual insight that we can hold and handle if we would only take it. But this very fact is this: that, through all that wisdom, there is this channel of this one primary thing that He has revealed to us, something that has never ever been told of in all the Old Testament. It was in the types and the pictures, but we have it all in Christ. We enter into the reality of it. We know what it is to know Him and we, a people who never knew God, a pagan heathenistic race in our very blood, we have been made the stewards of the mysteries of God.

'Having made known unto us the mystery of his will' - and here it is - 'according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself'. Now we could easily skip over that, but it would be very wrong. You see we've come across this phrase time after time: according, according to the good pleasure as He hath purposed in Himself. You know, this whole universe and, indeed my friend, your life and this church and everything that pertains underneath God under the sun - it's like a ship in the vast ocean that is going from one continent to another. And the men and the women, and the boys and girls, and the crew and the engineers, and the engine men and everyone - they're all running about. They're doing their own thing: while some are awake, some are asleep, while some are eating, some are playing games - all sorts of activity within this vessel. But that vessel will go to its destination. My friend, that is God's sovereignty, nothing can spite it and it will come despite you and I, for God will work out His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself. You see, if God purposed His pleasure in you and I, we'd be in trouble and so would He. If that verse said that God,
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according to His good pleasure hath purposed all the mystery of His will and His plans in you and David Legge and the Iron Hall - and I say this reverently - God: He would have to forget about it. But the mystery of His will is that He can perform it in His sovereignty, in His dignity and His deity despite you and me! What a God we have! Our God doesn't need to wait on you to lift a hand for Him. Oh, yes He's chosen that that's the way it should be, but if you're not going to get up and do anything don't think that God's going to let those people get lost. Just like He left Israel and He chose us - never you forget this - He can leave you or I, not in salvation but in blessing, and He can raise up another.

He is sovereign. He is God - and shall the clay, shall the thing formed dictate to the Creator of the universe? Verse 10, he describes even more that His will and the mystery of it is being revealed gradually. He's teasing it out, He's painting a picture to us through His good pleasure of His will in Himself. This is it: 'That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him'. What is the mystery of His will? Here's the answer, He gives it to us in verse 10 succinctly, compactly. He gives it to us in this one verse: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He should gather together in one, all things in Christ Jesus.

Now we need to look at this little word for a few moments: 'dispensation'. What does it mean? I'm not going to go into it in too much depth, but it's important that we understand it. It's translated a number of ways within our New Testament. We find it as the word in our English language: 'stewardship', the word translated 'order', 'administration'. The Greek word that means dispensation and all these things is 'hoiconaima' (sp?). It is the word that we get our English word 'economy' from. Now what is an economy? An economy is simply an ordered condition of things. Another way of translating it would be 'administration'. You hear all the time about the 'Unionist administration', don't you? 'The Labour administration' or the 'Tory administration' previously as it was. The idea behind dispensation - this Greek word - is the idea of government and administration. In fact the Greek word was used day by day in the Greek home, and this very word was used as a name for the house servant - if you want to call her a maid or a butler - the person who managed the affairs of the house. The one who saw to it that the family affairs ran smoothly, that there was enough food, that everything was washed, that everything was cleaned and done well, everything was in its order! That's what this word means.

So what's Paul trying to say? That in the dispensation, the administration, the management, of the fulness of times, God might gather together all things as one in Christ. What is it? Listen to this my friend: God is in control! God is the divine manager of all things! He dispenses that which happens in His universe! He administers it! He holds all things in order! He is the great God and steward of all things! There are many problems in this building, and some of them are so genuine that it breaks our hearts to even think about them. But many of the problems that we face are simply this: that we cannot rest in the sovereignty of God. It's not something to pontificate about or to have as a pet doctrine to impress people. It is something that's meant to go from your head to your heart so that you say: 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him'. Do you know my friend that whatever circumstances are in your life, whatever's happening, whatever the Devil or God may be permitting to enter into your life - whatever it is do you know that, through it all, God is in control? That through it all there is a mystery of the will of God. But what Paul is specifically getting at here is: when the fulness of times come to pass - in other words, something is going to happen - there is the mystery of God's will, that there is a day coming and at the appropriate time God will (as He says [in] verse 10) 'gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on the earth; even in him'.

I hope, as the Christian church in Jesus Christ, that we don't share in the pessimism of this lost world. G.N. Clarke, in his inaugural lecture at Cambridge University, said these words - and I quote: 'There is no secret plan in history to be discovered. I do not believe that any future consummation could make sense of the irrationalities of preceding ages'. 'There is no plan! God has no purpose! All this chaos, all this meaninglessness is just running together and it's just going to end in a big bang and we're all going to end
and there's no purpose to any of it'. Is it any wonder Paul said in the book of Romans: 'Professing themselves to be wise' - a lecturer in Cambridge University! But the dustman in Christ can know more than that: that all things, all things, are running together in the mystery of the will of God. We can say better than this intellectual - we can say like Paul that 'He has abounded toward us. He has made known to us, frail children of the flesh, people from a pagan background that never knew God in our life no matter what religion we're from. He has revealed to us the mystery of His divine counsels and will, that in one day on this earth He will bring all things together - one in Christ'!

God's plan (and this is beautiful) is for Him to sum up everything in His Son. That's it! Jesus Christ! He's not only every blessing that we have, and that we derive every blessing in the Christian life from. But He is what everything that exists will be summed up in. At the moment of time - the fulness of time - the authority of Christ that is trodden in the dirt and spat upon; the authority of Christ that is laughed at in our world, that is degraded and blasphemed - that authority will be declared by everyone. Can you think of that? It's hard to think of today, but let me tell you it is coming! And it will be recognised, it will be acknowledged on the earth and in the age - at the end of all things in heaven and in earth - all things will be under the headship of Christ.

That ought to thrill your soul! But can I ask you, as we think about that beautiful truth, can I ask you: do you know the headship of Christ? I need to be careful but, oh, I know you can turn me to 1 Corinthians chapter 11, and I know that you can tell me that the head of the man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man. And because of that the woman ought to have her head covered - and that's Biblical doctrine, for the angels - remember we are the object lessons of the grace of God, and it says it's for the angels - [this is] one of the reasons that the ladies do that. But can I address you men for a moment? I would vouch to say that some of you that do your nut about the ladies having their head covered know nothing about the headship of Christ in their life. Works both ways - headship! He is your head. He rules you oh man! He tells you where to go, what to do, what to say, what to be, what to live! Do you know anything of the headship of Christ in your life? Wouldn't it be tragic - think about it - that one day in the fulness of time when God brings all things together in Christ Jesus, and every knee will bow and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and you look at every knee bowing and you, as a child of God, recollect that there was never a time in your Christian pilgrimage down here on earth that you knelt before God and Christ, and said: 'Lord, I surrender all'? I'm not talking about being saved, I'm talking about total surrender to everything that God wants in your life. Wouldn't it be awful if the very Devil himself's doing it on that day, and we've never done it with the grace of God in our hearts down here?

What a time this will be! Let's rejoice in it! Let's think about it! A time when Christ's name will no longer be trodden down, when all the unchristian things will be put down and cut away for the last. When everything against God, and in the face of God, will be exterminated and extinguished and then all things - the word of God says - 'in heaven and on earth will be brought together in Christ'. Think about it! Ever since the world began sin (we thought about it last evening with regards to marriage), sin has ripped, destroyed, degraded, depraved everything in our lives and in our world. And the first man was separated from God, and then man was separated from man (Able and Cain), and then nation was separated from nation through sin - and all this separation! Then God had to come in through Abraham and separate a nation unto Himself and make a Jewish race - and there was a difference then between Jew and between Gentile. And ever since the beginning of time sin has made a separation on all fronts. But - praise Him! - there is a day coming when everything previously separated will be made one in my Lord Jesus Christ. It's true - isn't it? - but all around us, all that we see is division. Between Jew and Gentile even today, black and white, rich and poor, educated and uneducated. In all this true world around us, what is true of that world can be said, inwardly of us - even the children of God that (as one writer has put it): 'Every person is a walking civil war'. That there is a struggle even in the depths of our souls - a tension between sin and righteousness, between right and wrong, honesty and lies, passion and reason, Christ and the self-life, the old nature and the new.
But isn't it glorious to praise Him, to exalt Him and adore Him! That there is a day coming, that all that was realised and guaranteed within His own blood at the cross - I will enter into! And there is a day coming when all these divisions will be wiped out. Now notice - this isn't talking about salvation. It's not talking about the division between the saved and the lost - that one day that will be wiped out. Paul's not talking here about universal salvation - that everybody will be saved in the end and God will reconcile everything to Himself. It's talking about universal domination and dominion by God - that's what it's talking about. Paul speaks here about the mystery of His will, and listen: the mystery of His will is the mystery of the millennium. Something that was revealed, not in the same way ever before. Now let me say this: yes, Isaiah talked about it, Habakkuk and Haggai and even Obadiah, that we were looking at, talked about it. The prophets talked about the millennium on earth, but you'll never read about the millennial reign of Christ in heaven. For that is a mystery that has never been revealed until it's revealed here in our reading before us: that even the very cosmos, the very universe will bow to Christ. The thing that Christ has created and sustained throughout all the years of our life will be ordered and ruled by Him. The parallel passage in Colossians 1:16 is this: 'For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him'. You see that little phrase: 'and for Him'? Some people have translated it this way: 'towards Him' - have you got it? He is the goal to which all things have their direction, towards Him the total cosmos and universe moves. It finds its goal in Him. This is the end for which the universe was and is created. All the universe passed from Him, all the universe emanated from His fingers of power in creation, but all the universe will converge again towards the Christ.

He is the end and He is the beginning. He is the Alpha and He is the Omega. In the same way that all things sprung from Him at His command, so all things will return to him at His bidding - and everything material, spiritual will find their end in Christ. Can I ask you, as we close this evening: have you been running away from Christ? Have you? You're maybe here and you're not saved. You're maybe here and you know not the reality of what it is to be born again. Or maybe you're a Christian - Christians, and you're running away from Christ's lordship in your life. Well let me say this: you can't run away forever, and wouldn't it be better if you bowed to it here on earth than waited for that day, in the consummation of all things, when it will happen at the end of the age?

A Vincent van Gogh painting entitled: 'Still Life with Flowers' was sold a few years ago for $1.43 million in Chicago. But, you know, that painting hung in a suburban home in Milwaukee for decades. It was inherited in 1955 and for 30 or so years it hung there and the people thought it was only a copy. My friend, you have all the blessings that God could - now listen - God could give you, and they're in you! You have the deposit of it in your soul by the Holy Ghost...when are you going to enter into it? I hope you're not going to wait till you're up there. Cause it's no use down here up there. It's in you here and now my friend, because it can affect, like an atomic explosion, everyone around you, everyone in your home, everyone in the assembly, everyone in your land, because you are blessed in heaven as if you were in heaven now - you're blessed there in Him! Glory be to His name!

Our Father, we thank Thee that there is a day when He will have the pre-eminence and everything in this world - evil and sacred - God will channel through to His own divine purpose and will. We thank Thee that it's not just something that we look at universally, but Lord we look at individually, and we take that promise that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to His purpose. Lord, help us to rest in Thy sovereignty and help us to know Thine appointed Saviour more and more each day. In Jesus' name, Amen.
Let me welcome you to our Bible Study here this evening in the Iron Hall. It's great to see you all out, and we hope and trust and we ask the Lord that He will bless us as we meet with Him and around His word to see what He has to say to us this evening. We're turning again to Ephesians chapter 1. Ephesians chapter 1, and we'll take time to read from verse 1 - and you'll be glad to know that we're going to get down to verse 14 this evening, and that's one section. It's taken us six weeks to get there, but hopefully we've been blessed as we've been going through each little truth that the Lord has for us in this little book.

Verse 1: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory".

If you have the sheet that you were given last week (maybe you got another one on the way in) you'll see that we only got to the first point in our studies last week: verses 8 to 10. We learned what the mystery of His will is, we learned what a mystery is within Biblical terms - that a mystery is something that was hidden within the Old Testament scriptures that no one ever knew, not even the Jews, but in the New Testament, in our times, those hidden things of old have been revealed through the Lord Jesus Christ. We learned that the mystery of His will is that all things, all plans, all His counsels, all the circumstances in this world are being channelled together like rivers into the ocean to one specific purpose of the sovereign God. It's found in verse 10: 'That in the dispensation' - the economy, the administration - 'of the fulness of times [God] might gather together in one' - everything that is divided within this planet and universe, God is going to bring it together in one - '...all things in Christ Jesus, both which are in heaven, and which are on the earth; even in him'.

Quickly let us look at the remainder of what we have on our sheet, because it's important as we look at our study this evening - verses 11 to 14 - that we understand a few basic distinctions within the word of God. Paul says this great plan of God that has been working down all the ages, that in the dispensation of the fullness of times God in the millennial kingdom is going to bring everything together. Jesus Christ is going to have control over all things, He will rule over the world that is now in chaos. He goes on and he describes,
as we have it on our sheet, the mystery as it is applicable to the different sections of God's people down throughout all time. First of all - verse 11 and 12 - He talks to and about the Jews. 'In whom also we have obtained an inheritance', or we have been made an inheritance, 'being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ'.

Now notice that! Paul says - in verse 11 and verse 12 - he uses the pronoun 'we'. Now look at verse 13: 'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise'. So there's a distinction between verse 11 and 12, and verse 13. Verse 11, Paul says collectively 'we have obtained', or, 'we who were made an inheritance'. If you were to turn to Deuteronomy 9 (you don't need to do it, I'll read it out for you) and verse 29, Deuteronomy 32 and verse 9, you find this said of God's children Israel: Ye, "Yet they are thy people and thine inheritance...for the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance". The Jews in the Old Testament - when God, in the book of Exodus, revealed to Moses and the children of Israel who He was by His covenant name 'Yahweh' or 'Jehovah', He told Israel that they would be His gem, His treasured possession - that Israel, chosen race among all the world, would be a treasure unto Him. So you see what Paul's saying in verse 11: 'We', one day in the Old Testament, 'were made an inheritance to God. We were predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will, that we', the Jews, 'should be to the praise of His glory who first trusted in Christ'. Who first trusted in Christ? The Jew. Isn't that right? The apostles were Jews. The first church - those that believed - were in Jerusalem, and Paul is saying: 'We were the ones who first trusted in Christ'. It could even be translated: 'fore-hoped in Christ'. The Jews and the prophets and the scribes, before Christ was ever born, they all looked forward and 'fore-hoped' to the day when Messiah would come.

The word of God tells us and the New Testament opens up the mystery; that most of the Jews rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. Only a handful of them believed, but there is a day coming - Paul says - when all will be made one in Christ. And Paul tells us again, and enlightens upon it in Romans 11:26, that one day those Jews will look upon Him whom they have pierced and all Israel shall be saved. So Paul, in verse 11 and 12, speaks of the Jew. And then you look in verse 13 because this is the mystery, not just of the Jew - that the Jews who rejected Christ were now believing, but the mystery of the Gentile. 'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation'. This is a mystery! That the Gentiles, the pagans, the heathens that worshipped gods of stones and the spirits of their fathers - those who had previously been described as the filth of the earth: they had now also heard the gospel? They had now also believed God's word and, wonder of wonders, the mystery that the Gentiles now could actually be made an inheritance to God. We are God's inheritance! The mystery as it's carried out further in the book of Ephesians (and we'll look at it in later weeks) is this: in the fullness of times God will bring the Jew and Gentile together in His new heaven and His new earth. And the mystery of the church is this: that both Jew and Gentile are brought together in the person - in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those two words are beautiful in verse 13, aren't they? 'In whom' - in whom, in Him, in Christ, in the beloved, in Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus. Paul continually talks about this relationship: how we are planted in Christ, and everything that we have - the very fact that all things will unite together in Christ one day, the fact that we who were cast off of God, we had no hope in the world before Christ - we have been given all the blessings of God in Christ Jesus.

But we're going to home in specifically this evening on your fourth point there: the mystery of both, the mystery to both the Jew and the Gentile. Look at verse 14, first of all verse 13 to get the context: 'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory'. I want us to look at this verse 13, because it tells us the order of how these Gentile people from Ephesus got saved. It tells us, indeed, how anyone gets converted: 'Ye also trusted after that ye heard' - hearing! 'You heard the word of truth', hearing
the word of God. 'You had faith', you believed the gospel - and after you believed the gospel, you were sealed by the Spirit. Paul traces their steps, their birth pangs - how they came into life in Christ as Gentiles. They heard the glorious good news of the gospel, they believed in Christ, and then the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity came - the Spirit of promise - and sealed it. Turn with me to John chapter 7, John chapter 7, because here we have the Lord Jesus Christ, in His own words, anticipating the day when such a thing would be seen. John chapter 7 and verse 37: 'In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water'. 'If any man thirst' - isn't that the cry of the glorious gospel of Christ? Isn't it? 'If any man thirst let him come unto me', Christ says. And God has given us this glorious gospel to proclaim - this gospel of the word of God - and we are to take it and proclaim it, shout it from the mountaintops and the house tops that Jesus saves, Jesus, saves'. Paul tells us in Romans that this is the formula of faith: 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God' - that's the order! The order that Paul lays down in Ephesians: 'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth'. John puts it, in his gospel in chapter 1 and verse 12, like this: 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power', or the privilege, 'to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name'.

It's wonderful, isn't it? To have the word of God, isn't it? You see if we were to stand up here, and even if we knew Christ and tried to convince men and women that they needed to know Him too, we would waste our time for all eternity - because it would be useless because it is not our word that makes the difference. We can't create the anxious thought, but it's the powerful hammer and sword of the word of God. And to think that Paul describes it in this verse 13 as the 'word of truth'. Every word of it, every wit of it is full of truth - it is true! It instructs in the weightiest truths of life and of eternal life, salvation. It, itself, publishes the glad tidings of salvation, it contains the offer of it, it shows you how you can get to it! It gives you the power to trust in Christ, and the blessed Holy Spirit of the living God renders the reading and the preaching of the word of God effectual unto salvation. Indeed it is the word of truth alright - and, oh, how we should cherish it! For men and women of bygone days - and we forget it all too easily - have shed their blood upon the pages of holy writ because they wanted us to get it!

I wonder do you get tired of hearing the gospel preached? Do you? You hear it every Sunday night. You might hear it maybe more than that - a couple of times a week and you get fed up with it and you think: 'Well, I am saved and I don't need to hear this all the time'. I wonder have you, as a believer, lost the thrill of it? Have you forgotten what it was like to be lost in your sin and without hope, without God? What it was like to feel your sin weighing you down and you could do nothing about it? What it was like to have your eyes lifted by the Holy Ghost to the cross where the bleeding Lamb was dying? What it was like to realise that He was there for you? Have you forgotten? My friend, that is something that you need to get before your eyes every day. You need to get to the cross every day! For if you don't get to the cross every day, you'll never take up your cross and follow Him.

Are you convinced of the power of the gospel? Are you? The power that is in the word of God - do you really believe, as Paul says, that it is the dynamus, the power, the dynamite of God unto salvation to every one that believeth? The preaching of the gospel is what saves! We live in a day of drama but, you know, drama is not the word. Jesus Christ was the word, this is the written word - but you'll not find a word in drama. And to think of this fact: that Paul the great apostle, in the day in which he lived, theatre was the chief medium of entertainment. Do you not think he would have used it? Why did he not? Because God hadn't ordained it! But God tells us what works! He says that He has ordained the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. We are not born, Peter says, of corruptible seed, but we are born of incorruptible by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever. Do you realise that this is a living book? Do you? It is alive! It can talk to you! It can lead you! It can guide you! Its very words can protect you! And even if you don't read it - the Gideons will tell you - that when it gets into peoples' hands it changes their lives! Can I plead to you young people? Oh, for a band of young people today who will plead with a compromising church and
say: 'Take your rubbish and give me the word!'. My young Christian, if you don't have a thirst after the word you need to look into your heart. The whole church at large that wants to sideline our epilogue - the word of God - needs to look at what they're living. Is it a falsified, hypocritical life, or is it the life of God in Christ? I am utterly, utterly sold out and convinced that there is power in the preaching of the gospel, in the Spirit of the living God. But I'll tell you something else that I am utterly convinced about: if the cure doesn't come in contact with the helpless, it's useless. You know that the Roman Catholic Church (and God will damn them for it) locked up this precious book for centuries and it didn't do anybody any good. But when Wycliffe was burnt at the stake, and they burned him and his Bibles, and they took his ashes and they threw [them] into the Severn River. And little did those papists know that as they did that, the very Bible that was in his bones was going to every area, every town-land, every city within the whole of Britain because there's power in the open, preached word of God. It is the light of the world!

But can I say to you, do you know what we do with the light of the world? We shine it where there already is light. Don't we? We take it and shine it into the places that are beaming like the sun - the bright places - and then we stand back and expect to see results. But the word teaches that you've got to shine it into the deepest darkness and bring the dark souls into the vicinity of where the light is being shone. Sure light is only light because of darkness around it. Isn't that right? C.T. Studd, the great missionary, said this:

'Some like to stay within the sound of church and chapel bell, But I'd rather run a rescue shop within a yard of Hell'!

Do we preach the word? And, you know, preaching the word is like teaching - I often used to think about my teachers, that they weren't teachers at all, because they're only teachers when you learn! And, my friends, we are only preaching the gospel if the lost are hearing it. Do we go where the sin is? Do we go, like the Lord Jesus Christ, to where the sinners are? Because where sin abounds grace doth much more abound. Can I say to almighty God this evening, 'God save us from a respectable church-going Christianity!'. Oh, that God would restore us to make this place perhaps what it was one hundred years ago: a rescue mission! A centre where broken, damned souls were mended by the blood of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit - where hell-bound lives were saved! May God loose our tongues! May God loose our feet and our hands to shout aloud and to cry aloud in the street the great grace and gospel, and opportunity of the grace of God to all who will come and believe. I believe that we have caved in to the pressure today of the spirit of tolerance in our society. I really do, I believe we're afraid! We're afraid of the world and what they'll do, we're afraid of what our family and our friends will say: 'He's shoving religion down my throat again' - and we cave in. We are caught, as the word of God says, 'in the snare that is the fear of man'. We have listened to the prophets of modern evangelism who tell you not to speak of hell but of a 'lost eternity', to speak not of sin but of 'mistakes', to preach not the shed blood of Christ but only a 'giving of a life for others', to preach not a life of holiness but a 'life of wholeness and happiness' - it's very subtle, isn't it? But then we wonder why the light isn't shining into the darkness. God, give us a fearless, fiery, fervent band of preachers and proclaimers and Christians who will resist unto blood, striving against sin!

I wonder has God been speaking to you in recent days through the word of God about the lost around our district? I know He's been speaking to me, and some people have come to me and expressed how God has been speaking to them. And can I say to you as an assembly: Let's do something! They're lost! They're drowning in their sin! They're going into the fires of an eternal hell, never to get another chance! Let's do something! Don't ask me what, but let's do something rather than nothing! I'll be honest with you: there are times when I am before God that I can almost feel my hands dripping with the blood of the lost! D.L. Moody - he was often criticised for his methods of evangelism, and even his making appeals and altar calls - and do you know what his reply was? 'My way of doing it's better than your way of not doing it'. Brethren, let's do something!
Rudyard Kipling, the poet, writes regarding William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army. Listen to this! And can I say to you: after I preached the gospel last evening and ministered yesterday morning, and I got up this morning ready to get before God in the word of God for the Bible study - I didn't feel like it. I wondered how I was going to get the energy and what God was going to have to do! And this came to me - this word here that I'm going to share with you - and I had a jump in my step! Listen to this! Rudyard Kipling says of this great old man: 'I saw him walking backward in the dusk over an uneven wharf; his cloak blown upwards, tulip-fashion over his grey head. And while he beat a tambourine in the face of the singing, weeping, praying crowd who had come to see him off, I talked much with General Booth during that voyage and I expressed my distaste of his appearance at the wharf' - didn't like the way he was doing it. 'Young fellow', he replied - listen: 'if I thought I could win one more soul to the Lord by walking on my head and playing the tambourine with my toes I'd learn how!'. Isn't that it? Have you a love for the lost that you'll preach the gospel? These Ephesians heard it, but they heard it because it was preached to them. How shall they hear without a preacher?

An examining committee composed of ministers had met together to look at the qualifications of Billy Sunday. He was going to be ordained as a gospel minister. And among all the other questions that were fired at him in that interview, the world-famous baseball player was requested to identify who this great church father in church history was, and they named him and asked him to say something about his writings and about his life - and Billy was stumped. After fumbling around for a moment he, with a twinkle in his eye, said 'I've never heard of him. He was never in my team' - and they didn't know what to do. And after a moment's deliberation one of the men turned to the others and said: 'I think we should ordain this man. You know why? Because Billy Sunday has won more souls for Christ than the whole shangbang of us!' - isn't that what matters? It's not how much you know, it's who you know! It's the fact that you're consumed with an atomic fire of the love of Christ and the love for souls, so much so that you'll give them a chance! Give them a chance.

'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation' - and here's the next part I want you to see - 'in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the holy Spirit of promise'. Now I want you to note something in this passage: the Authorised Version of the scriptures that we love so much is a little misleading in this verse, because some have looked at it and seen: 'after ye believed ye were sealed with the holy Spirit'. And they've deduced that this is an experience that you have after conversion, and you have to wait for it. But look at the verse previous, Paul says: 'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth', so they trusted after they heard the word of God, 'the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed'. So if you took that line of thought that that word 'after' literally means 'way after', you would say that these believers got saved twice: after they heard the word of truth and then after they believed. But what's Paul getting across? That this was something - in this verse - this conversion experience was something that happened altogether in a moment. This is true christening...you've heard of christening, haven't you? Some believe that it's being born into the church of Jesus Christ, but this is true christening: being sealed by the Holy Spirit of God, and where the name of a father or a mother is not put upon you, but the name of Christ! It's like the farmer putting his dye mark on the sheep, on the flock. It's like the farmer putting that brand onto his cattle. He's marking them! He's saying: 'They're mine. No one will take them off me. They're mine. I'm going to keep them. I'm going to look after them'. And what the sealing of the Holy Spirit is for the believer is simply this: that God is satisfied with Christ's cross work! And He puts a seal on it by giving you the Holy Spirit. Your gift of the Holy Spirit is the full-stop mark; punctuation of satisfaction upon Christ's atonement at Calvary. It's different than the way that the Holy Spirit worked in the Old Testament, where He came upon someone and then He came off them. And then he would come upon them again when they needed them, but then He would go away. This is something entirely different, what Paul was talking about hear is what baptism, Christian total immersion, believer's baptism means and symbolises: that we are baptised into Christ. It is the effusion of the Holy Spirit.
Himself: that He, the third person of the blessed Trinity, is given to us, available to the believer according to the promises of the Old Testament and the words of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the promised one, yet He is the same one whom all the promises are fulfilled in. Of course, there's a difference and we must make the difference between the Holy Spirit's regenerating work and His sealing work. If you think about it like this: there's a difference between building a house and then someone moving into the house. And God, in regeneration, comes into the soul of a man, quickens his spirit and He makes him a new man or woman in Christ - the temple ready to receive the Spirit. Then, at the same moment of conversion, the Holy Spirit moves in to take possession - He seals them! So many of us find these things very difficult to understand. So Paul gives us some imagery in these verses: he talks about a seal, and then in verse 14 he talks about 'the earnest of our inheritance'. The seal, within these old classical days, gives us some instructions and illustrations about how the Holy Spirit relates to us as the believer in the sealing. You know what a seal is, you get them on letters sometimes in wax. It's the same seal that Pilate put on the stone that was across the tomb of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a stamp, and in these days it was a sign that was affixed to a document to guarantee its genuineness. It was also attached to goods that were in transit, that if they got lost the owner would know. They would be sent back to him, they would never be lost for good. It made sure that they were protected as they went from one place to another, and also it represented a designation of office in the state. You've seen letterheads, or suitcases, or envelopes with [OHMS] - [On] Her Majesty's Service, haven't you? That's what this seal was. It represented that this was a guarantee of genuineness - this letter was real. It made sure that, as that letter went from one place to another, that it would be protected, it would never be lost. It was something that had the stamp, the name of the person, the dignitary that it represented.

Oh, how it speaks to us of our salvation! You see, the seal of the Spirit that Paul is talking about here - it guarantees everything that God has promised - it guarantees it to us! We can be sure! We've learnt week after week of the inheritance that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ in election, in predestination (one day to be like Christ), in adoption - so many blessings of wisdom, knowledge. We have so much in Christ according to the riches of His grace, but the sealing of the Spirit upon our lives is God saying: 'Now, there's the receipt! There's the guarantee'. The two ideas behind it are ownership and security. Isn't it wonderful to know that we are not our own? That we are bought with a price, that we belong to Christ, but not only has He His stamp on us, but we are secure as He is in God. We are His and we are safe.

Paul adds to the analogy of the sealing and then he talks about 'the earnest of our inheritance' - and that word can be translated (the word 'earnest') as the 'deposit'. What he's saying is the Holy Spirit to the believer is the deposit, the guarantee - the word is borrowed, these days, from the commercial world - it meant an instalment in hire purchase. It was a token of payment ensuring the vendor that the full amount would eventually follow and be paid. It's a similar idea to the engagement ring. It's a promise that the marriage would come to pass, but it is greater than an engagement ring - for we've heard of so many marriages and engagements that don't come to pass, that don't reach that final day - but this is a watertight guarantee. This is an 'earnest': a deposit. God has covenanted with us, not just by the shedding of His Son's blood, but as an inward witness within our soul by the sealing of the Holy Spirit, that one day we will have everything that is promised to us. God has paid the down-payment to us, He has sealed us with the Holy Spirit, which assures the seller of good faith - we are the seller, we are receiving the Holy Spirit - and it gives us the good faith that God, the buyer, one day will pay in full.

You remember those hours maybe - they don't happen too often, they're special times, maybe in a meeting or in your own quiet time, or reading a book or the word of God - and you have a special sense of God's presence. You know what I'm talking about - but isn't it wonderful to think that that's only the deposit? These things that we experience - and, I tell you, I don't think we really enter into what God wants to experience down here at times - but even the fullest, the most complete experience of the living God on earth, is only a
taste of what is going to be paid in fullness to us one day. And what an experience that will be! God calls it, through His word, 'the redemption of the purchased possession'. What is the purchased possession? It is the inheritance. Who is the inheritance? We are the inheritance, we are God's treasure! We were once the dung - Paul said 'the filth and off-scouring of all things', and at times we ought to view ourselves as that. But in God's eyes, in Christ we are His treasured possession. It's amazing how anyone could see us in that way, isn't it? But in Romans chapter 8 we read all about it: that there is a day coming - and the whole earth groans and we have the witness of the Holy Spirit, or we ought to have, within us crying 'Abba Father', that we are not of this world, that we have been redeemed by soul and spirit - but there is a day coming when we will be redeemed by the body. And all of us - everything about us - will go one day to be with Christ and serve Him - and you, my Christian friend, ought never to be happy in the world because of that, you don't belong here!

And although every Christian (and I want to stress that: every Christian) is sealed by the Holy Spirit, Paul says in Romans 8:9: 'if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his' - you can't be a Christian without the Holy Spirit. Everybody here saved is sealed in the Holy Spirit, but let me say this: for many Christians the Spirit's presence has been buried deep in the recesses within the sanctuary of their spirit. And that sealing that they have been given has never been let out to contaminate their whole being, to effuse into both their body and soul, not just their spirit, so that we can say as Paul says: 'to be filled with the Spirit'. Do you know why that doesn't happen? If you turn to chapter 4 of Ephesians - chapter 4 of Ephesians - we find another reference to this sealing in the Spirit: 'And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption'. Why is it that in so many Christians - and I would believe 90-plus percent of them in these days in which we live - that they do not know the reality and the blessing of experiencing the Spirit-filled life and walk with God? It's because there are things that grieve Him. Why did He come upon the Lord Jesus Christ in the likeness and the form of a dove? Well, the dove has no gallbladder. Did you know that? There's no gall in a dove, no dirt. It's a pure animal, it is white. It is a timid animal, in other words my friend, if you want to know what this is - to feel His Spirit witness with your spirit that you are His - get rid of your sin! You need to yield yourself to Him.

Let me, in conclusion, express and explain what the end of this verse means: 'the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory'. It's a remarkable thing within the New Testament, that there are only two books that you find reference to this great truth of being sealed in the Spirit. You find it in the book of Corinthians and the book of Ephesians. And it's interesting to note, within the history books, that both cities of Corinth and Ephesus were great centres of the lumber industry in ancient times. A raft of logs would have been brought from the Black Sea (and some of you have been in Romania and you know the Black Sea), and those logs would have been brought down from there, and the different firms in Corinth and Ephesus would have travelled to a harbour and they would have looked over the logs, and they would have made their selection. Whatever logs they would have found as being fit, they would have paid a deposit, not the whole amount but just a deposit - an earnest payment - and they would have taken a knife and marked a wedge - a cut upon the log - to seal it. I think this is beautiful. Do you want to know what the redemption of the purchased possession means? Do you want to know? Listen: they would have pushed those logs down the river, and they would have channelled and travelled though all the storms, through all the obstacles. And maybe if that log could talk to you they would say: 'Am I ever going to get to this place? Am I ever going to survive? Am I going to drown? What's going to happen to me?' - but there would be a day that would come that those logs would reach the harbour there, and those that had paid the deposit upon them would come and they would see the seal upon them - and they would claim them!

What storms are you going through? I know you can hardly see by them. We're all like that at times. You wonder: 'Has this Christian lark any truth in it at all'? You're maybe listening to people in your family that are unbelievers, and you'd nearly think twice about this word and all the things that are talked about of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, one day you'll be perfect, one day you'll be like Him, one day you'll see Him. You wonder: 'Will it ever come to pass?' - but listen! The church of Jesus Christ that He bought
with His own blood - you, individually, as His sheep and His child - you are His purchased possession. You are His inheritance. You are His treasure, and the moment you were saved there was never any chance of you being lost because you were sealed - guaranteed! You were the earnest of that inheritance! There is a day when the redemption of your body will take place - your soul's been redeemed already, and so, really, has your body but it hasn't been realised or consummated yet - but that day will come when you will be transported to be like unto His glorious body! That's why Paul says here, it's 'unto the praise of his glory'. Do you know what this mark often meant? Do you know all the designer labels? You ladies know all about it! Designer labels, or a car - a BMW or a Mercedes marque, a Rolls Royce - do you know what that means? You know what a manufacturer loves to do, He loves to come out and see his seal upon a thing and say: 'I'll stand over that'! There's a day coming my friend - maybe He can't do it for you and me now, He can do it, because we're in Christ, positionally - but there is a day coming when my Lord Jesus Christ, who died for me, will look into my eyes and say: 'There's My child! I'll stand over him!'

Our Father in Heaven, we thank Thee that we are saved and saved to the uttermost; that we're sure, we're sealed, secured - the package is finished - and we're on our way. There's nothing in Heaven or on earth or under the earth can stop that eternal journey now. But Lord help us to realise that we are blessed now in those heavenly realms; that we can know what it is to know the Holy Spirit as the glove upon our lives; that we are possessed by Him and that He uses us. Lord, use us we pray, use us as a light on a hill. Help us not to hide ourselves under the bushel of this building, but Lord break us loose and let us go, and give us grace and take away our fear. For we know there's power in the name of Jesus, and we'll know that, that day, when in the moment and the split second we see His face, we'll know there's power because we'll be like Him. That's the greatest miracle of all time: that we should be like Him. We thank Thee for this time and ask now that, Lord, You'll part us now in Thy blessing. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Transcribed by Trevor Veale, Preach The Word - January 2001
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Ephesians - Chapter 7

"Paul's Prayer List For You - Part 1"

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Ephesians 1:15-23

1. Thanks For Salvation (verses 15-16a)
   a. Faith
   b. Love

2. Prayer For Illumination (verses 16b-17)
   a. The Author – By God
   b. The Means – Through Wisdom And Revelation
   c. The Subject – To Know Christ
   d. The Instrument – The Eyes Of Your Heart

3. Prayer To Know Hope (verse 18b)

4. Prayer To Know Inheritance (verse 18c)

5. Prayer To Know Power (verses 19-23)
   a. Infinite (verse 19b)
   b. In Christ (verses 20-23)

Now let me give you a warm welcome to our Bible study here, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the Iron Hall. It's great to see you all and if you're visiting with us, maybe for the first time, we're especially glad to see you and we hope and trust that you feel at home with us and that the Lord blesses you through His own inspired book, the word of God.

Ephesians and chapter 1, and we'll take time to read the whole chapter together to get the context of what we're reading this evening. Reading from verse 1, and we're concentrating tonight on verses 15 probably only through to verse 19. So let's read from verse 1: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory".

I'm out of breath, for that was one whole sentence! All we have just read was one whole sentence of praise, and now we have a full-stop. Now we look at what we're going to think about this evening. What we've just
read was the praise of Paul, and now we're looking at the prayer of Paul. It's the first prayer of two that we find in the book of Ephesians: "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all".

I've entitled our message this evening as 'Paul's Prayer List For You'. There are several things that Paul prays to God, and intercedes to God, that the children of God in the church in the city of Ephesus may have. He prays, he implores, he pleads to God that they may know, in their Christian lives and experience, certain things. We all ought to have prayer lists - and if you don't have one you should get one, and list down the things day by day, or week by week, or month by month, that you want to bring before the Throne of Grace, intercede for others and pray for yourself. But I wonder if we were to take out our prayer lists, and compare them with the prayer list of Paul, how they would compare?

If you look at what Paul asked God for, very little of it - in fact none of it - was physical, all that Paul prayed for was spiritual. We might have our Aunt Aggie's big toe on our prayer list; all the ailments that we can think of of friends and relatives - and it's important that we do pray for the healing of others, and for those who are going through physical turmoil and trial. But what Paul is indicating to this church in Ephesus, as he begins his letter - and he's just finished a long sentence and tirade of praise to God for the great plan of salvation from eternity past to eternity future, all that God has done and will do in Christ Jesus - and as he comes to a prayer of intercession for these Christians, he pleads for their spiritual need. Nothing physical, but spiritual. Also, interestingly, Paul's prayers are not centred around himself. If you look at that list from verse 15 right through to verse 22 you'll see that, always, his prayer life here is centred around prayer, intercession, and pleading at the Throne of Grace for others.

In a general sense there's a great deal of confusion about the whole subject of prayer. Even within the subject of who to pray for, and what to pray for, we find within our daily lives, individually, that there is a lot of imbalance. Sometimes we're always praying for others and we never think of ourselves - but I think most of the time it's more likely that we pray for ourselves and we forget about others. It's like the 40-year-old spinster (I hope there's no 40-year-old spinsters in the meeting tonight!) who prayed: 'Lord, I'm not asking just for myself, but please give my mother a son-in-law'. She was praying for others, but with herself at the centre. If you scour the pages of Holy Scripture you will find that a study of the prayer life of the saints of God, you will find that most of them, most of the time, centre their prayer life around others. Go to Genesis 18 and you find there, Abraham supplicating the Throne of Grace for that wicked, two wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Go to Exodus 33, and Moses has just come down from the mount where God dwelt and where God was giving him the law. As he came down - you remember he heard the singing and the orgy, as the children of Israel were bowing down and bringing obeisance to a golden calf - and he fell before God and he interceded for the people, and he even asked that God would punish him so that his own people might be saved, so that they might have salvation. You can go through the letters of Paul and we thought yesterday, Lord's Day morning, about Romans 9 and verse 1 where Paul prayed for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh - his brothers and sisters in Judaism. They were praying for others.

This was a theme within Paul's epistles. Turn with me for a moment to Romans chapter 1 and verse 9. You see that Paul, at the beginning of his letter to the people in Rome - the Christians in Rome - he writes in
chapter 1 and verse 9: 'For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers'. Colossians chapter 1 and verse 9 - the same chapter and the same verse - 1 and verse 9. At the beginning of this letter to another city and another church, he introduces and again he starts with the subject of praying for them: 'For this cause we also, since the day we heard of it' - your faith - 'do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding'. Again in 1 Thessalonians 3 and verse 10, Paul again, he amplifies how he prays. He says: 'I make mention of you' - that means specifically he named their names before the Throne of Grace. He says he did it without ceasing, continually, he didn't forget, he didn't take a break from it - all the time he was remembering them. Then here, in chapter 3 and verse 10 of 1 Thessalonians, he says: 'Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?'. He prayed without ceasing. He prayed mentioning their names, and you think of the many people that Paul knew and Paul met and had come into contact with and led to Christ, and the churches and the sheep that he was tending and looking after. But day by day, night after night, if his time was not taken up with preaching the word of God or teaching the flock, his time - his minutes, his moments and seconds - were taken up with bringing their names before the Throne of Grace.

When we pray for others what do we ask for? What do we ask for? I want you to remember that in the book of Ephesians Paul was in prison. We looked at that in the introductory message of Ephesians - how he was locked up under house arrest. You think about that, and if you were there and you were writing a letter to the Iron Hall and you'd been locked up for your faith, what would you be asking? 'Oh, pray that God will do something miraculous! That God will break down the walls of the prison, bend the bars back, that He will strike the knees of the jailers and let me go'. Not Paul! What does he pray for? He doesn't ask that they have things that they do not already have, do you notice that? He doesn't ask that God would impart to them something that they had not been given at the moment of their conversion, but he asks, and he implores, and he pleads to God, that God the Holy Spirit would reveal to them what they already have.

We believe, 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 16, that 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness'. Therefore, as we look at this book in the New Testament - as we look at every book in the Bible - and we see that it was specifically, primarily written to the church at Ephesus, we note that it is personally 'for me'. The children's chorus says:

'Every promise in the book is mine
Every letter, every word, every line'.

And that's a reality! It's all for you! And if Paul is here, and he is praying it for the saints at this particular time, that means if we believe that Paul was praying in the Holy Spirit (and he was because it's the Holy Spirit who inspired this book and the words that we read before us in this letter) - so according to the philosophy of prayer, if the Holy Spirit of God had inspired the heart of Paul to pray for these specific things, that means that this is God's will for the children of God in Ephesus. And if all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for you and I today, that means that this is God's revealed will for you and me. What does God say? What is the Spirit of the living God praying for you? What is He interceding for you within the heart of Paul the apostle? What is it that Paul was brought to his knees to pray for?

Well, let's look at the first thing: he was led. How could he not be after such a beautiful sentence of praise and glory about election and predestination, and about redemption, and about adoption and so many things that we've read about already in chapter 1? How could he not thank God for their salvation? That's what he does, and he does it in a two-fold way. Look at verse 15: 'Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints'. He gives thanks to God for their salvation by talking about faith and love. Of course, first of all, the faith that he talks about - 'pistus' in Greek (sp?) - the faith is the saving faith, the faith by which we trust. We have received a gift from the hand of God to trust the crucified Christ: the
bleeding Lamb at Calvary, we’ve received that gift of God which is eternal life, we have been saved! But what Paul is also talking about is not simply that first gift of faith that we received when we were born again, but he talks about how, as Christians, that we must live by faith, our life must be grounded within faith. I want you see this: that he was praising God that these Christians in Ephesus were grounded, knew in the depths of their soul, that the Lord Jesus Christ was upholding them. They had an assurance, they had an assurance that no matter what would fall at their feet, what troubles or trials or tribulations that they would experience; what opposition or persecution would come from the empires around them - they knew that, no matter what happened, it was well with their soul! They were firm, they were grounded, and because of that they could charge ahead with their Christian life.

I heard of a man in Canada and he was trying to cross a frozen river - St. Lawrence River. He got down on all fours, and first of all he put his first hand ahead of him and just tested the ice, and then his second hand, and gingerly he gradually got on to the ice. He crouched, trying not to put too much pressure on it - and, to his horror, he heard a noise behind him and he turned around to see just a team of horses coming! All he could see was the smoke, he thought: 'What am I going to do?', and he panicked! It was too late - the team of horses ran straight across the ice to the other side. He turned bright crimson, because if he had only known how firm the ice was, he would have galloped across himself. Friends, this is what this book is all about: to know how firm a foundation we have in Jesus Christ! To know that we cannot have a firmer foundation - that everything that we have is an inheritance in Him! We do not believe in a church, we do not believe in a creed, we do not even look to Christians, we believe, we place our faith in Jesus Christ alone! Never you forget that! Because I feel today that in some of our evangelical circles, and particularly in our circles, there is a popery that is akin to the church of Rome. Looking to a church, looking to a denomination, looking to a tradition of doctrinal interpretation - my friend, we have nothing but Christ!

Faith! When Paul saw the faith that saved him, and the faith that kept him, and when he could see, by the eye of faith, the faith that would lead them home, he turned to God and he praised Him: thanksgiving for their salvation. But look at verse 15, because he doesn't just mention faith, but the second thing down there is love. What's he saying? He's saying that true faith - such faith that is truly of God's Holy Spirit, that is rooted and grounded in Christ - will, and must, manifest itself in love. You find that in Galatians 5 verse 6 where Paul again says: 'For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love'.

An artist, on one occasion, painted a portrait - an erroneous portrait, it was totally false - of hell. Of course, it was nothing like hell, because you cannot describe or paint hell. But he thought he was doing a good job, and he put this circle of people - miserable faces - around the dinner table. They were all sitting with their miserable long faces looking at one another, and they had in their arms long spoons by which they couldn't feed their own mouths - and he said that this was like hell. Food on the table, a long spoon and they cannot feed themselves, they're being tormented and tortured. Now my friend, hell is nothing like that - but one thing he got right was this: they were so preoccupied with feeding themselves that they didn't realise that with the long spoons they could feed each other - and they died because they never saw that.

The Holy Scripture is full and the New Testament is full - believers of the church of Jesus Christ, please listen to this: he talks about love to all the saints. He was praying to God, and praising and thanking Him that these people were saved - and the evidence that they were saved was because they had love for one another! The Greek word that Paul uses for 'love' here is the word 'agape'. It is the word for the love of God. Do you know what kind of love that is? It is the love that wills to love the unlovable! You who were in sins, dead in your trespasses, in your filth and iniquity - God in grace and in love demonstrated in Christ Jesus, who died for you, that He loved you. That's 'agape' love. That is what Paul is talking about. That means this - and it's hard to take [but] you as a Christian are going to have to, if you want to show fruit that you're really saved, that the faith of God is in you - you are going to have to love people that you don't even agree with. Oh, that's
hard isn't it? 'It would be nice if Paul just left and dropped out that little word, 'all' the saints. Oh, I can love some of them. Oh, I can love the separatist churches, yes, or the fundamentalist churches - I can love them'. My friend, listen! Don't water down God's word anywhere! All the saints! All of them! I'm not saying you have to agree with them. I'm not saying you have to join up and make a fellowship with them. But, listen, if they're saved, if they're washed in the blood of Christ it is the same blood that washed you, my friend. It's the same veins that brought that blood out at Calvary - and you're no more worthy of it than anyone else. All the saints, because they belong to Him - that's what the Lord said from His own lips: 'A new commandment I give unto you: that ye love one another as I have loved you; that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples: if ye have love one to another'.

I'd love to go into the book of 1 John because there's a passage there that says that no man has seen God at any time - and you know the passage I'm talking about - and how we will never really see God with our eyes. I don't know what's going to happen in Glory, but at the moment we can't see God, He is spirit, He is invisible. But John goes on to talk that we, as the temple of the Holy Ghost here on earth, are the way in which the world around sees God with the naked eye - if we love one another! How much of God is the world seeing? It's interesting that Paul combines these two great realities: truth and love, and he puts them together. Some people will tell me today that they might have faith, but they find it hard to love people. There are people who love and they're filled with love, but they don't have faith in the depths. Get the balance! Get it! That a true Christian - true Christianity - combines sound doctrine with sound living. Think of this: Paul is praising the spiritual success and blessing in others. That's what he's doing in reality and practical terms. Can you do that? Do you find it hard to look at another church and say 'God's really blessing them'? - and say 'Praise you Lord, I thank you Lord that you're blessing them; Lord continue to bless them, really bless them'? It's a hard thing to do, and sometimes we can resent it when others are more blessed than we are and more praised than we are.

But let's move on because not only does he thank for their salvation with regards to faith and love, but the second point down on your sheet in verses 16b to 17 and 18 is this: that he prays for their illumination. 'I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints'. Now I want to pose a question to you this evening: do you think there is a difference between reading the word of God as a book, and reading it as a Christian should? Is there a difference? Some may say yes, some may say no, some say you need to read it intellectually first, and academically - but the word of God testifies this evening that, yes, there is a difference. A Christian, the child of God, when he opens this precious book he must see it as the word of God, and seek God's illumination. Paul prayed that the Christians in Ephesus may know illumination. Yes, I've already said all scripture is profitable, all scripture is God-inspired, God-breathed, as the word of God testifies that 'Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Spirit of God' - but listen! Do not make this mistake: a merely natural man, if he picks up this book, my friend, and if he looks at it, it is possible that he will see nothing in it. Why is that? He doesn't know the author, isn't that right? You could read the Belfast Telegraph (as I'm sure many of you do) and you flick through it every night and you don't really read it. But wait till your grandchild, or your brother or sister, makes a great achievement in school or in sport - and what do you do? You pick it up. You make sure you buy it, and then you read the article and perhaps you'll cut it out, and you'll read it over and over again and again and again - why? Because you know the person! It means something to you - and when the believer reads the word of God he should be looking at it, knowing that he is indwelt by the Spirit of the living God, and when he reads it he should be hearing the word of God - the very voice of God - through the word!

That's what Paul means when he says that we are given - or ought to be given - the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. I've broken up into four sections, how we receive this spirit of wisdom
and revelation. What exactly is it? Is it a charismatic gift that's being talked about here? Something about dreams or a vision in the night? Is that what the word of God is speaking of here? Well, first of all, Paul tells us very clearly that the author of this spirit of wisdom and revelation is God. That's why he thanks God. Who's he thanking for it? He says: 'I thank the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank You Lord'!

Verse 17: 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you' - God is the author.

If you are to be given this spirit of wisdom and revelation, my friend, you need to see that God is going to have to give it to you. There's so much working, there's so much trying, there's so much striving, there's so much in the flesh in so many Christian lives today - and they do not see the simple reality that everything that we have, or can have, or will have, in our faith is of God! All of it! Start to finish! Oh, we believe the Bible - oh, yes, that's true: but did you know that the Bible alone is not enough? Did you know that? What am I saying? Well, we need God! We need God, through the Holy Spirit, to open up its truth to our minds and to our hearts. See if I took this book and preached it, I could bind many of you up with rules and regulations if I was not preaching knowing the reality of this book. And there are men all around the world, in lecture theatres, in universities, in church pulpits, and they preach from this book - but they don't have the Spirit of God in them, and because of it they're misinterpreting and misrepresenting the word of God. You see my friend, this is what Paul is speaking of: that we need God to come as we read the word of God and reveal His truths, not simply to our minds, but to our hearts also - and then, when He acts, the spirit of wisdom and revelation will come to us.

God is the author! But secondly, look at the means. The means that we know God, and are able to know all the intricate details of spiritual life, and life in and about the Lord Jesus Christ, is through the means of this spirit of wisdom and revelation. Now this Greek word 'revelation' here is the word that seems to indicate 'insight and discernment'. This is something that the Holy Spirit gives to the believer. 'He who will lead you', the Lord Jesus said, 'into all truth' - that, as you read the word of God, He comes and He brings the mysteries of divine truth to our souls. We find it in 1 Corinthians 2 verse 14 and 16: 'But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned'. That's the same idea that Paul is talking here about revelation: this must come from God! 'For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ'. That's what Paul means - that we have been given the mind of Christ, the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that when we read the word of God we have the God-given ability to see Christ, to see God, to learn about these spiritual worlds, spiritual realms and things.

The author is God; the means is the spirit of wisdom and revelation, but thirdly look: the subject, the reason why we're given this ability, is to know Christ. Oh, that some people would get this! It's not to know the future. It's not to know the date the Lord is coming back. It is to know Him - 'Whom to know is life eternal'!

Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light.
My chains fell off,
My heart was free.
I rose, went forth,
And followed Thee'.
Never forget, my friend, that salvation is a divine revelation - and if salvation is to come, God must come! You can't work it up! You can't bring it with music or emotion! You can't bring it with fancy lights or a fancy church - God must bring it! Do you know Him? Do you?

Paul prayed that they would have a clearer, a sharper, a keener, a more detailed knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. We were talking last evening about genetic engineering, and when we look around at the world today, and we are dazzled - aren't we? - we're surprised, we're taken aback with the discoveries that man has made in the natural realm. But Christian friends tonight, if we were to surrender ourselves to the Holy Spirit, who is the spirit of wisdom and revelation, and if we were to take the enlightenment that He gives through the word of God, we would see things far greater than that!

You know the Prime Minister, don't you? You know him. You know what he looks like - you even know, perhaps, the way he's wearing his hair at the minute. You know his wife, you know that she's pregnant, you maybe even know the date that the baby's meant to be due. You know his whole family. You know what he stands for or what he falls for. You know so much about him, but you don't really know him, do you? Some of us - what Paul is trying to say - that when we get saved, if we leave it there, friends, that's pitiful. That is tragic, because we have an opportunity to have an audience, to have an experience, to have a relationship, with the King of kings and the Lord of lords! Do you know Him? For God wants to give to you the knowledge of Him, God wants to draw you into the Holy Scriptures. The word for knowledge within this verse is the word 'gnosis', but Paul takes that word that simply means 'knowledge' and he intensifies it, and he puts a little word in front of it - a preposition: 'epi' - and he talks about 'epignosis'. The 'epignosis' of Christ - do you know what he's saying? A real, deep, full knowledge - he is talking about a thorough knowledge of Jesus Christ - to go deeper and deeper into God, in Christ.

What's the cry of the world today? 'Know yourself', isn't it? 'Know who you are, what you believe, what you feel, your emotions, all your natural instincts and senses. Know who you are'. Bullinger (sp?) says this: 'Society today, instead of breathing in this life-giving air of heaven, their windows are closed, their doors are shut, they are asphyxiated with their own exhalation. They are breathing over again and again their own breath, from which all vitality is gone'. The clarion cry today is: 'Find yourself'. 'I went away to this country or that country', or, 'I took up this career and I found myself'. Friend, you don't need to find yourself, you need to find Christ. You will do no good for yourself - whether you find yourself time, after time, after time, after time again - it'll do you no good: you need Jesus Christ the Son of God! That's why Paul said in Philippians 3:10: 'That I may know him'. You see, that's life - not just getting saved, but the whole relationship with Him, to get to know Him more and more and more. That is why Paul said again in 1 Corinthians 2, 10 and 11: 'But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God...even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God'. The Spirit of God inspired these pages, and if you're a believer this evening, you need the Spirit of God to come and illuminate these pages.

But fourthly, look at the instrument. The instrument that God uses to bring this wisdom and revelation, which is the word of God brought to our hearts individually, to our lives. The instrument is described as 'our hearts' - but a better translation of it would be this: 'the eyes of our hearts'. Look at the verse, verse 18: 'The eyes of your understanding' - the eyes of your heart - 'being enlightened that ye may know'. We thought about it yesterday morning - that our hearts have eyes and ears. And the way we will know God (oh, that we could grasp it!) is nothing to do with our intellect. God may have gifted us with a keen intellect, but what God wants is a tender heart, a contrite, a broken spirit. For His knowledge - that revelation of who Christ is - is something that is given to them who love Him enough to want to know more about Him! Your knowledge of God doesn't depend on your IQ, but the eyesight of your heart. Friend, how is the eyesight of your heart? What does your heart feed on? What does your heart thrive on? It is the seat of your thoughts and your affections, it is the place where you make your moral judgements, as well as you feel in your emotions. But,
my friend, that is the instrument that God the Spirit wants to use to reveal Jesus Christ the Son of God to you. Does He have it, or does the world have it?

If this is going to happen, if God the author is going to do this - if He's going to bring the means through the spirit of wisdom and revelation, if He's going to reveal the subject of Jesus Christ to the instrument of the eyes of your heart - there's three things you need to do. One: you need to spend time. You will never get to know anyone without spending time with them. Two: you need to talk with Him. You need to talk with Him, converse with Him, commune with Him, and let me say this: when you're talking to your friends you need to talk about Him. There are people who confide in me that when they're with other believers, when they talk about the Lord, they look at them as if they've horns growing out of their head. They talk about the things of God - these are believers they're talking to - and they don't want to talk about Him. They want to talk about everything under the sun, but the meeting's over, they're out for a walk, or they're having supper, or they're doing something else, and their 'spiritual hour' has gone! Do you talk about Him? And you need to think about Him. Do you know what the key is of seeing Christ with your heart? It's taking the word of God and a holy Christ contemplation. Taking the word of God, through the Spirit of God, and meditating upon the Christ of God!

Harry Ironside tells of years previous to his so successful and blessed ministry, that he went home to his mother, and he was just staring in his gospel ministry, and when he got home (this is in America now) he found a man in their home from Northern Ireland. Ironside was a young man, but this man from Northern Ireland was dying of what they called in those days 'quick consumption'. He lived in a small tent under the olive trees. Ironside went out to see him one day, and they ended up on their knees with an open Bible. He said that this man, who could hardly talk, as he opened the word of God to him, as he looked upon his thin worn face, he could see the very peace of heaven manifested there. His name was Andrew Fraser, he could barely talk, his voice was ragged and old and dying. He said to Ironside as he came to him: 'Young man, you are trying to preach Christ are you not?'. They talked together, turning from page to page, passage to another, and the tears began to run down Harry Ironside's face as the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ was being brought to him from the whole gamut of scripture in ways that he had never seen before. He turned to the man and he said: 'Where did you learn these things? What books are you reading? Could you show me where they are? What seminary did you go to?'. The man said: 'Young man, I learned these things on my knees on a mud floor in a little sod cottage in the north of Ireland'.

Do you know one of the books that has blessed me, apart from the Bible, in my life? It's A.W. Tozer's book: 'The Pursuit of God'. It was written on his knees. One of the greatest works of all New Testament Christianity is Watchman Nee's work, the only book he ever wrote - all the other books are a combination of his diary writings and his messages - but the one book he wrote, 'The Spiritual Man', was written in a little log hut in the mountains of Asia - on his knees! Where do you think Paul was when he was writing this? He was on his knees, I dare to guess and - my friend - what he was praying for these believers was that they could know Christ in the deepest sense imaginable. And you know that the tone deaf will never stand up here and sing a solo - you can train them, you can send them to musical school and university, you can do all you like with them, but they will never learn to sing. The only way that is possible is that they become a new person and that they're given the nature of a soloist. We may not be the cleverest, we may be despised among all people but, my friend, listen to this: we have Christ! And because we have Him, we have everything. Because we have Him, we can be brought into the depths of the knowledge of God in His vastness, in His transcendence, in His love, in Christ for us at Calvary, in the depths of His justice in hell. We can know all of God through the word of God, breathed upon by the Spirit of God!

Two other things - quickly - that he prays for, thirdly, is the prayer to know hope. And what Paul is talking about here is the hope of His calling. We found it and we read about it in chapter 1 and verse 3 and 4: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in
heavenly places'. He begins to talk about how we are chosen in Christ, how we are predestinated in Him. Why are we predestinated in him? So that one day - one day - listen to this, now don't miss this - we shall be like Him! Now I hope this is not irreverent what I'm about to say, but it pictures it for me: that spiritually speaking, when I get to heaven, if I could take my camera with me (spiritually speaking now), and I stand beside my Lord and get my photograph taken with Him - we would be the same! Isn't that wonderful? What will it be to look on His face, and not just to look on His face, but to be transformed to be like Him and to be like Him forever?

Our Father, we thank Thee for the word of God, and we thank Thee for the Spirit of God who shall lead us into all truth; who helps us - the 'paraklete' - the one who comes beside and takes us along the way. Lord, we pray that as we ponder Thy word and meditate upon it, that You may teach us Thy way. We know that that will be in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, for He has said: 'He that shall come will testify of me'. Lord, help us to know Him, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Transcribed by Trevor Veale, Preach The Word - February 2001
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Ephesians - Chapter 8

"Paul's Prayer List For You - Part 2"

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Now it's good to see you all out this Monday evening to our Bible study here in the Hall, and we're glad to see you. We hope and trust that as we meet together round God's word, studying His word, that we will see our Lord Jesus Christ, and our prayer will be that we will love Him more and more.

If you have your handout from last week - perhaps you don't have it, there were some on the way in, but maybe you missed that - but if you have it, it would be helpful to you. I want you to add a few other little points to that handout from last week also, because we're reaching the fourth and the fifth point of that handout - and we're going to look, first of all, at the fourth point and then we're going to tease out a little bit the fifth point. But let's read Ephesians chapter 1 again to refresh our minds - and I read this every week, and I don't apologise for it because it's a beautiful chapter of the word of God.

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. Wherefore I also, after I heard of your
faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all”.

We began, last Monday evening, thinking of the prayer of Paul - Paul's prayer list for you, and for me. We spent several weeks - we're on our eighth study now - but we spent six weeks looking at all the blessings that we are blessed with in heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. We looked at the whole history of salvation. Then we began last week, from verse 15, looking at the prayer, Paul's prayer list for the saints in Ephesus - and we also looked at how this is the list of prayer requests that Paul intercedes for every believer in Christ across the whole world. We looked last week at how he thanked God for their salvation, how he saw within them the combination of their faith rooted in Christ, but also how they were walking in faith day by day. We saw the combination of that faith with the possession of love which was practised, which was the fruit of that faith in the depths of their spirit - that it bore a love one for another. The only way that they could know that they were born again was this combination of the faith of Christ, with the love of Christ.

Then he prayed in verse 16, right through to 18, for illumination. We saw how, through the word of God, we have God's revelation to us - but we also saw that it's very simple to read the word of God and to misinterpret what is on these pages. Therefore Paul prayed that the saints in Ephesus, Christians everywhere, would have from the Holy Spirit a knowledge, a revelation, that they knew what the word of God was really saying. We learnt how only God could give that - that the means of it was through this spirit of wisdom and revelation, the purpose of it was to know Christ Jesus. We saw that the instrument of it was the eyes of our hearts - that we don't know Christ through our IQ or intellectually speaking or academically. We can know about Him in that way, but to know Him: it is a thing of the heart. Then we learnt, thirdly, that Paul prayed for that hope; that that hope would purify them, that it would fill them. As Peter said: 'That hope of seeing the Lord Jesus Christ' - the blessed hope that one day He would come again for His own people and they would see Him, they would be conformed to His image, because they had been predestinated to that day.

Now we turn to the fourth point that we have down on our sheet - verse 18. He says: 'The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling' - one - 'what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints' - two - 'and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe' - three. A three-fold prayer request of Paul. We've already looked at the hope, but then Paul says: 'I pray that the Holy Spirit of God would reveal to these Christians in Ephesus the inheritance that they have. That they would know the great blessings that God has given them'. There are two possible meanings for this inheritance. Of course, we learned in weeks gone by that Paul has already spoken about the inheritance that we have. And, in fact, we read those verses in this sense: that we have been made the inheritance of God. We are God's people, we are washed in the blood of Christ, we have the seal of the Holy Spirit - His mark upon us and therefore through grace, through redemption, we have become God's purchased possession. That's what verse 11 says if you turn back to it. We read it in this way: 'In whom also we have obtained an inheritance', or 'we have become an inheritance', 'being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will'. That's what Paul wrote to Titus, was it not, in chapter 2 and verse 14? Listen: 'Who', Christ, 'gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works'. Peter spoke about it - I
Peter 2:9: 'But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'.

Isn't it glorious? We have been made God's possession! Didn't we learn when we were thinking of the sealing of the Holy Spirit, how manufacturers around our world, when they put a seal or a stamp upon their product, that they love to be able to stand over it. They love to be proud of it - the wonder of wonders of the grace of God, the amazing grace in Christ is this: that as God looks down on us, His people - rooted and grounded and washed in the blood of Christ - He looks at a peculiar people. He looks at a special people. He looks at a pure people, a jewel for Him, His treasured possession. Of course, the second meaning of this phrase 'inheritance' can be this - and this is what it means in the context of the rest of the chapter as we read through it: that it is we, we will inherit something in the future through Christ. You see God's plan is not simply to save us - not even to save us, and then to have us serve Him down here - but there are so many things in the future that God has prepared for them that love Him. It can't be entered into through eye-gate or even through the mind. The amazing thing is this: that this verse seems to indicate that He will possess this universe. He will take, He will capture a redeemed universe through His saints! Isn't that amazing? That He will use you and use me! The word of God says that 'He will come with ten thousands of his saints', and He will bring us down here, and we will reign with Him!

It is amazing, isn't it? Just before World War II in the town of Ataska in Texas, a school took fire and burnt down, and 263 lives of little children were taken. Like many places in Ulster, there was scarcely a town in which someone wasn't affected with a family losing a child. After the war they built the school again and they began to expand it and do it up, technologically speaking, and in their new school they had a prized possession. They had learnt from the past and they put in what was called 'the finest sprinkler system in the world'. They were making sure that this thing would never ever happen again. Civic pride ran high - they thought 'this will never happen, the school will never burn down'. And they even got their prefects and their teachers to bring people, day after day, into the school to show them around at the intricate detail of the safety features within the school. After the post-war boom, when more money came into the school, they decided they would expand and they would build another wing. And as they were adding the wing to the school it was discovered that the sprinkler system had never been connected. What an incredible story! It's foolishness beyond belief, isn't it? How they could have everything at their grasp, even everything at their use, yet alas the parable tells us what has happened to so many children of God - that untold power and resources and blessings are available to every believer in Christ, but so many never hook up! So many never get in touch, never plug in, and they become impotent and shamefully useless in the hands of Almighty God!

What Paul wants these Christians in Ephesus to do is, as he looks at this passage, not only to realise the inheritance that they have but - fifthly - he wants them to know the power that they have through God in Christ. Look at the verses - verse 18, the third part: 'That [you] might know what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ'. God wants you and I, my friend - listen - to know the power that is available to us! To know the dynamite, the atomic power that we have to be saved, and then to go on to live the Christian life before men and women in our world. Paul asks God: 'Oh Lord, give them that spirit of wisdom and understanding and revelation, discernment; that as they read the word of God, that the Holy Spirit would come, lead them into all truth, interpret the word of God to them, and then they would come deeper and deeper and deeper into the knowledge of the heavenly realms of the riches and the blessings that they have in Christ Jesus the Lord'. He prays that they would have a deep appreciation of the power of God, that they would realise - and you know what he's been talking about all through this first chapter - that they would realise the power that is behind election, the power that is behind predestination, behind adoption, behind sanctification, the power of God that is behind the bestowal of all these blessings, behind the preaching of the word of God, behind that blessed hope, behind everything that we have as an inheritance, and the power behind what has made us an inheritance in Christ. If you could see...
this passage of scripture written on music, every note is leading upward. It's coming to the crescendo, it's coming to the grand finale of what Paul has been leading to right throughout this whole discourse of salvation and Christian blessing.

What's it leading to? First of all it's leading - as your first point says under 5 - to show them God's infinite power. God's power! The purpose of what Paul is trying to bring out here is the potential of God's power - 'What is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe'. F.B. Meyer put it like this: 'It is power. It is His power. It is great power. Nothing less would suffice. It is exceeding great power beyond the furthest cast of thought'. To emphasise the magnitude of God's power - Paul can't really do it in language that we understand, because you can't do it in any language - and Paul describes the greatest exposition and exhibition of divine power that has ever been known in the history of mankind. Verse 20, this power was demonstrated and 'wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead'. He goes on: 'and set him at his own right hand in heavenly places'.

If I were to ask you what you believe the greatest demonstration of God's power was, you might say to me: 'Well, it must be creation. That in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and the universe. He created all the angelic beings, the whole solar systems, everything! Was that not the greatest? In a word it all came into being'. You might say: 'Well, it must be the Red Sea, where God parted the sea for His children to deliver them from Egypt'. You might say it's the plagues that hit Egypt, every one representing one of their false gods, to curse them and to let the people of God go from them. You might even say it's the incarnation - God manifest in flesh, great mystery of godliness: God, contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man. You might say that is the greatest thing. No! Paul tells us that the greatest demonstration of the power of God is found here: He wrought, He demonstrated His power in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in heavenly places.

Why is that the greatest demonstration? Do you know why? Because all of hell, all the demons, all the devils and principalities and powers were massed, united together to frustrate the plans of almighty God. They wanted to keep Christ in the grave, but God triumphed - Hallelujah! God triumphed and pushed Him, by the power of His almighty being, out of the ground, out of the burying place, and brought Him back to life. Christ's resurrection, Christ's glorification and exultation were a shattering blow to Satan and all his hosts on that glorious day when He rose Him again from the dead. God's victorious power was displayed as never before! As I've said, no one can describe or explain such power, but Paul tries to do it - and he uses several words with the same idea. He uses the words of the vocabulary of dynamics. Look at the verse - verse 19: 'what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead'. According to the working - note that word, 'working', of the 'strength' - the second word - of His might - the third word - which He 'energised' in Christ - the fourth word - when He raised Him from the dead.

Someone described that sentence like this: 'The words seem to bend under the idea'. Do you see what Paul is trying to get at? The first word he uses - 'power' - the power of God, which was manifest, demonstrating - is the Greek work 'dynamus' (sp?). It's the word that describes inherent power, raw strength and the power of God. God is demonstrating His raw ability and strength by working according to the working. That word 'working' speaks of operation, it's the Greek word 'energia' (sp?). It's the word that we get energy from, it speaks of great strength. God was working His great 'dynamus' - His great power - through the working in Christ, through the strength of the strength. 'kratos' (sp?) - it means 'might'. Then the last word, 'energised', is 'iscus' (sp?). Do you see what it's trying to say? This working, this effective or operational power, the 'energia' - the working of God - was there at the resurrection. What is the word that he's using? If you turn to chapter 3 and verse 7 you see it, he says: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power'.

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That's what the word is - 'energia' - something that is working, but not just working, but working effectually, it's having the desired effect. God was demonstrating His power at the resurrection and, praise God, it had the desired effect! The word 'kratos' speaks of the power in-working right within, the ability to conquer. It's talking about Wellington's ability to conquer Napoleon at Waterloo. It's what we read in chapter 6 and verse 10, look at it: 'Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might'. The strength of God, energising, not only effectually working in the life of a believer, but effectually working in the resurrection of Christ and also being seen in the bodily strength that is vital within the resurrection of Christ. Paul wants, through this tirade of language, he wants us to look at the resurrected Christ, the Lord of glory standing there on the resurrection morn. He wants us to see the immensity of the power of our God. He wants us to bow at the Saviour's feet and worship divine omnipotence - strength that isn't just executed and fails, but the strength of God that is effectual, strength that is inherent, that is deep within the being of God, that can never fail, strength that is there and displayed, the ability to conquer never failing - always conquering!

Do you not want to fall at His feet? This is where the power is: at the resurrection and, yes, at the cross and we love the cross - that was the supreme display of the love of God. But the greatest manifestation of God's power was when He resurrected His Son and when He set Him at His own right hand. But before Paul begins to analyse the power of God in the resurrection, do you know what he wants us to see? And if you don't see it you're missing everything! He wants to see, incomparably, the great power for us who believe! You see, Paul isn't just demonstrating all this so that we can be theologians, so that we can be 'biblical clever-clogs' and know everything about the power of God. But he is demonstrating to us, through an illustration of this great power in the resurrection of Christ, that this dynamic, dynamite power is available to us who believe. It's available in salvation, isn't it? Isn't that what Romans 1 verse 16 [says]? 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power - the 'dynamus' - of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek'.

There might be someone here, and they're not a Christian. They've never been born again. They don't know the life of God flowing through their body, soul and spirit - and maybe you think that you've committed a sin that is unforgivable. You have dirt on you, mind or soul, that you feel can never be cleansed, you're too dirty. My friend, when you see the power of God raising Christ from the dead, there is no one too unredeemable! There is no sin that's unforgivable! There is no sinner that's unsaveable! But Christian, that power is available not only in salvation - and this is what many of them miss - it's sanctification. Look at chapter 3 and verse 20. He talks about this: 'Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us'. God's power! That dynamic, dynamite change that should be going on, chemically, within all of us.

Paul talks again, Romans 6:3 and 4: 'Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life'. What's this power for? It's power to save, it's power to sanctify, it's power to know! Is that not why Paul prayed in Philippians 3 and 10: 'That I might know him’? The only way we can know Him is to know His power in our lives. Can I ask you: Paul said 'That I might know him and the power of his resurrection' - do you know the power of the resurrection in your life? 'What do you mean?’ I mean that this divine power is available to every believer in Christ! I'm not story telling tonight, this is real! I'm talking about real things, real life, things that matter! God has imparted to you - it doesn't need to be done again, He's done it - He has given you the divine power that rose Christ out of the grave! Do you have it? Oh, you do have it! Have you realised it? Have you tapped into it? Do you know it's there? Are you using it? As one Christian writer put it: 'Many Christians, today, the system is in place but is dysfunctional because of ignorance, or sin, or unbelief'.
Paul's prayer is, if you're not experiencing this, that God would give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation that you might know Christ, that you might know the inheritance that you have in Christ, that you would know the mighty power that Christ had wrought in Him at the resurrection there, and then as He ascended to Glory and sat at the right hand of His Father. That you, in your life - your life that you mightn't think is too important, your life that you think is insignificant, that God isn't really interested in and you can't do much for God, you're not a great thinker, you're not a writer, you're not a preacher - but yet God has imparted to you the resurrection power of Christ! But one thing matters, and that is that that power is dependent upon our fellowship with God. Oh, don't miss that whatever you do. It's dependent - the knowledge of it, the experience of it. It's like Samson - you remember that awful passage in Judges 16 where he said: 'I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him'. He was out of touch with God!

God displays His power infinitely through salvation and sanctification, and then [in] verses 20 to 23 we see that He displays His power in Christ in many ways. The first way is this: in the resurrection, that we've already been talking about in verse 20. The resurrection - it was the supreme expression of the power of God, 'Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places'. This is what F.B. Meyer says about this: 'There is a marvellous lift there from the grave of mortality to the throne of the eternal God who only has immortality, from the darkness of the tomb to the insufferable light, from this small world to the centre and metropolis of the universe. Open the compasses of your faith to the measure of the measureless abyss, and then marvel at the power which bore your Lord across it'.

Do you see it? The power of God that took Christ from the tomb, and took Him to Glory, and brought Him into the realms of Glory, and set Him there at the right hand of His Father. You see, the resurrection of Christ was the first event ever like it in all of history. You might say, 'But people were raised from the dead before. There was Lazarus, there was miracles in the Old Testament'. But all those folk rose from the dead to die again, but He rose in the power of an endless life. Isn't that what Paul says [in] 1 Corinthians 15? 'Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming'. He is the first like Him! He is the first to rise from the dead like that! With the power of eternity running through Him! Never to die again! There will never be another Calvary! There will never be another tomb! He will never have scars upon His flesh again. And, here, Paul describes - inspired by the Holy Spirit - the resurrection of Christ through the Father God. Yet Jesus Himself said - didn't He? - 'I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again'. Yet He ascribes the resurrection to the Father and the only way of explaining it is this: He said, 'I and my father are one'. There in the resurrection we see both together in that unity. What a display of the oneness of God in His resurrection!

Then in the second half of verse 20, you see it in His exultation. This is so interesting, because Paul links the resurrection, in its powerful importance, to the ascension. Cast your mind back to the end of the gospels, and you see the disciples gathered there, and Jesus had risen from the dead, He had ministered 40 days upon the earth to little groups and to big groups. Then He gathered His disciples together around Him and said: 'Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth'. Then a luminous cloud descended, and with their dazzled eyes they watched their Saviour slowly gliding up to Glory, as He sat at the right hand of the Father on high. What would you have given to be there? One writer said: 'Can you imagine the music, the perpetual starbursts of colour, the shouting of myriads and myriads of angels at the enthronement of the Lord Jesus Christ?' Can you imagine what that moment was like, when the Lamb slain came in there with His own blood and the angels marvelled, and the Father, if He could stand, stood to welcome home His Son?
There is power in the ascension because it says that God made Him to sit. You know, this is beautiful - we read about it in the book of Hebrews that He sat down. Now that is a sign of authority, but it is also a sign of the finished work - that He sat down in heavenly places. Watchman Nee says: 'Christianity begins not with a big 'do', but a big 'done'. It's finished! It's over! Everything is done! He did it! Oh, that thrills my heart! As I walk this pilgrimage, and I try and I try and I try to be holy, I try to serve, I try to strive to be more like Christ, and all along He's saying: 'My son, my child, why are you striving for all that I've done already?'. It's wonderful! There He sits, with the work done, at the right hand of God - and do you know what that signifies? It signifies a place of privilege. We read about it in Hebrews 1:13 - listen: 'But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?' - none of them! That is a place of privilege reserved for Christ, it's a place of power. "Hereafter," He said, "shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of Heaven". The right hand of power! It's a place of distinction and in Hebrews 1 and 3 we read: 'Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high'. It's a place of delight, the psalmist says in [Psalm] 16 and [verse] 11: 'at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore'. It's a place of dominion, 1 Peter 3:22: 'Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him'. A place of privilege, power, distinction, delight and dominion is reserved for one Man: Jesus Christ!

You know, the ascension does at least five things. It completes the resurrection. You see, when the Lord rose from the dead, there He was and He yet [hadn't] ascended to Heaven, and it would not have been complete unless there was a man - a physical being of God-man who was in heaven. Do you get it? That at this moment, as we sit here, there is a man like us in every way, except sin, in heaven - and He's at the right hand of God! It means, secondly, that He became the firstfruits of His people. Because He has risen, because He has ascended, it guarantees for us that there is a day coming when we will rise, when our bodies will be redeemed, when we will be glorified, exalted - every believer in Christ! Thirdly, it began a ministry of intercession for His people. See what we've been singing this evening, what we have been praying? It all goes through the Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest there, who interprets that worship and prayer and it's offered through Him to God the Father. Praise His name! Fourthly, from that position that He is in there at the right hand of the Father, He is the dispenser of the holy word of God. Do you get it? When He ascended He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.

But most significantly, the ascension means His super-exultation above all things. Now I want you to see this, as we close our meeting this evening, verses 21 and 22 - that He has become, through that resurrection, through that exultation and ascension: 'Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: [He] hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all'. Paul again, he can't describe our Lord, can you describe Him? I can't. He couldn't either, even inspired by the Holy Spirit. He had to stack up all these words and [do] you know [how] he puts it? Verse 22 really means this: 'that He is put above every title', (verse 21, I beg your pardon), 'every title that can be given'. Have you got that? Christ is exalted above every conceivable intelligence, every angelic being, demonic, human - whatever they be, He is above them all! One writer put it like this: 'Above all that anywhere is, anywhere can be, above all grades of dignity, real or imagined, good or evil, present or to come'.

My friend, you can't imagine anything greater than our Lord. Men's imaginations run wild, don't they? Sometimes theologian's minds run wild also! But yet they cannot think of anyone, of any being, greater than our Lord. He is above all! He has been exalted to that place of pre-eminence.
Verse 17: we learned that Paul asked for us, and prayed for us, that we would have 'epignosis', which was knowledge - that deep deep knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, that revelation of Him through the Holy Spirit. And friends, if you have that, and if God begins to give you that, do you know what you'll see? The exalted Christ! Now can I say this? - 'Whom having not seen we love', isn't that right? We've never seen Him, we've never gazed upon Him and sometimes we're in prayer, or we're meditating, or we're listening to preaching, or we're around the table and we're trying to conceive, or even imagine, what the Lord was like when He said certain things, or when He did certain things. Then when we come to pray to Him, we imagine Him as He was on the earth - that is not the way He is now. Friends, we need to understand this: we worship the exalted Christ! We worship the glorified Christ, who is ascended to Heaven. The courts have rung with the singing of angels! God has praised His Son! He is exalted! Let's get it right! He is the Lord and there will never be an age when He would be out-ceded or far exceeded.

My friend, this should give us spiritual goosebumps. We should be excited at what our Lord has done and who He is, and the power that has been manifest in His being. Now this humbles me: this is the power of my Lord Jesus, yet He wants me there. Does that not amaze you? He wants you and I there. He said in John 17: 'Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world'. It says in these verses that He has power over created beings, human and spiritual. You see, there's a hierarchy of angelic beings, whether they be good or evil. It's a bit like the rank in the army, but the word of God is saying that He is far above, verse 21: 'all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come'. He's above all demons. He's above all angels and archangels. He's above every man! He's above all!

Paul says, in this world, and in the world to come - and that would be better translated: 'in this age and in the age to come'. What it literally is speaking of is the literal 1000 year reign of the Lord Jesus Christ - the millennial reign. It's saying this: that until then, and when that is achieved and accomplished and consummated, that He alone will be the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords! Verse 22 says that He has power over created things: '[He] hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church' - all the rest of creation, although universal dominion belongs to Him now, the word of God says He doesn't exercise it all, He doesn't demonstrate it all - but there is a day coming when He will! Hallelujah!

Are you downhearted this evening? Are you? Are you discouraged? Do you feel belittled by the circumstances of this pitiful existence that you feel? Listen to Paul! 'For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us'. Then, finally, verse 22 and 23 speak, and this is the crescendo, this is the climax that Paul has been leading up to - that God's power has been revealed through the resurrection, the ascension, and all the outflow of that. But the miracle and the mystery is this: that God has revealed His power towards His church. '[He] hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all'. This is the mystery that was never revealed before, the church is not in the Old Testament. It was revealed in Christ and through Christ and - here it is: that this Christ has been given as the head of the church! No other head! No pope! No moderator! No minister! No elder! No pastor! Jesus Christ alone!

But that is not primarily what that verse means, its meaning is more staggering than that. It means that this almighty Christ has been given as a gift to you and me. Isn't that amazing? Is it any wonder that Paul said: 'this unspeakable gift'? The miracle of grace is also this, and I mean this sincerely, verse 23: 'Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all'. What Paul is saying here is this: that until Jesus Christ receives the inheritance of His own peculiar people, He will be incomplete. That's what Paul's saying - now, not incomplete in His character, but incomplete in the body. You've never heard of a body without a head, or a
head without a body! It's amazing, as Calvin says, that Jesus Christ, as He is at this moment of time, does not want to be regarded as whole until we are home.

Is there a temptation, my friend that you can't get over? Is there a trial? Is there a burden? Is there an obstacle that you feel that you cannot face? Think again, for we have the powerful Christ! Glory to His name!

We're going to stand and sing:

'He is Lord! He is Lord!
He is risen from the dead,
And He is Lord!
Every knee shall bow,
Every tongue confess,
That Jesus Christ is Lord!'

And then we'll sing the second verse: 'He's My Lord!', standing to sing.

[Congregation sings]

Lord Jesus Christ, we acknowledge Thee as our Lord, as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, as the worthy inheritor of all things. But Lord Jesus, it humbles us to think that You consider Yourself incomplete without the blood-bought throng. Lord, we are Thy bride and we say: 'We love Thee, Thou art altogether lovely'. We pray that, moment by moment, that through the spirit of wisdom and revelation that You would peep through the lattice, and give us glorious glimpses of Thy blessed person. Amen.

Transcribed by Trevor Veale, Preach The Word - February 2001
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We come to our study again in the book of Ephesians and we're now into chapter 2, this is our ninth study - not our eighth study as it says on your sheet, it's actually our ninth study. It's been a bit confusing and I apologise to Steven Smith [and] thank him for printing these week after week - I keep meaning to thank him, but I always forget. But it's been confusing, because we've been running the same sheet into the second week quite a lot and it's actually the ninth week of our study. It's taken us eight weeks getting through chapter one, but I hope it's been well worth it studying those beautiful truths that we have in the Gospel. We're looking at chapter two and we're going to read the first seven verses, and God willing we'll get through them all this evening. So let's read them, and please read them in the light of what we have already read and studied in chapter one. It's important that you don't see it as a section on its own, so remember election, predestination, adoption, all those beautiful things, redemption, the riches of the knowledge of wisdom that we have in Christ, all the things that we have been blessed with in heavenly realms, that we have seen already within chapter one. So in that light and remembering Paul in prison, on his knees, praying to God and writing to God about these blessings - he already has all of this in his mind as he comes to write chapter 2 verse 1: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and in sins: Wherein time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

Let us take a moments prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, we seek Thee now. We ask that Thou wilt come, Amen.

I'm told that Mount Whitney, in the US of A, in the state of California, is the highest spot in the whole of the Continental US. There's not a higher spot or mountain or piece of land - it's 14,495 feet - and as you stand on that precipice, you can see from that great height a panorama of the Sierra Nevadas, the beautiful mountains snow-capped all around - and then in the distance you can also see the low lands of the desert plains panned out before your eye. On one side you can see clearly the crystal, indigo and turquoise lakes all around, glistening in the sun. And it seems like the top of the world - as you stand there it seems that there could not be a higher point in all of the universe - as you look on God's earth, you look down at it all. But if you look carefully, about 80 miles southeast is what is called Death Valley, and although this great mountain - Mount Whitney - is the highest point in the US, Death Valley is the lowest point, 280 feet below sea level - and indeed the hottest place in the whole country with a record of 134 degrees in the shade. What a contrast: standing on one place, the highest point, the highest hill, yet able to see from there the lowest point in the whole of the country.
Ephesians 2 - which could be called the 'purple passage' of the 'purple book' of the New Testament - Ephesians - is a bit like that. For Paul brings us from where we have been - in heavenly places, blessed in heavenly realms in Christ Jesus with all those blessings that we've already thought about - and he has us on that mountain, that pinnacle and we've been on it. We saw that he was getting to a climax in the last verses of chapter one, talking about the power that rose the Lord Jesus from the grave and seated Him at the right hand of God, and he talks about how that power is available to you and to me. And now from that pinnacle, from that mountain, he wants us - just for a moment - to take a little glimpse into where we have come from. From the highest point that any human being or spirit can reach, to look down to the depths of depravity that we came from.

Don't let the chapter division put you off, or rob you of its connection with chapter one. Because what Paul is saying, the power that he talks about in the last verses, verse 19: "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in heavenly places, far above all principality...". This power that raised Christ from the dead, this power that put Christ at that privileged, honoured place at the right hand of His Father, that power is the power that saves you! That's what Paul's getting at, Paul is saying: 'It is that power that works in you'! God has let this atomic, dynamite power of His own strength to infuse your spirit and to ignite your whole being - He has lit you!

If you were to turn to chapter one of Genesis, and let's do it for a moment this evening - chapter one of Genesis - you see a parallel with what we're reading in chapter two of the book of Ephesians, for you know that the universe began in Genesis chapter 1: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." - verse 2 - "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep." Deadness, darkness, just like what we read in Ephesians chapter one, or two, dead in trespasses and in sin. Then secondly, if you read on it says: "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." The infusion of the Spirit of God, directed to deadness and to darkness and what did it bring? It brought the power of God's creation, let there be light! Amen. And then what we have in the next verses, right down to the end of the chapter and verse 31, we have the new creation, don't we? Coming from darkness and deadness, and the Spirit of God comes and hovers upon the waters and we have that infusion of the power of God, and then we have the great thing that God has done, and we'll read about in the weeks to come, chapter two verse 5 to 22. Oh there is nothing new under the sun! And I believe way back there in Genesis chapter one, that God knew what He was going to do through His Son Jesus Christ. He was sending a type and a picture, an arrow pointing forward, a shadow of what He was going to do to glorify His Son, to bring worship and honour to Himself in the courts of heaven one day, where He would redeem a people to Himself.

And so Paul plugs into that eternal truth, that was right there in the beginning at creation, and he talks in verses 1 to 3 of chapter 2 about being - look at the first point - depraved and dead. Let's read those verses again: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and in sins: Wherein time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." And as Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, opens chapter 2 of Ephesians, all we can see are spiritual corpses in the valley of death, have you got it? Death! Spiritual decomposition, absolute rotting, death!

I want you to notice that there's a bit of a difference from verses 1, 2 and 3 - for in verses 1, 2 and 3 and verse 4 there's two people being addressed. Verses 1 to 3, you see that Paul says: 'you', he uses the second person, as he used in chapter 1 and verse 13: "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth". And we remembered there, as we looked in chapter 1, that at that point Paul was talking to the Gentiles. Paul the Jew was saying to the Gentiles: 'You also trusted when you heard the Word of God'. He uses the second
person again in verse 1, 2 and 3 '...you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses...wherein times past you walked according to the...prince of the power of the...spirit', and so on. He's addressing them as the Gentiles, those who were in darkness from all time, those who were not given the Law of God, nor the prophets of God, nor the Spirit of God in any form - nor the worship of God - they were in darkness in all times past. But in case the Jews got proud, in verse 4, or I beg your pardon verse 3, he says: "Among whom also we" - [it] changed - "we all had our conversation in times past". So he analyses what the Gentiles were like, how they were dead in their trespasses and sins, walked according to the spirit and the god of this world - but then in case the Jews get proud he says: 'All of us were the same! All tarred with the same brush!' And the first thing he has to say about them all is this - verse 1: "Who were dead!".

Now you'll notice, if you have the authorised version of the Scriptures, that 'hath he quickened' in the first verse is in italics and that simply means that the translators have added that - it is not in the original scriptures in Greek. Now they did that for a purpose, but if you read the original Greek you will read it: 'and you who were dead in trespasses and in sins' - there's no sign of that quickening yet. These people were dead, and that's the first thing I want you to add underneath your first title, 'spiritual deadness'. What is Paul talking about? He is talking about man without God. He is talking about man unable to reach the requirements of God, man falling short of the glory and the standard, the holy mark of God - and let me say this, this evening: when Paul, by the Holy Spirit, says 'dead' he means dead! Do you understand? He means the cessation of life. It is an absolute statement, he doesn’t simply mean in the danger of physical death, or even the second death - in danger of hell. And it doesn’t simply mean, as some of the conservative evangelical scholars believe, the absence of the highest life: that when man fell in the garden, that he was deprived of the highest form of the life of God and he fell to a lower life - and it would surprise you who believes that! No my friend, this means dead! Absolutely, categorically dead! It's not just separation from God, but as John Calvin the great reformer insisted: 'This is a state of real and present death'. Paul's not using a figure of speech here. Paul means that the Gentiles were dead - verse 1. Verse 3 we all had our conversation in times past - the Jews were dead - and all are dead under sin and done, universally, spiritually, morally dead!

You see the most vital part of the personality of a man is his spirit. The spirit was given so that we might know God, and the tragedy of the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden is that that part died - that's what God meant when He said 'the day that thou shall eat thereof thou shalt surely die'. It didn't mean that Adam was carried out in a coffin, the minute he sinned against God - but his soul, his spirit, eternally was in a coffin, dead. And therefore men are dead to God, and Paul gives the evidence for this in verse 1, he says: '...who were dead' - look - 'in trespasses and in sins...'. 'Transgressions' that word trespass means - and transgress simply means to have a line drawn, some law, some rule, some boundary, and for you or I to step over that boundary, to trespass, to transgress, to fall from that law. The word 'sins' simply means shortcoming - missing the mark - that's what Paul meant [in] Romans 3:23: "All have sinned and fallen short from the glory of God", missed the mark of God.

Now what's Paul doing? He is showing the multiplicity of the ways that our deadness is evidenced. Some people believe that these transgressions and sins are the cause of the deadness - no - my friend, as you will see, that is not the case. The trespasses and the sins are not the cause, but are the evidence, the mirror that shows men and women, boys and girls that without Christ in their sin they are lost, eternally lost, condemned, damned! There is nothing that can be revived in their souls because the most vital part of the human being, the spirit that relates to God, is dead! How do we know that? Paul says that 'with the law came the knowledge of sin'. Did Paul say with the law came sin? No. You see the law was God's giant magnifying glass, to show mankind that he could never ever keep up to God's glory, God's standard, before. Paul even described himself as being alive before he had the law - as far as he was concerned he was OK, as long as he was in his Judaism - but when God gave the law, all of a sudden, all were condemned.
Do you see it? There's a subtle difference, but we need to draw the line this evening: there is nothing in the human heart that can be revived. There's a hymn that I love, 'Rescue the perishing, care for the dying', but my friends there's a verse in that hymn that is scripturally incorrect. It goes like this, 'Down in the human heart, crushed by the temper, feelings lie buried that grace can restore, touched by a loving heart, wakened by kindness, cords that were broken will vibrate once more'. Impossible! We are dead! Have you ever tried reviving a corpse? Doesn't work, does it? For when life leaves the body - what are you? Dead. Dead my friends, and what it needs is not a reviving, for reviving presupposes that there was life already! But what you need is the Creator of the creature to come and to bring new life again, he needs to be born again! Sure isn't that what the word means? Born again.

Now I'm not saying that everybody's as sinful as one another. I'm not even saying that one person has to be as depraved as another person, that a mass murderer is as equal in depravity as a little child - that's not what I'm saying. For if you look into the Scriptures you see that there were illustrations of this in Jairus' daughter and the widow of Nain's son and Lazarus. Three resurrections that the Lord Jesus Christ performed, do you remember Jairus' daughter? It wasn't long that she had died, perhaps a few minutes, and even when her father was out trying to get the Saviour to resurrect that body, they came and said 'It's too late, your daughter's dead' - a few minutes dead. And then the widow of Nain's son being carried - he was a few hours dead, he was prepared for burial. And then there was Lazarus, Jesus standing at Lazarus' tomb and He was going to resurrect him - and they looked at Him and said 'Are you mad? By this time he stinks!' - a few days dead. You see the fact of the depravity of man is that you're dead. It doesn't matter about the extent of your depravity, the fact is: it is a spiritual fact that the part in you that relates to God is dead. It didn't matter how much decomposition or rot had set in, like our sins, they all were as dead as one another and it took the same resurrection life to raise them again!

What a past and what a present. Isn't it? Do you ever ponder the past that you had before you were saved, have you? Dead, helpless, hopeless, morally reprobate, depraved, you couldn't do a thing for yourself spiritually speaking - and Paul lists the evidences of their deadness. Dr. Geboline (sp?) went into a meeting on one occasion, and the head of the YMCA came over to him - the secretary - and passed him a little decision card, and on it read: 'I promise faithfully henceforth to lead a religious and Christian life' - and then there was a place to sign your name. 'How do you like that? Isn't it pretty good? Isn't it a great way of putting it?', he said. The Doctor replied: 'How on earth can a dead man live any kind of life?' Is that not true? Dead! You see, you cannot live a life for God, until you receive a life from God! Have you got it?

The first thing that Paul wants us to know is that we were dead. The second thing is this: he wants us to see that one of the evidences of our deadness was the way that we walked. And this is the second thing under our first point, the world - in verse 2: '...dead in trespasses and in sin, wherein times past ye walked according to the course of this world'. The Greek word is the word 'kosmos' - it's used 186 times within the New Testament scriptures, and virtually every instance of its use has an evil connotation. It's not talking about the physical world, with the birds, and the trees, and the soil, and the rocks, and the mountains - that's not what it's talking about. It's not talking about the racial world the black and white, the Roman Catholics, the Buddhists, the Protestants, all different races and creeds. It's talking about the world system, the spirit of the world, the evil world - it's often translated 'way' or 'age'. We read of it in Galatians 1 and verse 4, Paul says: "[Christ] Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from the present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father'. That's what it means, the world, the evil system that is against God, that is at enmity with God, that will have not God to rule over them.

The dead today are walking around us. They're captive to social and the value systems of today's culture, and it's all hostile to Christ! It might seem harmless on the outside, it mightn't seem blatantly obvious that they are against Christ - but if you ask them what part has the King of kings and the Lord of lords in the whole of their system - and they will dismiss Him, and if they could they would crucify Him again! Never be duped
by the world. The sign of a dead person in the world is that they are a slave to pop culture, to the media culture, to the group think of talk shows and magazines and newspapers, they indulge in the sins of the time. You see the world has a mould and it wants to pour each and every one of us into its mould and make us its devotees. It is the mould of depravity! Young person I speak to you specifically: the Word of God says this, and this is a scripture that I think many a modern day Christian - and that phrase galls me - would love to cut out of their Bible: 'Love not the world, neither the things that are of the world' - that's the fruit of the world - 'for if you love the world the love of the Father is not in you'. And I heard of Christian churches this week taking their young peoples fellowships to a public house, renting a room and having a disco - do you know why? To show the world that Christians can have as much fun as the world, without drink. Is that not sad? Is that not tragic? A total misconception, that it's deadness! And anybody who's been in the world knows it is, anybody who's tried the broken cisterns have saw that the waters fail and the devil laughs at the child of God that tries to be satisfied in such deadness.

The course of this world does not necessarily have to be a depraved course, in the sense that we think of drinking, and smoking, and sleeping around, and pornography, and child abuse and all those awful sins, murder and terrorism and all these things - but often, beware! - because the course of this world can often be a religious and a moral one.

There's a story told, an amusing story, about Jeremy Bentham (sp?), he was a philosopher and the father of Utilitarianism - and he's dead, but he still sits on a chair, dressed in old garb and hatted in the early 19th century gentleman's wear. For when he died he wrote down and gave orders, that his entire estate be given to the University College Hospital in London - on one condition - that his body be preserved, and placed in attendance at all the Hospital boards meetings, now don't you elders get any ideas! And he is there today, he's there today. They bring him in, a corpse in all the garb, and do you know what the chairman of the board says, year after year, after year? 'Jeremy Bentham present, but not voting'. My friend that is the course of this world, religiously speaking, for the false religionists, the false ministers and preachers today - they are present in the churches, they are present in their pulpits, they are present in their garb, and in their religious names, but they are dead - and dead useless! But the world loves them, for they don't condemn the world, but they love the world and the things that are of the world. They are kind to the world, but in their selves they have a form of godliness that is powerless, and a costless religion that they give nothing to of themselves, but they live off it.

Oh the world loves religion! 500 years before the Lord Jesus Christ was born, some Greek philosophers were debating with one another, and the question that they were asking was: 'What is the briefest definition of man?' And Plato was there and he stood to his feet and he said: 'Man is a two legged animal'. And one of them went out and brought in a rooster and held it up and said: 'Behold, Plato's man!' Then one exclaimed, 'I have it!' 'Man is a religious animal'. There is no other beast, or creature that looks up to God, and that cries to God, and wants to please God, and wants to live for God - why? Because men are incurably religious - and even the atheist worships himself, he worships man and everything that man does. But my friend whether it be the deadness of overt sin or whether it be the deadness of religiosity - it's all dead! All dead!

We're dead, and we see it in the world, and then in verse 2 we see it in the devil: '...according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience...'. And one by one we are beginning to add to the unholy trinity, the enemies of the child of God, the world the flesh and the devil. The prince of the power of the air, who is he? At times he's called 'the prince of the world', 'the prince of demons', and this awful title that makes us shake in the age in which we live - 'the god of this age'. The Bible describes him as the chief of evil spirits, it describes him as having his realm in the atmosphere, and he commands innumerable hosts in the unseen world - and thus what he does is create a spirit of the age, a spirit that presumes all of humanity, in which he will knit together just enough good, with just enough bad, to achieve his purposes. And he - the Word of God says - is the one that energizes the dead of the world.
Don't believe this nonsense about 'God is our Father', that everybody has God as their Father, nonsense! Jesus said to the Pharisees: 'Ye are of your father the devil!' And my friend, if you are not converted this evening - don't you call God, Jehovah, your Father, for He's not! Your father is the devil, and it is that spirit that he has created around this world in all the fashion and media, in all the drive to bring humanity down to hell, to dupe them, to drug them, to make them drunk with their iniquity, with that new culture, and drag them as far away from Christ as he possibly can - to bring them to hell with himself. He is the ape of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit, it says, 'will lead you into all truth', but what does it say of the devil here? 'The spirit that now worketh', verse 2, 'in the children of disobedience'. The Holy Spirit will take you into obedience, but he will take you to disobedience. Whatever it is, this is a sign of deadness. And today we have a Church, much of it, finds nothing wrong with a social drink, with a business drink, finds nothing wrong with going to certain places, leading themselves into temptation. Churches think nothing of sidelining God's Word, to make way for music or entertainment - and many of them have a view of the Scripture that says that only the fundamentals count - even those now have been watered down! We need to beware my friends, for we live in a godless age, and I think on many occasions 'Ichabod' could be written on so many places, for there is no reverence of God, no fear of the Almighty, no realising the One that we come to worship, [on the] Lord's Day and during the week, that He is the Almighty, the mighty God, the King of creation, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Lord of all the universe, the Head of the Church, the One who is above all principality and power, all demons, all angels, and He has been set as our Head and given to us as a Gift - yet we think we can come to Him any way.

Then Paul begins to speak to the Jews. He has finished speaking to the Gentiles in verse 1 and 2, and now he turns to the Jews and he makes sure that he includes them: 'Among whom also we' - the Jewish race - 'all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of the flesh'. There you are, the third of the trinity, the devil, the world, and now the flesh. What's Paul saying? He's saying that the dead, spiritually speaking, are not just corrupted from without, but they are corrupted from within. Not just a problem from the world - and mind you the bright lights of the world, the cry of the world, the temptation and the pull of magnetism to the soul of a believing child of God that has never known the world, can be so strong, and I do not underestimate it because I've known what it is! But my friend that's not the worst, for Paul could say 'In my flesh dwelleth no good thing. Who shall deliver me from this body of'- what? - 'death!' Decomposition, and we all know what it is, that's why when the little monks go off into the desert and enclose themselves in to seek God - and they might have a right motive, they might be very sincere - but they can't get away from their sin, because it's in them!

It's like the little girl who was scolded for kicking her wee brother. She was kicking him in the shins, and then she began to pull his hair, 'Sally!', the mother said, 'What are you doing? Why did you let the devil make you kick your little brother and pull his hair?' To which she answered, 'The devil made me kick him, but the pulling of the hair was my idea'. Isn't that what we're like at times? 'Oh the devil made me do it'. Oh you wouldn't say that to your partner, or to your friend, but that's what you think in there [to yourself]. My friend, most of the time I would vouch - the devil has bigger things and you do it yourself. The devil's not to blame, it's an act of your will, it's a choice that you have, but there's a deeper problem - because within you there is this thing that Paul alludes to called 'carnality', the fleshliness, the life within you that is a wrong life, gratifying yourselves in the lust of the flesh, your desires that have more base desires, the appetites of the flesh that you want to gratify.

He goes on talking about corruption and he doesn't just talk of the flesh, but what does he say? '...in times past...the lusts of the flesh' - look - 'fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind'. You mightn't be doing it in the flesh, but you could be doing it in the mind - and I think there are many Christians feeding like parasites among the filth of the world, in a closed room with a television, with videos, with magazines - it would surprise you! F.B. Meyer put it like this: "It is ruinous to indulge in the desires of the mind, as those of
the flesh. By the marvellous gift of imagination we may indulge unholy fancies, and throw the reins on the neck of the steeds of passion, always stooping short of the act." Oh you can get the buzz by just thinking about it! "No human eye follows the soul when it goes forth to dance with satires, or to thread the labyrinth maze of the islands of desire". Sure somebody could be feeding their mind on filth at this very moment and no-one else in the whole meeting knows about it, no-one can check it, only God can see it. And half the time we're not aware of God, we're not living in the consciousness of the presence of God - therefore we feel we get away with it. He says: "It goes and returns unsuspected by the nearest, but if this practice is unjudged and unconfessed" - listen - "it marks the offender a son of disobedience and a child of wrath". We need to see that God is saying that this is a fruit of the child that is dead.

A lot of people go through times doubting their salvation, don't they? I went through a long period of my life doubting my salvation because I could not just believe God - that He has said 'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved'. Well, sometimes I wonder ought some so-called 'Christians' to doubt their salvation a little bit more. To be sure that you are in the faith, to persevere that you may show works - the Lord Jesus says - meet for repentance, why? Because if you are continually feeding upon the spirit that now worketh among the children of disobedience, the likelihood is that you are a child of disobedience - a child of wrath!

Paul talks not just of carnality, of corruption, but now of condemnation. The Word of God says we are condemned already, the wrath of God abideth on him who is condemned, who is without Christ, who is without hope, who is not saved - unconverted! Many have said that verses 1 to 3 of chapter 2 of Ephesians is like a summary of the first three chapters of the book of Romans. You have the Biblical doctrine of depravity, and then you have the truth that God can save! Now when I talk about depravity, what I'm talking about is this, not that everybody is depraved - as depraved as they could be - but that every single part of our person is tainted with sin, is that not true? Your mind, your will, your body, so much that has tainted motives - all sorts of feelings and emotions tainted with sin. And we have here a total awful picture of the valley of death - he's just been on the mountain of the blessings that we have in Christ Jesus, but he has us looking down now into the awful depths of our past, where we were brought from, where we were saved from. Some people say in churches: 'Man is well. Man's alright - what are you talking about? He's trying his best and there's an innate goodness within men and, if we all try our best with one another, man will be alright'. Some evangelicals say: 'Man is just sick. If you give him the medicine of the Gospel and the Word of God that he'll revive and he'll be alright. He may be mortally wounded, if he doesn't get the Gospel he'll die, but treat him and he'll be alright'. But my friend the Word of God says 'man is dead'! You can go to any morgue and try and puff and blow into the lungs of a corpse, you can shout 'Boo' in the face, you can do all sorts of things - but once the life is gone, they're dead.

Do you ever think back to what you were? I love this, verse 4, we've come through a cemetery of sin: 'But God' - Hallelujah! - 'God who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ'.

But God! But God! What a cry! What that should do for our hearts, for the sinner deep dyed in his sin and his deadness. McDonald says, 'It's one of the most significant, eloquent and inspiring transitions in all literature', why? Because it indicates a stupendous change, something that I could not change, you could not change, no church could change, or minister or system, or philosophy of belief could change, 'but God'! Hallelujah!

God is the author, but look what it says about our God: 'God who is rich in mercy'. What did the Psalmist say? 'He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens
are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him, as far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us'. The mercy of our God is an inexhaustible mine. You can't plumb the depths of it, you can't measure the width of it, the riches of His mercy and then what does it say? 'The great love wherewith He hath loved us', why is it a great love? It's a great love because it's His love, and it's better to be loved by the sovereign Saviour of the universe than by every human being that has ever been born. His love is a great love because of what it cost Him to love us, because it cost Him the blood of His only begotten Son - it is great also because of the wealth that it gives to you and I, all the riches in Christ Jesus! Verse 5, 'Even when we were dead in sins, hath he quickened us together with Christ'. 'When we were dead', it's a great love because it shows the gulf that God did span at Calvary! It shows what God had to do to bring us from the depths of the mire of the dirt, and the shame, and the darkness, and deadness that we were in. And the deader we realize we were - that we are - the greater the cross becomes.

Oh it's wonderful, that He quickened us. And that word literally means 'made us alive' and in scripture, most of the time, the word is actually translated to describe the physical resurrection - but what he's talking about here is a spiritual resurrection. The resurrection of a dead spirit, that's why he was talking in verse 19 and 20 in chapter 1 about the great power of God that rose Christ from the dead, that set Him at the right hand of the Father on high - that that is the power that works in you, to bring new life to your spirit, to resurrect you, to give you that born again life in Christ - to quicken you. And you have been quickened - look at the verse: '…quickened us together with Christ'. Isn't that beautiful? Together with Him: that means that when He died, I died in Him, when He was buried, I was buried in Him, when He was raised, I was raised with Him, and when He ascended on high, I went to sit there with Him in heavenly places.

What did we read Paul said? 'We are blessed with all spiritual blessing in heavenly places' - why? Because we're in Him, and He's up there, do you see it? Together with Christ - and Paul is so overwhelmed with the undeserved blessings that he has, that he interrupts his train of thought here in verse 5, and he just exclaims: 'By grace you're saved!' It's all of grace, he gets so excited that he realizes what it was - and then in verse 6: '…and has raised up us together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ'. Positionally, positionally you're not waiting on the rapture, positionally you're not waiting on the millennium, or the new heavens and new earth, because positionally you're in them already. And that means you can enjoy it, you can enjoy all the blessings, all the blessings of Christ in Him. And look at verse 7, as we finish, in verse 7 - this is wonderful: '…that in the ages to come He is going to show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ'. God, for all eternity, will be unfolding new revelations to us of the blessings that we have in Christ. Do you know what I believe God's going to do? He's going to take us into the school of heaven, and He's going to be our teacher, and He's going to tell us what it cost Him to show grace to us. No matter how long we're there - do you know what the term spell is? Eternity, and in all eternity it will never tell how great the gulf that my Saviour spanned at Calvary.

Read that verse again, verse 7, look: 'His kindness toward us', he multiplies it, 'His grace in His kindness toward us', he multiplies it again, 'the riches of His grace in His kindness toward us' - and finally - 'the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us'. Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Our Father we thank Thee for Jesus, the Lord and Christ - the One who saved us from our sin. And we thank Thee that there is a day coming, when we will learn in the school of God, for all eternity, what it meant to show the exceeding riches of the grace of God toward us. Lord let us never lose the thrill, let us never lose the joy, of what it is to be a child of God and to be saved from our sin. Part us now with Thy blessing, we pray, in Jesus Name. Amen.

Transcribed by Judith Watkins, Preach The Word - July 2000
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Ephesians - Chapter 10
"Amazing Grace"

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That was good singing. It's good to see you all out this evening to our Bible study here in the Iron Hall Assembly. If you're visiting with us - and there are some visitors here this evening - we're very glad to see you, and we hope and trust that as we study the word of the Lord together, that the Lord will speak to us individually and corporately as a fellowship here, and that the Lord will have a message for us all this evening.

If you have your Bible with you, we're turning to Ephesians. Ephesians chapter 2 - and we began chapter 2, last week, at verse 1 - and we went through verses 1 to 7 and we looked at the subject: 'From Death to Life'. But we'll read those verses again, and we're specifically homing in on verses 8 to 10 of chapter 2 and we're looking at the subject of: 'Amazing Grace!'. Verse 1: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins: Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them".

Last Monday evening we looked, and we saw in verses 1 to 3 of the chapter that sinners are utterly dead - that the human being, when he is born into the world, is born in sin and shapen in iniquity. This is something that cannot be changed - and it is not the fact that man is alright and he'll be alright in the end, and we looked [at] how it's not the fact that man is mortally sick and one day he will die from the sins and the trespasses that he commits. It's not even as good as all that, but the word of God teaches that man is dead. There is the absence of life, and being dead he cannot help himself. There he is, a spiritual corpse, the spirit within him that is the part of the human being that relates to God, that is there to worship God and to know God and to have a relationship with God, is dead. If man is to know God - we saw in verses 4 to 7 - that he has to be made alive. He has to have a spiritual resurrection where God, the Holy Ghost, comes into the spirit - the inside, the inner man - of a dead unbeliever and breathes new life. He has to be born again, born from above.

We remember that we saw Paul, and he brought us to that pinnacle of faith in all of chapter 1, looking at the history of salvation - what God has done for us. There from that mountain top, in chapter 2 and verses 1 to 3, he now makes us look into the depths of the valley of death where man was before he was converted. Then, as it were, again he lifts us from that valley and he says: 'But God!' - He is the answer. We saw from that pinnacle of saving grace, and all the blessings that we are blessed with in heavenly places in Christ, we saw a
journey from hell to heaven, a journey from darkness to ultimate light, a journey from bondage to total and utter freedom, a journey from wrath to glory, a journey from death unto life! From that surveying point he assesses the whole relationship that we have with Christ Jesus - how once we were dead and now we have been brought into life. And now, as it were, sitting there contemplating on the blessing of what God has done in salvation, he summarises the whole thing up in 2 verses - verses 8 and 9. Let's look at them. He tells us how this great change, this great regeneration from death to life has happened: 'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast'.

You could say that these two verses are the gospel in a nutshell. My friend, this is what it's all about. Paul, in these 2 verses, gives us the dynamics of salvation - how salvation happens, what salvation means, the whole process and mechanics of how you are saved, why God has saved you, what God has saved you from, what He has saved you to, and how it has all been done. It is one of the greatest declarations of the gospel of God that we find within the word of God. So many people have been converted through these verses, it's no wonder! But let me say this to you: if you're not saved tonight, you're not converted, or you're a backslider, I want you to listen very carefully to these words. Listen carefully to what God is saying to your heart about how we are saved. How are we saved?

Now I want to begin with verse 9, to clear away all the rubbish first of all. For verse 9 makes a declaration that we are not saved of works 'lest any man should boast'. How are we saved? Well, we could answer that with a negative first of all - how we are not saved - we are not saved by works! Now let me say this: that modern day Protestantism has become a religion of works, and indeed it outstrips pope-ishness at times - and the extent to which men of the cloth rely on works, and climbing a celestial ladder to God of good works, morality, theology and all that they can think of just to reach God, to be good enough to get into heaven. But yet God the Holy Spirit denounces it, and declares: 'Not by works, lest any man should boast'.

They believe and they preach the frog and the milk philosophy. I don't know whether you've ever heard of that philosophy or not. You'll not hear about it in the halls of the universities or the theological colleges, but do you know what it is? It's the wee frog that you put into a carton of milk that can't get out. How does it get out? The only way for that little frog to get out of that carton of milk is for it to start to paddle away and beat its feet, until it beats so much that it makes butter. Then it gets a little pad and it's able to jump out of that carton. That's the gospel of so many of our churches today: 'Try your best! Work for God! Work with God! Keep the commandments! Go to your church! Give to the poor! Do all you can! Be nice to your neighbour!' - but my friend, listen to what God says: 'Not of works, lest any man should boast'.

Ach, if you stopped 20 people in Templemore Avenue this evening and asked them: 'When you get to the Judgement Seat, and you stand before your Maker, and you are asked why you should be let into Heaven, what will you say?'. 'Oh, I'm a good person you know. I try my best, and I do no harm to anybody, and I'm trying to do good to everyone, and I go to my church, and I give to the poor - there are much people worse off than I am. There are people that do terrible things, and I'm not like that. I'm no murderer. I'm no burglar, or terrorist, or rapist, or anything like that. I try my best!'. Now listen friends, that attitude will get the frog out of the milk, but it'll not deliver the soul from hell. God says: 'Not of works'. Listen to it! It's emphatic! It's categorical! It's emphatic! No buts about it! You can't water it down! You'll never get into heaven by works! But do you know what the trouble is? That we have, ingrained within our very nature, something that is called pride. That simply means that the stumbling block of the gospel to many people is this: that they want to do a wee bit about it. You see, people don't want a gospel of grace where they don't do anything. They want to add a wee bit. They want, at the end of the day, for there to be a wee brass plaque where, at least, it says: 'This person - David Legge - added a little bit to his salvation'. They want some of the glory, some of the time - when they get to heaven they want to have it themselves.
Why is it not of works? Paul tells us in verse 9, in the second half of the verse - what does he say? Look at it: 'Lest any man should boast'. Imagine if you got to heaven, or I got to heaven on my own steam, imagine what it would be like. There wouldn't be enough room to keep all the celestial big heads that there were, isn't that right? Peter would have to widen the golden gates to get you in, isn't that true? 'Lest any man should boast' - that's why Paul says it, that's why the Holy Spirit made him say it, that if there are people in heaven that are glorying in the fact that they got themselves there, [then] God's not God and they are. That's what it's down to. That's what it means! God would have to play - and I say it reverently - second fiddle for a soul that is in heaven that saved himself, or added to his own salvation. My friend, this is why God has declared this.

It's interesting - if you go into the gospels, into Matthew's gospel, you see there that the Lord, on occasions describes the judgements at the end of the age. Do you know the only people at the judgements that are boasting? It's the ones that are going to hell. If you turn with me now to Matthew chapter 7 and verse 22 you see that. Matthew 7 and [verse] 22, and Jesus depicts them standing there before Him, and what is it that they're saying to Him? 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works?'. 'Depart form me ye cursed into everlasting fire', is the reply that comes from the Lord Jesus. They're boasting, but no one shall boast in the face of God for their salvation. That's why it's by grace. If you turn to chapter 25 you see that the sheep that are saved, the ones that will go into eternal life and enjoy the blessings of God's salvation forever - they're the very ones that can't even remember the good deeds that they did do! Matthew 25 verse 37: 'Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink?', and so on. They can't even remember! They are there, and that proves that they don't get there by their good works, because they can't even remember them!

You know, my friend, salvation doesn't come by works, and anyone that is truly saved has nothing to boast about. There's nobody boasting in heaven this evening. There's nobody lifting their head high because they saved themselves, or they did something about their salvation, but it gets worse than this. The situation of man is more tragic, because the gulf between the deadness of man and the awesome righteousness of a holy God is so far away that man can't do anything about his salvation. Maybe you don't believe that type of religion. Well, turn with me to Romans chapter 3, for we need to look at this - and I want to say that everything I'm saying is from the word of God. In Romans chapter 3 we read two things about the awful state of man. What Paul does is, he employs a rabbinical technique of writing. It used to be called the string of pearls, where he puts a whole lot of truths together, but it's not a string of pearls because they're awful pearls. It's more like a string of perils! He lists the overwhelming evidence that man - listen - is universally corrupted.

The first thing he mentions is their character. Look at verse 10. Verse 10, through to 12: 'As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God'. Now take that in my friend! When God says that there is none that seeketh after God, He means that there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one'. Man is universally corrupt in his character! Then he goes on, verse 13 to 18, to say that man is corrupt in his conduct: Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes'.

It's awful, and Paul in Ephesians declares that all people, no matter whether they're Jew or Gentile, whether they're pagan or pious, whether they're pope or Protestant, they're all condemned and done under sin! This is awful! If you look at Ephesians 2, that we've taken our text from, that's why Paul does not relate these works that he talks about: 'Not by works, lest any man should boast'. Often when Paul was talking about works he referred it to the works of the law, keeping the commands of the Old Testament, but he knew that the
Gentiles, those that weren't Jews, didn't even know what the commandments were of the Old Testament! He wants to make categorically clear that he's talking about every human being that has ever been born or lived, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you got it? It's an awful scene, isn't it?

Someone has said that: 'Our good works are no more beneficial than rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic', isn't that right? Can you imagine being on the Titanic and when it's going down and you escape into the circumference of where the boat is about to sink? And there's a man trying to swim beside you and he gives you a dig and he says, 'You know, I'm the Olympic gold medallist winner in swimming'. And he says to you, 'Now look! You follow me and you swim with me, and if you even want to hold onto my foot you do it!' - and they're off the coast of America (you know where the Titanic sunk). Will they get there? No. Why? Because the distance is too far to reach. My friend, that's what God's distance is like! That is what the law of God is like my friend, it is beyond us. Anyway, how can a dead man do any swimming? A dead man can't do anything. The unsaved person is dead in their sins, and they're there helpless and hopeless, and all they have is hell, and all they deserve is hell, says the word of God.

My friend, this is an awful situation - and here Paul pronounces that this is why it needs to be so great a salvation. Is it any wonder that the Lord Jesus said in the Beatitudes, in Matthew 5 and verse 3: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'? One paraphrase puts it like this: “Blessed are those who realise that they have nothing within themselves to commend them to God, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. That's what it means. Do you realise that tonight, my friend? Don't come with all of your righteousnesses whatever you do - and I'm talking to both Christians and non-Christians here tonight. Because sometimes Christians get a thing about themselves, and about how much they know, and what they do, and how much they pray, and how much they preach - and they just think that God loves them for what they can do for God or even for who they are - not a bit of it! God loves us unconditionally! He loves us for one reason: because He chooses to love us, nothing else. If we are to know Him, if we are to be saved by Him, if we are to enter into the kingdom of God, we must become as little children. That means there's not to be pride about us. What does the hymn say?

'Boasting excluded, pride I abase
For I'm only a sinner saved by grace'.

You see that's what Paul said in the book of Romans and chapter 3 and verse 27. He asked: 'Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith'. You can't have faith and works together to secure your salvation - no! The word of God teaches, the book of Ephesians, the book of Romans, even the book of James teaches that faith, and faith alone will save the soul alone. You see the tragedy of religion today - and sadly much of Protestantism and a lot of evangelicalism is going in that direction - is that it blasphemes the Saviour and it castrates the cross. You see, that's what Paul talked of in Galatians chapter 2 and 21, look what he says: 'I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain'. If I could get there through my works, through inner righteousness, through a false religion or a denomination, Christ need not have died at Calvary! Do you know why He died? Because there was no other way!

Do you think God would spend so great a price for your soul if you could get there on your own steam? Not a bit of it! That's why the word of God is laying down here for us - Paul doesn't want us to miss it - as if we could already through all the verses that we've been looking at - but he wants to set down absolutely, so that there's no doubt about it in our minds, that if we are to be saved we must be saved by God, and God alone. You see, if man could save himself [then] man is his own saviour. Do you understand that? And if man could meet God halfway and help him out in the salvation then man has two saviours: himself and God. But the word of God is teaching, categorically, that there is one Saviour - and God says, Isaiah 42:8: 'I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images'.

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Old John Nelson was a godless, blaspheming blacksmith until God saved him. Then what happened was a tremendous transformation of grace in his life, and he became one of John Wesley's preachers. One day when he was out preaching the gospel, he began a conversation with a very self-righteous man, and that man said to him - listen: 'I don't need your Saviour. My life is all that I need. I can present my own life to God and I'm satisfied He won't be hard on me. If anybody gets into heaven I'll get there because of the way I've lived. 'Look here!', said Nelson, 'If you get into Heaven you would bring discord, because do you know what they're doing in heaven? They're singing: 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, that was slain! Worthy is He for the finished work that He has done at Calvary' - that's what they're singing. But if you went in by your own works, you'd have to sing: 'Worthy am I! For I did a good work. I tried my best and it worked. I got the goal. I achieved everything that needed to be done. I ticked all the boxes that God wanted to get me here. Worthy am I!'. And do you know what he said? 'An angel, if they heard you singing that, would take you by the scruff of the neck and throw you over the wall'.

No flesh shall glory in His sight, and if there's an inch of you that thinks you're going to get to heaven by anything to do with you - my friend, you are in trouble. For if man has to have anything to do with his salvation, do you know what it means? It means God would owe man heaven at the end of His life. Do you think you can bargain with God? If you do your best that at the end of the road God's going to have to, He's obliged to take the chequebook down and give you an eternity in Heaven? Do you know what the book of Romans says? Chapter 11 and verse 35: 'Or who hath first given to him', God, 'and it shall be recompensed unto him?'. There's nobody owes God anything, and God doesn't owe him. God is no man's debtor, and Paul teaches in the book of Romans that if we have to have, or feel we have to have, some part in our salvation - God is in our debt! But Paul says: 'Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace but of debt'. You see, if you've to work for your salvation, you're being saved because God's in your debt, and God can't be in anybody's debt. Do you understand this?

This isn't some bargain, you know. Some people preach the gospel as if it's some bargain, and you would need to be a fool to refuse it. 'Eternal life? The slate wiped clean? Everything you want - a home in Heaven when you die, and everybody at church for your friends?' - that's not the gospel! You see, the gospel costs you everything, but it cost Christ everything. I wonder, is there anybody here this evening - you know, this is something that has been argued for years, debated in the church, even from the fifth century; Palagius brought this doctrine into the church that men could help God with their salvation, that men could meet God some way, [and hold] out their hand to God heavenward some of the way, and then God would reach down and pull them up to heaven. But the word of God says this, and it's our first point: that grace is working for us. You see, that's the way you're saved. By grace! We are saved by grace. Look at verse 8: “through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God”. By grace are ye saved!

What is grace? Grace is simply - to give a simple definition of it - is God's unmerited favour to those who are totally undeserving. Do you know what it is? It's verse 4: 'But God'. Verses 1 to 3 have been describing what a terrible pit that we're all in from birth and then, in verse 4: 'But God, who is rich in mercy'. God reaches down. It's grace, He doesn't have to do it, He wasn't obliged to do it and He certainly wasn't in anybody's debt to do it. We're all on our way to hell, and God would have been righteous and just to let us go there, but God who is rich in mercy poured unmerited favour upon us - those who didn't deserve anything. Do you know what this verse means? Look at verse 8: 'By grace are ye saved through faith'. Do you know what it literally means? You are being saved? No. You shall be saved? No. You can be saved? No. You may be saved? No. If you travel on the way that you're going, and keep the slate clean, you will be saved? No! By grace ye are saved through faith! Do you know what that is? It's in the perfect passive participle. Do you know what that means? The perfect tense describes an action which is a state of being at the present time, and Paul is literally saying this: 'By grace we are in the state of being, of having been, saved'. That's the state of being that you're in. The state of living and existence - if you've put your trust and faith in Christ - is of 'have-being' saved already. No doubt about it!
Can you say that? Are you in a state of having already been saved, so that you know in the depths of your soul that you'll never die spiritually? That you'll never lift up your eyes in hell? That you'll never smell your flesh burning in the lake of fire? That you'll never have God say: 'Depart from me, I never knew you'? Even though you've known the gospel all your life, do you know what it is to have that deep assurance: 'I have been saved'? You need to have no doubt about it. Some of you, when you go shopping you make sure you get a receipt for whatever you bought just in case it's not right, yet some of you are taking shoddy goods for an eternity. My friend, is there anything more important than that? You need a guarantee that you are saved, secured!

What is this grace? There was once a mission in the slums and there were all sorts of creatures came into that mission - drunkards and drug abusers, murderers - all sorts of sinners. One night - and there were many people getting saved every night - and one night, there at the altar kneeling down before the preacher were two men. One was a judge and one was a robber, and both of them were shedding tears and crying to God for mercy to be saved. As the pastor walked out of the church that night, he happened to walk out with the judge. The judge turned to him and said: 'Did you see who was kneeling down there beside me tonight?'. The pastor said: 'I didn't know you noticed'. 'Oh yes! What a miracle of grace,' he said. The pastor replied, 'Oh yes! A convict being saved!'. 'Oh no!', said the judge, 'I meant me. For I was brought up a gentleman. I was taught to say my prayers. I took communion regularly. My bond was my word. I went to Oxford. I got my degrees. I learnt law and then I went to the courts, and I was debating and challenging men about the right and wrong of the law, but there I was and God was able to save a self-righteous wretch like me! That's grace, my friend!'. He said, 'You know, for a convict to come out of jail - it would have been the greatest news that he could ever hear, to know that the slate could be wiped clean. But for me, I thought my slate was wiped clean. But it wasn't'.

My friend, this is the type of grace that we are preaching. This is the grace that we have in the word of God, and it takes this grace to save all. It's all of grace, and the minute, my friend - now listen to this, Christians, because there's a lot of watered down word preached in these days - immediately you begin to mix what man does with what God does, and add a little bit and you tell people that man can meet God halfway, or that God will save them and then they have to run the race themselves and keep themselves, and if they sin the next day, well, if they died they'd be in hell - that's not a gospel at all! That is not grace, it's certainly not the grace of God. My friend, salvation is not co-operation - man and God. It is absolute regeneration! Do you know what Pascal said? 'Grace is indeed required to turn a man into a saint, and he who doubts this does not know what either a man or a saint is'.

You see, if you think that you can be saved by your works, or you can meet God halfway, or that you in some way came to Christ and He was obliged to take you because you're such a good person - my friend, listen to this: you have no idea what a sinner is, because a sinner is dead and he can't even help himself. Have you any idea what a saint is? Do you know what a saint is? It's a person who is clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and unless you have His holiness - His righteous standard - you will never stand before God, because it's only that standard that He accepts. All that God asks of a sinner - not that he work his way, not that he do his best - the only work that God asks a man to do is a work of fact! Admitting a fact! Throwing the hands of rebellion down, and saying: 'Lord, You were right, I'm dead. Lord, I need You!'. For the gift of God is eternal life, and you need to admit that you can't do it, that only God can save you - and the work that God has done with Christ at Calvary, where He put Him through my hell and my judgement, where He took my place and my transgressions, and the iniquity of us all was laid on Him. Unless you are trusting on the finished work - it's completed, you don't need to add to it by the way - unless that's what you're resting on, you can never be saved. For it's by grace.

Look at the second bit, verse 8: 'For by grace are ye saved through faith'. Now what's Paul saying? He's simply saying this: that faith is the medium for this salvation. It's the condition upon which the salvation is
given. But beware of something here - faith is not a quality. You'll hear people talking in our world today and they might be a Muslim, they might be Roman Catholic, they might be a dead dyed Protestant, they might be a Mormon, they might be a Jehovah's Witness, they could be anything in the whole wide world and they have faith. Now it's their own faith. It's man's faith. They have a faith in a god, but don't make the mistake that faith is a quality that men have: 'Ach, he's religious. That's just his inclination. He was born that way. I don't know whether it's a gene or something, or it ran in his family. That's just his persuasion. He likes to worship God, go to church and be good living'. Not a bit of it! It's not a virtue. It's not a quality. It's not even a faculty of the human spirit that, because of sin and because of the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, has been ignored or trampled down or neglected. My friend, listen! This response of the faith of man is by God's grace! Can a dead man have faith? No. This is something that man cannot produce.

You see, the response of faith in a man, even that very thing, must be evoked by the Holy Spirit of God. To make sure that we don't [make the] mistake of thinking that God does the grace, and then we need to work up the faith within us to believe what God is saying, Paul says, and repeats in verse 8 - look at it: 'Not of yourselves...For by grace are ye saved through faith, not of yourselves'. It is a free gift, the gift of God! And every commentator says this - listen - that Paul, when he talks about a gift here, is not only talking about a gift of faith but he's talking about grace and faith. He's talking about the whole thing that he's talked about before. He's talking about a whole gamut of salvation. That every wit of it and bit of it is by God's grace - it's a gift! A lot of people find this hard to believe because they say: 'Well, can I not even have exercise in a little bit of faith in the whole thing? Could I not do that wee bit?'. My friend, the grace and faith that we find here is the gift of salvation, and there's a lot of people, and they're in danger of making faith their saviour. Do you know what I mean by that? Friend, Christ saves you!

Can I take a bit of a digression? I remember hearing Duncan Campbell on tape. It was during the revival, and there was a mighty move of God. There was a young girl that rang him up on the telephone after one of the meetings, and said: 'Mr. Campbell, you're going to have to come down. I need to be born again. I've been praying for two weeks that God would show me the way of salvation and I still haven't got there. I know that I'm not saved'. Mr Campbell got up out of his bed and went down to the wee girl's house. He opened to her Romans 10 and verse 13, and said: 'For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved' - and that is true. You know, that wee girl turned round to him and said: 'Mr Campbell, do you think a verse of scripture will save me?’. God needs to save a man. It's not a head knowledge of scripture. It's not even an intellectual tick at the side of it saying 'I agree with that' or 'I concur with that'. It's a work of the soul in the very spirit of man. Oh, I wonder have a lot of people really got this work done within their soul. You might say: 'Well, how do I have this faith? How do I receive it?'. Well, we know! Turn to Romans 10 for a minute. Romans 10, keeping in mind that God says that even this faith is a gift from God. Paul tells us in Romans 10 and verse 8 - if you look at verse 8 you'll see there the little phrase 'the word of faith'. Do you see it? Speaking of the word of God - 'the word of faith'. Then in verse 17, a well-known verse: 'So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God'.

Do you know how faith comes? Now listen carefully! When the word of God is preached, that word of faith, and the seed of the word is sown out hither and thither and it lands on ground that has been prepared by the Holy Spirit of God. When that happens, when they come together, faith is created within the soul and the spirit of man as a gift of God. What were we singing earlier?

'I know not how the Spirit moves,  
Convincing men of sin,  
Receiving Jesus through the word,  
Creating faith in Him'.

Is it any wonder Paul could say 'by grace are we saved'? It's not works, he's already said in Romans 4:5: 'But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for
righteousness’. Him that doesn't work for it, but believes in it! And you remember there the jailer - and Paul and Silas are there, and the Holy Spirit has convicted him of his need and what did he say? 'What must I do to be saved?' - 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved!'. My friend, that is the message that we have: 'believe'. It's the message throughout the whole of the word of God. It's the message of the word of faith. It is to implore men to believe the gospel of Christ: 'And as many as receive Him, to them He gives the power to be called the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name'. Oh, it's wonderful, isn't it? Paul shows us the order in chapter 1 and verse 13 if you look at it. He said to them: 'In whom ye also trusted' - when? - 'after that ye heard the word of truth'. You see, it's the word of God entering your heart my friend. When you see a promise from God, that God loved you, and that Christ died for you, and something is enabled within you to say this: 'That was for me He died!' - and you believe that it was for you, and you're saved.

That's what the reformers died for. That's what Martin Luther's clarion call was: 'Justification by faith alone, by grace alone'. Sola fide - by faith alone in Christ alone, not by works but by Christ. Oh, it is wonderful, isn't it? As the carol says:

'But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still
The dear Christ enters in'.

From start to finish, Paul has been trying to show us that this is God's grace. Then we see quickly, grace working in us in verse 10a - we're almost finished. He says: 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them'. Now, this is by no means a postscript or parenthesis. Paul isn't putting this down as an afterthought, saying: 'Oh, I'd better tell them this: that now you're God's workmanship', but this is what Paul has been leading up to. This was what he was bringing to them - the conclusion of why he was talking about grace and faith and not of yourselves. Verse 10 is the outcome of all that came before it, and it shows us this: that salvation, the salvation of God, is for a purpose. It is intended to produce good works as the fruit of its genuineness. Don't get me wrong now! Listen! Works has no part in the securing of our salvation, but after we are saved we are to prove our faith is real by our works. Some say Paul and James contradict each other when James says that 'Faith without works is dead', and Paul says that you can only be saved by faith through grace. No. If you read James very carefully you will see that what he is saying is this: 'That by their fruit ye shall know them'. And the root is faith and the fruit is works - and we, through this grace and faith, have been created, it says, in Christ Jesus unto good works.

Do you know what that means? You, my friend, have been foreordained - if you're saved - to do good works for God. This is beautiful! He says that we are his workmanship. Do you know what that word in the Greek is? 'Poeme' (sp?). It's the word that we derive our English 'poem' from - 'poeme'. Do you know what he's saying? We are God's poem. Another translation says that we are God's 'work of art'. Used in the New Testament twice, but what he is saying is that 'we are God's poem!' Now, if you've ever seen a poem you'll know this - that you read and you think to yourself, if you're like me, 'I could never write anything like that!' You know what it's like - if I was to sit down at that piano tonight and play you a tune you would all run out! Why? Because I don't have it in me, do I? You've either got it or you don't! My friend, the only one who's got it to save you is God! He's the only one that can make a poem of your life. We, the word of God - Paul is saying - are the masterpieces of God. Think of that! There is nothing like us, not in ourselves but what God has made us. Look at verse 10 - He has created us in Christ Jesus unto good works. The Hebrew word for 'created' there is the same word that you find in Genesis 1 verse 1: 'In the beginning God created'. What he is saying is: what He did in us in Christ, the change that He has wrought in our soul when we were born again, is the new creation. We are new people in Christ Jesus! It denotes the creative energy of God, that only God has through Christ Jesus. It's emphatic - just like verses 6 and 7: 'Only in Christ Jesus'. Only in Him - none other!
Then finally and thirdly he says that it's grace working through us. We are created in Christ Jesus unto good works 'which God before ordained that we should walk in them', or that 'God before prepared for us'. Do you know this life of regeneration, this life of salvation, the fruit that we are to have and show in our lives - this is amazing - has already been prepared by God! It literally means that we are to walk about for all eternity in everything that God has prepared for us. The road is already built and spread before us. You see the more I read the word of God, I realise that everything I have is nothing to do with me. It's all of God! Do you know what this means? You might have helped a wee lady across the road today and felt very good about it, but the word of God says that He prepared that for you in His eternal counsels - and He, by His Holy Spirit within you, enabled you to do that. He's not going to have one on that day standing beside the Throne with a big badge or a big smile, thinking: 'I did something' - for my friend, God did everything!

Let's bow our heads, and perhaps you're here this evening and you're not sure about how you are with God, you don't know whether you're saved or not, or you're cold. Maybe tonight, maybe you're starting to doubt whether - not whether you prayed a sinner's prayer, or whether you signed a card, or walked an aisle (and I'm not decrying those things, my friend, because many are saved by that medium) - but, you see, this salvation is a work of the Spirit in the heart of a man. Maybe you're not sure whether that work was ever done, or maybe the fruit that's in your life does not testify that you were born from above and that you're a child of God. Well, why not come to the Saviour tonight? Or come back to the Lord? Christian, rededicate your life to do those good works that have been prepared for you that you're maybe missing in your life. Why not do it now? If you want to speak to me after the meeting, I'll be at the door.

Our Father, we thank Thee for amazing grace. Lord, we can't claim any of it. Oh, sure there's times we'd love to. Oh, we've such a wire about ourselves at times Lord, that we want just a little bit that we can say: 'Well, I did this', or, 'I achieved this'. But Lord, we hear these words from the bleeding Christ at the cross of Calvary: 'It is finished!'. And before we were ever born the work was done, and we thank Thee that we can't add to it and we can't take it away. All we have to do is believe it, and trust in Him and believe the gospel, and by that faith, know Jesus Christ as our Saviour. We thank Thee Lord, we thank Thee for a wonderful Saviour, and we ask that the fragrance of His presence would go with us now. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Transcribed by Trevor Veale, Preach The Word - February 2001

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Now let me welcome you to the Iron Hall this evening to our Monday evening Bible study. It's great to see you all out and I welcome you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and hope and trust that - as we've made the effort to leave the sunshine and come in here to look at the word of God - that the Lord, indeed, would bless us and shine His own sunshine upon our hearts.

Ephesians and chapter 2, chapter 2 and we, this evening, are on our eleventh study as it says at the top of your handout and we're hoping to look, this evening, at the subject: 'From Alienation to Reconciliation'. This is a great chapter from a great book, and we've been meditating upon where we have come from in our sin and where Christ has brought us to in His wonderful marvellous grace. So, to recap on all that - because it's important as we look at what we're going to study this evening - let's read from verse 1 of chapter 2.

Paul says: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins: Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others", and here's this glorious expression, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them".
Now here's the verses we're going to look at this evening: "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father".

'From Alienation to Reconciliation'. If you study the annals of history, and down all the eras of time, you will find that history shows none distinction greater than the one we have just read about within the New Testament. What I am talking about is a racial, national distinction. There are many racial distinctions within our world today and we, in Ulster, know all too well what it is like to have two people fighting over one piece of land, both believing that they own the land, both believing it is their right. You can go through all of history, you can look down every country, and you will find within that piece of land at some time there has been a similar ethnic fight.

We've just read, within the New Testament, about perhaps the greatest of all: a racial, national, political and religious separation. Of course, as we've read, and if you're familiar with the Scriptures, you will know that that was the distinction between the Jew and the Gentile in Biblical times. The distinction is still there today, but during the times of our Lord Jesus Christ that distinction was very acute. You see, to the Jew the Gentiles - and you're a Gentile, for a Gentile is simply someone who is not a Jew - to the Jew the Gentile was simply fuel for the flames of hell. That's all they were worth, that's all they were good for. The common motto for the Jew toward the Gentile was this: 'The best of the serpents - crush them, and the best of the Gentiles - kill them!'. It wasn't even lawful to help a Gentile woman giving birth, for that would bring another heathen pagan Gentile into the world.

It reminds me of the story, in our own wee land, of three men sitting in the waiting room in the Royal Victoria Hospital: one was black, one was a Roman Catholic and one was a Protestant. They were sitting there for a while, waiting on the news of their new born babies, and all of a sudden the nurse came rushing in with bad news. The bad news was that they'd mixed the little nametags of the babies up, around their wrists. There was a terrible panic and a dilemma, and the nurse says: 'What I need is one of you to come in and look at the child, and see if you can recognise any features, and claim the child for your own'. I'll not tell you whether it was the Protestant or the Roman Catholic, but all of a sudden one of the men was seen to be walking down the corridor with a black baby. And you can understand why: for that is the mentality of a nation that is divided - 'We will have anything but the other sort', isn't that right?

That is what is happening in the New Testament. It's so contemporary to our day and age as we live in. The Jews hated the Gentiles, and the Gentiles hated the Jews. And just as the Jews saw the Gentiles as fodder for the flames, so the Gentiles, in turn, could turn to the Jews - and even apart from their own animosity toward the Jew (because they hated them) they even hated one another, and the Gentiles were fighting among one another. Indeed, the great Greeks thought themselves to be the highest pinnacle of all humanity. Plato said that the Barbarians - and that's just a name for anyone who was not a Greek - they were their enemies by nature. It was said that the Greeks waged a truce-less war against people of other races - against the Barbarians. It's the old cry of humanity, isn't it? 'If you're not like me, if you don't have the same colour of skin, the same religious creed, the same background, the same class - well then I cannot accept you, and unless you're born like me I cannot accept you'. To the Jew the Gentile was a dog. To the Gentile the Jew
was a homicidal enemy, who went through every race that was not Jewish and slew them. And all of a sudden we have here this political, religious, racial cocktail down in history. We know it so well through reading our Bibles, and all of a sudden Paul comes in here with a new message, something that is totally different. That's why he comes in verse 11 - look at it - and he says this: 'Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands'.

Now we read together from verses 1 to 10, we recapped our memory about what we have been learning - about how man came from deadness, being quickened by the Holy Ghost of God through regeneration upon the work, the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary, and this dead sinner has become alive to God. Right? We learnt how verses 1 to 10 are universal, didn't we? Paul wasn't talking about Gentiles, was he? Or he wasn't talking about Jews, he was talking about both. He was talking about all humanity - that they are altogether counted as such: dead in sin, and they all need to be made alive by the regeneration of the Holy Ghost. But now Paul goes a little bit further, and in verse 11 he shows: 'Yes, I did say that there's no difference, that we have all sinned, we have all fallen from the grace of God and God's standard of righteousness, but', he says, 'if you think about it - you Gentiles - you were a little bit worse off. In a sense, Gentile Christians in Ephesus, you had a greater alienation from God than even the Jews'. Now what is he talking about? This is the first thing that I want you to notice on your notes: alienation, in verses 11 to 12. Look at verse 12: 'That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world'. Paul says: 'the Circumcision call you the Uncircumcision, you're alienated from God and all the blessings that God gives to His people'.

If we had time this evening we could go into the book of Genesis, and you would see there how God chose and called one man - Abraham - Abram and then Abraham - and he was called out of the nations of the world. Now Abraham was a Gentile, and then he became the first Jew by being called of God. Do you know why God called him? Simply to become the partakers of the promises of His grace. Isn't that wonderful? After Abraham, then came Moses. God then gave Moses the law of God, which was a picture - like a mirror image - of the standards that God required of a man to be acceptable with Him, and they were told: 'If you obey everything in this law you shall live'. At that moment, when Abraham was called of God, when Moses was given the law of God, the Jews - the Israelites - were separated, sanctified unto God from every other nation upon the face of the earth.

You can read the Old Testament and you will find that God never ever made a covenant with a Gentile. Look for it! Now I'm not saying that He didn't make promises that affected the Gentiles - that's not what I'm saying - but He never ever made a specific promise directed towards the Gentiles. Why? The first reason we find in (a) on your notes and verse 11 is this: that the Gentiles were hated. Paul says in verse 11 that the Circumcision called them the Uncircumcision. Now, you see, to be called the Uncircumcision was a name of disdain, because the Gentiles didn't have the surgical sign that marked Israel as God's covenant people. It was a term of reproach, a term of disdain to show towards them: 'You don't belong to God. You're not God's chosen people. You have not been given the law of God, and the prophets of God, and the writings of God. You're rejected. You are a Gentile dog. You are the Uncircumcision!'. It's a similar name that people would call other races today that they didn't like - a racist name. We can almost feel something of the sting when we hear David within the word of God - and you remember he heard about Goliath, and Goliath was willing in his proud arrogance to stand up to the people of God, and ultimately to stand up to the God of the people. Do you remember what David said? 'Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the Lord God?'. Do you feel the sting? 'Uncircumcised Philistine! This unclean pagan! This atheist! This false religionist!'.
Of course, the Jew spoke of himself as the Circumcision, and the problem that Paul had here was that they were using this term in a proud arrogant way. 'We are the Circumcision, you are the Uncircumcision, unclean!'. They became so proud of it that Paul seems to take exception to their boasting, saying that their circumcision was - look at the verse 11 - only in the flesh: 'in the flesh, by hands'. Do you see what he's saying? 'You boys that are priding yourselves in being circumcised because it's the sign, the covenant sign, of being part of God's holy nation - you've only it in the flesh! It's only an outward sign! It can only be seen by the physical eye'. Paul is saying. But there need to be more than that - they didn't have the inward reality of faith in the Lord. Turn with me for a moment to Romans chapter 2, and it's important that we understand this. Romans chapter 2 and verse 28, and Paul expands upon this and he says: 'For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God'.

Do you see what they were doing? They were praising themselves in the fact that, outwardly speaking - not just through their circumcision but by their way of life, by how long their beard was, by what they ate, what they drank, the 600-odd rules that they kept, added to the Scriptures - because they were Jews they prided themselves in the outward appearance of their religion. Paul says 'No! No, not a bit of it! You've totally missed the mark. Oh, you've the truth of God's word. You even have had God's prophets speaking to you by the Spirit of God down all the ages, and it was right in the beginning for you to obey and to circumcise the child. But now what has happened? It has become an outward show and you don't have the inward reality of having a circumcised heart'. Now, what does it mean to have a circumcised heart? It simply means this: in the same way as outward circumcision represented dedication to God, you need dedication to God in your heart. My friend, listen: it's your spirit and your heart - it's the inward man that matters! Now, I'm not saying that the outward doesn't matter, but it doesn't matter as much. Because we are so physical people, maybe even carnal and fleshly people, we judge everything on the outward appearance and sometimes we can get by because we fool everybody - but God knows what's in the heart. God knows whether the hearts are circumcised. Do you see what was happening here? There was a pride, and even if you were a true Jew in the fleshly sense by birth, you could not be a true Jew toward God unless the heart was right. Even with the true Jews who were worshipping God the way they thought was right - even they hated the Gentiles!

Now, I want you to see the depth of this thing, the pain of it, the severing of the separation, the great gulf that was between the Jew and the Gentile. Even when a Gentile wanted to worship and follow the true and the living God, they had to become a Jew. You can read about Ruth, she had to become a Jew. Rahab had to become a Jew. You couldn't be a Gentile and be saved, you had to change to be a Jew. You see, in the Jewish mind, Jerusalem and the temple was the place, the only place, where God's name was. No other nation, no other people, no other shrine was there but the one to the true and the living God - there in the centre of the universe in Jerusalem. Even the very Gentiles were forbidden to enter into the inner temple area, on pain of death.

Now here's the punchline: you're a Gentile! Have you got it? Now I know there's one that's not a Gentile here, but most of you are Gentiles. Do you know what that means? You are hated! Hated! Hated! In times past, to be born in Ulster, you were hated of the people of God. To be born in Europe, to be born a non-Jew, to be born a Gentile, you were despised of God's people - unclean, you were the dogs of the universe! Then we see in verse 12 (b) that not only does Paul say that they were hated and despised but he says that they were Christless: 'Ye were without Christ'. Now, of course, we all were without Christ before we were saved, weren't we? But that's not what that means. You could read it like this: 'Ye were without Messiah', that's what it means. You see, the Messiah belonged to the Jews. The Messiah was not promised to the Gentiles, the Messiah was promised to Israel. Although it is predicted in the Old Testament, and throughout the word of God, that the blessing and the benefits of Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, would flow through to every nation and every man through His ministry - yet He would be born a Jew. He said Himself: 'Salvation is of
the Jew'. He said also that He had come primarily to minister to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. I want you to paint this picture in your mind: you were despised! You were Christless!

Thirdly, verse 12 says that we were aliens. We were without Christ: 'Being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel'. What does alien mean? Well, it simply means this: one who does not belong. A stranger, a foreigner, a person who has no rights to be in a specific place, they have no privilege of citizenship. Now, do you see it? The Gentiles were hated, absolutely despised. The Gentiles had no hope of Messiah or Christ. The Gentiles were aliens, alienated - they didn't belong to God, they didn't belong to God's commonwealth, God's promises, God's word, God's prophet. They didn't belong! Now get it! You were despised! You were Christless! You don't belong! It's awful, isn't it?

Fourthly, it says, look at verse 12: 'Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise'. Who were the covenants made to? Think about it. Go to the Old Testament: there was the Abrahamic covenant made to Abraham, there was the covenant made to Noah, there's the covenant made to Isaac, to Jacob, to Moses, to David, to Solomon. There's covenants throughout the Old Testament, right throughout it all, but they were all to Jews - not to those that were hated, not to those who were without the hope of Messiah, who were aliens, who were strangers. What an awful picture it is to think what it must have been like before Christ was born, before the gospel was given, to be a Gentile! There was no hope! There was no gospel! There was no free will or free choice there, because you were rejected.

Then we see under (e) that it was hopeless. You're without Christ, you're aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise: 'having no hope' - hopeless! Can you imagine what it would have been like to live in a nation that was a Gentile nation? You hadn't the one true living God as your God. You would go into battle, and you wouldn't know whether you would come out of it again. You would go to fight for your country, and you didn't know whether your country was going to win or not, because you didn't have the prophet of God to guide you as to what to do. You didn't have any sacrifices of oblation to make to God, to make sure that God's smile was upon you and that you were walking in the will of God - awful! That's what it was like nationally. In the government, and in the country, you didn't know when another nation was going to flood in and destroy and rape and pillage the whole place, and loot it and take over. You didn't know when an empire was going to come and become your dominators in a national, political, religious way. You didn't have any assurance - nationally they were hopeless! Well, what if you were individuals? You were a wee woman in a wee tent, and you couldn't be a soldier, and you couldn't be a politician. You didn't really care what was going on in government or on the battlefield. Well, you had no hope individually! Now picture this: you didn't know what was going to happen to you after the grave. You hadn't God's word to tell you. You hadn't the prophets of Israel, because you didn't belong to the commonwealth or the promises of Israel, and there just this blackness of darkness forever where it was concerned with God.

You can even see it 500 years BC before the Lord Jesus Christ. A man called Theogines (sp?) wrote this - listen: 'I will try to have a good time while I'm young, and I shall leave the sunlight that I loved, then I shall see no more. Have a good time my soul. While young have a good time. Soon others will take my place, and I shall be black earth in death. No mortal is happy under the sun' - that was 2,500 years ago. What are young people saying today? 'Go out and enjoy yourself! Forget about God, and religion, and good living. Go out and enjoy yourself, because one day you're going to die. You'll never be able to enjoy yourself again. Life is just as long as it is, then it ends, then you're buried, dead, and done for. Your life's out like a candle'. Nothing's changed under the sun, has it? You can go to the Roman poet, Callitus (sp?), in 500BC, and this is what he said:
The sun can set and rise again,
But once our brief life sets
There is one unending night
To be slept through'.

No hope! This is a Roman - a Gentile from Italy. He had no hope of anything before him or after him. There was no God, no Heaven, just like today! The first century was the age of suicide, and Taccidus (sp?) tells of a man who killed himself in indignation that he had been born. Remember Job? He cursed the day of his birth. Do you remember Solomon going through that great book of Ecclesiastes, going into everything that the world, the devil, the flesh, intellect and pleasure could give to him? And at the end of it all: 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!'. This was his conclusion: 'Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die!'. It's all there is! You would think, in all their intelligence, that they could think up something new and better than that, couldn't they? But they can't. There was a Social Darwinist called Herbert Spence, and he wrote this - this is more recent now: 'My own feeling respecting the ultimate mystery is such that I cannot even try to think of it without some feeling of terror, so that I habitually shun the thought'. Have you got it? This is the mind of the Gentile: 'Live on as you're living. Live on in paganism and all your idolatry, all your materialism, and the first feeling or thought of God: shun it! Darken it! Forget about it! Put it into the recesses of your conscience, your mind, your spirit, and bury it!'. Oh, what it would be to be a Gentile!

Paul goes on to say not only were they hopeless, but they were pagan - verse 12: 'Having no hope, and without God in the world'. Now that doesn't mean 'without a god in the world'. Boy, they had plenty of gods! They had gods of stone, gods of wood, gods of the spirit, gods of the forest, gods of the sea, god of the mountain, god of the sky and the clouds. They have so many gods, you couldn't remember them all! Oh, they had plenty of gods, but when it came to the one true living God they were atheists. It's interesting, isn't it, that the pagan world - we tend to think of the pagan world as irreligious, and it's not. It's the exact opposite. The pagan world is intoxicated with religion! They want all the religion they can get, all the temples, all the shrines, all the offerings, all the rules and regulations, yet at the end of it all they were without God! Without the true and the living God. What would it be like to be hated? To be Christless? To be rejected? To be an alien and a stranger? To be hopeless? - and then at the end of it all to realise, as you got to the bottom of the barrel, that you're without God? That's where you would be if it wasn't for Christ. There'd be no hope for you. But it's wonderful - isn't it? - because we turn to verse 13, and in verse 13 we see not alienation but salvation. Paul was saying: 'Yes, the Jews were even closer than you Gentiles because they had the truth, you were in darkness', but even though that was the case Paul begins again to sum them all together as one - and he's almost going into what he went into in Romans 3:23, where he said there is no difference: 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God'.

Now I want to try and put right a mistake that many believe - and some would say that some Bible notes have led people astray on this truth. The Jew was never saved through works! No man or woman is saved in the eyes of God through works! They were never saved through sacrifice, because Hebrews tells us that the blood of bulls and goats can never ever take away sin. They were never saved through ritual or through the law, because we read in Galatians that the law was the schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. The law was the mirror to show us our dirty face before God, to show us that we had fallen short of the glory of God. But those things, all those covenants of promise and ordinances, could never save the Jew - even the Jew! Before they knew who Messiah was, before they had the light of the knowledge that He would come, where He would be born, what He would do - listen: if a Jew was saved, listen, they were saved by the blood of Christ! Now, we need to get that. You see, the cross, just as it is a tree, the Jews before the Lord Jesus Christ and the cross were leaning towards that tree. Everybody after the cross, if they want to be saved, if they want to go to Glory and have their sins forgiven, must be leaning backward upon that cross. Isn't that right? The prophets, the psalmists, what were they doing? They were looking forward. 'Was it not the spirit of Christ within them', Peter says, 'that was testifying of Christ and the hope that would come through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ?'. Oh, that's what this salvation is about. Look at (a): it's in Christ!
Verse 13: 'But now'. It's like that other wee verse, verse 4 - isn't it? - where God brings the great transition. Everything looks dark, I love the way Paul does it: he's painting a terrible, dismal, stormy picture of our sin and our state before God and then, all of a sudden, it's as if he just gets the paper and rips it all away and says: 'But God! In Christ, now, He has done a new thing!'. He has brought the Gentile from the place of alienation to be, Paul says, 'in Christ'. Now, this is what this means: because the believer, even the Gentile alienated believer, is in Christ he's as near to God as Christ is. What is he saying? 'But now in Christ ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh', made near, made close, 'by the blood of Christ'. You can read it [in] Colossians 1:21,22: 'You, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight'. Paul says it again in Colossians 3:3: 'Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God'.

There was one year at the Keswick convention and there was a speaker called George Silwood (sp?). And a wee man after the meeting came up to him and said: 'You know, it's wonderful, isn't it, to be safe in the arms of Jesus? Isn't it wonderful?'. Do you know what Mr Silwood said to him? 'Son, I have something better than that'. 'How can you have something better than to be safe in the arms of Jesus?', he said. Listen: 'I am safe AS AN ARM of Jesus!'. What does the word of God say? 'We are His flesh. We are His body. We are the body of Christ. We are part of Him'. This is what gets me about this 'saved and lost' doctrine. I can't understand it, for with the body of Christ there's no amputation, there's no decapitation! I am engrafted in Christ and just as a part of His body can never be lost, I can never be lost! It's just as well, isn't it? For I would be lost and the reason why I can't be lost is, as Paul says, that I am saved in Christ: 'who were sometimes afar off', verse 13, 'made nigh' - how? - 'by the blood of Christ'.

The Crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ was the greatest crime that ever took place in humanity. If you were wanting to give it a name you would call it Deicide. It's one thing to lift your hand or to slay another human being, but this was God incarnate. Men lifted their hands, and the greatest demonstration of man's sinfulness was when they slew the Son of God. Yet the word of God shows us the divine sovereignty of God the Father, as we look on the humanity of what is going on, and it seems that these wicked men are lifting Christ and slaying Christ; that we read within the word of God that He was delivered by the determinant counsel and foreknowledge of God. This was no mistake. He laid His life down. The miraculous thing about it is this, as the hymn says:

'The very spear that pierced His side
Drew forth the blood to save!!'.

How are we made near? You've seen - haven't you? - I hope you've seen tonight how far off from God we were. It's not simply about not being saved. It was the fact that we were not saved and we were Gentiles. But He has brought us near by the blood of the cross, and there at Calvary you can see the wickedness of man - and it's embodied in the soldier taking the spear and piercing the side of the Lord, and the blood and the water flowing. Yet from that wounded side came the demonstration, the greatest of all, of the love and the grace and the mercy of God bringing us near by the blood of the cross. The little hymn says this:

'Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or take away one stain'.

Enoch Powell once gave a speech called the 'Rivers of Blood', but those rivers of blood he talked about were nothing like the rivers of blood that were shed on Palestinian grounds. Think of it! On a daily basis - blood
everywhere, blood being shed, lives being taken to sacrifice - as they saw it - to cover over their sin, but the word of God says that none of those rivers and oceans of blood could ever take away sin. Do you know why? Because none of that blood came from a victim that had any intrinsic value. Whatever you do, don't listen to anyone or anything that demeans the blood of Christ. For this is the blood of God incarnate. This is the precious blood of a Lamb without blemish and without spot. This is the blood of the Lamb of God:

'But Christ the heavenly lamb
Takes all our sins away
A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they'.

For only the blood of Christ had atoning power. Only the blood of Christ - and I say it reverently - was the blood of God. It took that blood to bring an alienated Gentile close to Christ! The wee hymn says:

'So near, so very near to God,
Nearer I could not be.
For in the person of His Son,
I am as near as He.

So dear, so very dear to God,
Dearer I could not be.
The love wherewith He loves the Son,
Such is His love to me'.

Hallelujah! What a salvation! Then thirdly, there's alienation, salvation, and then Paul talks about reconciliation. He says in verse 14: 'For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us'. He is our peace. Now notice it doesn't say this, it doesn't say: 'He makes our peace'. Now He does make our peace, but that's not what this says. He, the person Christ Jesus, is our peace. How is he? This is the first thing, (a) by union: 'He is our peace who hath made both one'. This is hard to say in Northern Ireland, it's controversial, but when you get saved you lose your nationality. You're not a Gentile any more. You're not dying or fighting for any flag in particular - it's the King of kings and the Lord of lords you follow now. Christ has brought these two warring factions, these two combatants together - sworn enemies, Jew and Gentile - and made them one, because now He has a chosen generation, a royal priesthood and holy nation - and it's not the United Kingdom! Then He talks about demolition. He says not only has He made both one, but: 'He hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us'. What Paul is alluding to here is [that] there was a wall within Herod's temple, and it was the wall that separated the Gentiles from the outer court to the inner holy place - they weren't allowed in. If you look into the history books you find this: that Josephus writes, and indeed archaeologists have found it in 1871 and they found another inscription in 1934, that upon that wall separating the Jew from the Gentile was written this - listen: 'Let no one of any other nation come within the fence and the barrier around the holy place. Whosoever will be taken doing so, will himself be responsible for the fact that his death will ensue'.

Isn't that powerful? But what does Jesus do? There on the cross He lifts His holy hands and He demolishes by the dynamite of the cross any wall of separation between us and God, between us and God's people. Then, in verse 15, he says that He has abolished [in His] flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in the ordinances. What's He talking about? He's talking about there at Calvary's cross, the Lord Jesus Christ abolished the law. Now, the law was good and the law was holy, because the law was from God, wasn't it? But you see, sinful men had lifted the law and made it a badge for religion, and said that unless you had been given the law you couldn't know God. So Jesus Christ, on the cross through His blood, wiped it away! The word of God says that for us Gentiles and for the Jews that couldn't keep the law anyway, He was
made a curse. He was cursed by the curse of the law, that we would be free from the curse. Then further on, verse 15 (d), you see creation because Christ has made one new thing, He has made the church of Jesus Christ. This is a thing that had never happened in history past, and don't believe the false doctrine that Israel in the Old Testament Scriptures is the church, and that the New Testament church is the continuation of Israel. God had never done this before! Never had He united Jew and Gentile. Never had He made them unique. Never had people on the earth lost their national identity. Never could people become the body of Jesus Christ. Never ever could the Jew be free from the law and never could they reign with Christ on the earth in a millennial reign, they were always the subjects.

He brought pacification - peace between them, reconciliation through the blood of His cross. Not only have we been reconciled to one another, but the word of God says we have been reconciled to God. Verse 18, one of the greatest things of all, through His living resurrected life, His ascension to Glory, and His intercessory ministry we can come - both of us, Jew, Gentile, ex-Protestant, ex-Catholic - can come to God by one Spirit.

'The veil is rent, our souls draw near
Unto a Throne of Grace.
The merits of the Lord appear,
They fill the Holy Place.

His precious blood has spoken there,
Before and on the Throne
And His own wounds in Heaven declare:
The atoning work is done!

'Tis finished! Here our souls have rest,
His work can never fail.
By Him, our sacrifice and Priest,
We pass within the veil.

Within the holiest of all,
Cleansed by His precious blood.
Before the Throne we prostrate fall,
And worship Thee, oh God!'.

Do you believe you have a wonderful salvation? Do you? You do! And if it wasn't for Christ we would have no hope!

Our loving Father, we thank Thee for the Lord Jesus Christ who has given us Gentiles hope. Oh God, we so often think how we've been saved from sin, but we never ever think of how we've been saved from being despised and aliens and strangers to the commonwealth of God. But yet a God of grace and mercy loved us: for God so loved the world that He gave His Son. We thank Thee, dear God, that we have entered into these blessings. Help us never to be unthankful - and we say, Lord, hallelujah, what a mighty Saviour we have! Take our thanks, in Jesus' name, Amen.
Ephesians - Chapter 12
"God's New Home"

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Let's come before the Lord before we open the word of God tonight, and ask His help as we turn to His word - that He will bless us and speak to us in a mighty way. Let's bow and let's pray together. Please pray also; don't just be waiting on me praying, we're praying together to the Lord, so let's bow before Him now.

Our Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of being numbered in the church of Jesus Christ. We thank Thee that we are lively stones making up that building and built upon the Living Stone, the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, we bless Thee for our Lord, for the Captain of our salvation, for the Alpha and Omega, the Author and Finisher of our faith - the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee that He bought us, not with corruptible but with incorruptible - His very own blood, there where He shed every ruby drop for us in love. We thank Thee that He shed it for us who were sinners - alienated from the commonwealth of Israel - those who were doomed and damned in their sin, yet what a miracle: that we have been brought nigh by the blood of Christ. Lord we thank Thee, we ask tonight that we would have our appreciation deepened of what the Lord Jesus accomplished for us there at Calvary. Oh Lord, come among us and be one of our number and show us the Lord Jesus. Holy Spirit, we ask Thee this evening: reveal Christ to us from the word of God, show us He whom our souls desire and love. Come and show us Jesus Christ, our risen Saviour and Intercessor. Lord, there are many with varied needs in this place tonight and we just pray that the word of God may meet their need. Whatever the message is - that it would be for them, that they would find food, satisfaction, refreshment from the preaching of the living word of God. We pray for all those who are sick at this time. We think very especially of those who are just after operations, those who are facing treatment in the days that lie ahead, those who are bereaved and still sorrowing loved ones - some of them here with us tonight. Lord, we pray that they may know the word of God to be an encouragement to them, to uplift them, to sooth and succour their hearts. And after they see the Lord Jesus Christ, we pray that they would know that their Redeemer liveth and that He is there to help them in their time of need. So Lord, we need Thee now - preacher and people in the pew alike. We ask for Thy Spirit and we ask for Thy help. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Turn with me to the book of Ephesians again and chapter 2, Ephesians chapter 2. Now, I've a touch of the cold again, so if you don't mind a few funny noises, I don't mind at all. So if you can bear listening to me tonight, hopefully the word of God will be a blessing to your hearts. Now, we're almost finished (not Ephesians now, don't jump ahead of yourself) Ephesians chapter 2, and we're going to read from verses 19 to 22. Hopefully you will remember from the last study that we had, from verses 13 to 18, the subject that we were upon. We thought about the alienation of the Gentiles and we looked at the fact that, of course, we are Gentiles because we are non-Jews. We were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. We were outside the promises of God that was given to His race: the Jews.

So not only have we learnt that we were dead in our trespasses and in our sins, but we were also separated from God in the fact that we were Gentiles. So the plot deepened, didn't it? It got blacker and blacker - the
predicament that we were in. But twice we have already come across a phrase that has warmed our hearts: 'But God'. Wonderful, isn't it? 'But God who is rich in mercy' - and then we learnt again - 'But God' has brought us nigh. He has demolished the middle barrier, wall of partition between us, between us and the Jews, and between us and the Jewish God. He has brought together the two enemies of all time: the Jews and the Gentiles, and He has made - and note this - 'one new man'. Not something that the world has ever seen before. It's not the Jews dressed up. It's not the nation of Israel. It's not even spiritual Israel. It is one new man.

So we're going to look, this evening at verses 19 to 22, and what Paul seeks to do within these verses is give a further explanation of what he has been saying already in the verses that we looked at in our last study. Verse 19 of chapter 2: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit".

In our very first study in the book of Ephesians, we saw how Paul obviously was writing to the church in Ephesus. Of course, you know that the Ephesians were Gentiles, they were not Jews. Now Paul, we have noticed, differentiates when he's talking about the Jews and when he's talking about the Gentiles in this little book. When he talks of the Jews he talks of 'we' - 'We were privileged to first have the gospel of Christ' - do you remember that? But then, when he turns to the Gentiles, he changes and he talks to 'you' - 'You who were dead in trespasses and in sins. You who were strangers from the commonwealth of Israel, foreigners, aliens, cut off from the promises and the covenants of God'. Do you see the difference? Now again, in verse 19, he says it again: 'Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God'.

Wasn't it beautiful to see how God has done a new thing? God has taken people who were archenemies down all the eras of time, and He has united them together in one new organism: the church of Jesus Christ. We've seen how we're saved, brought near to God. In the last study we looked at how we have been brought near to one another - the Jews to the Gentiles - and we have seen how the mystery that Paul had seen for the first time ever in all of history. Remember, we said that a mystery was something that had never been revealed before. It was not found in the Old Testament scriptures. It's not found in the Gospels, but it has been revealed now through the writings that we are reading. All of a sudden he sees, from the eye of God, this new thing: the church of Jesus Christ.

Now, we read within the New Testament that the church of Jesus Christ is described in two aspects. The first aspect comprises all the believers from Pentecost to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to the air, to the rapture - all those who are born again, from that point in this present dispensation, when the Holy Ghost came to when the Holy Ghost will go again, and we will go with Him. But then there is a second sense, for in the book of Corinthians we read about an aggregate church. In other words, the church of Jesus Christ made up not only of those who are alive at this moment upon the earth, but made up of those both militant upon the earth and those resident in heaven already. Have you got it? So there are two senses of the church in scripture. There is a sense that the church is made up of all the believers who are now upon the earth and alive, and also alive in Christ. That can be described as the church, but there is a greater sense also: that the church is all those who have died in Christ, and are asleep in Christ and have gone to be with Christ, and one day will rise again - and we that are alive and remain will be caught up together with the Lord in the air. That's another sense of the church of Jesus Christ.

But the point that Paul wants us to get is that there is this body of Christ - a new thing, a mystery, God's masterpiece, God's poem. We've seen that in the body of Christ there are no distinctions. There are no national distinctions, no racial distinctions, political distinctions are eradicated and destroyed. Right
throughout the whole world all distinctions, all barriers, have been broken down, done away with. That is why Paul, continually, if you look at the passage, repeats this word 'one'. 'One man' - to emphasise the unifying work of Christ. Look at verse 14: 'He hath made both one'. Verse 15: 'One new man'. Verse 16: 'One body'. Verse 18: 'One Spirit'. He is trying to get across, and the Spirit of God is getting across, this fact: that it's no longer two. It's no longer 101 nations in the world, for when you come to faith in Christ you become a member of the church and effectively, and spiritually, you lose your nationality and your political allegiance, and you become one in Christ. Isn't that marvellous? All - now listen! - all spiritual division ends with Christ. Kent Hughes (and I'm very fond of writings and I would recommend them to you) says this: 'The death of Christ has created a new humanity - a third race, as it has been called from the early centuries'.

Think of that! A third type of people, a new creation, a new race that is different, that the world has never seen before or will ever see again. Can you think as these Ephesians read about this and as they were sitting in their Gentile flesh, what it meant for them? The stupendous significance of the fact that those - they who were cut off from God through all time - had now been brought near, had now been glued to the Jewish nation, God's chosen race. They had now entered into the promises of God's people of old, they had become a third race. He puts it like this: 'Interlopers became insiders, aliens became heirs, and the lowest class became the first class'. We saw that the Gentile was in a place of hatred, wasn't he? He was despised, he was cut off, he was alienated from the very centre of all God's promises and purposes and plans. The Gentile could never enter into them or touch them, but now through this miracle of grace, through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and through God's new creation of the church of Jesus Christ - now they have been brought right into the dining table of God's goodness and grace. Calvin put it like this: 'Those who were formerly profane, formerly unworthy, have now become partners with the godly. They have now the rights of citizens along with Abraham, with all the holy patriarchs and prophets and kings. Nay, better than that - with the angels themselves!'.

Now I want us this evening to enter in a little further into the significance of what it means to be one in Christ. Now, I've got to confess something with you, that I feel in Ulster, and indeed in the church of Jesus Christ at large, and in my own personal life - that I do not come to grips satisfactorily with the implications of the word of God. Now, don't get me wrong: I'm not saying I don't understand the word of God. I'm not saying I don't read it, or I don't study it. What I am saying is this: we often do not come to grips, practically speaking, with the implications of what the Holy Ghost tells us through the word of God. We are told to work out our salvation, but that entails and presupposes that we think out our salvation. You don't do before you think, or at least you ought not to do. So if you're going to do, and you're going to work out your salvation, and try to live for God, what are you going to do? What steps are you going to take? And what are those steps in relation to what Paul is talking about here 'in the unity of the church of Jesus Christ'? Now, I want you to think about this - really think about it! All the barriers are down - that's what Paul says - Christ has demolished, with the dynamite of the cross and the Gospel, the middle wall of partition dividing God from men, and dividing men from one another.

Now, if that is so I want us to look at some scriptures. Turn with me to Ephesians 2, where you are, but verse 12 this time. We're going to get this at the background before we look at any of the other books or scriptures, to see what Paul is driving home here. 'That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world' - so he's starting at that premise. Chapter 3 and verse 6: 'That the Gentiles' - talking about salvation now, and this is the outcome - 'That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel'. You see now what's happened - the middle wall of division has just fallen down.

Now let's see the implications of this. Turn with me to Galatians chapter 3 and verse 26 to 28. Now we can't go into the whole gamut of what these verses really mean this evening, but what I'm wanting you to get is
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Pastor David Legge

this: the barriers are down! Verse 28, chapter 3: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise' - divisions that men make. Turn back to Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 11 - what is he saying? He talked about the Jews as being the Circumcision and the non-Jews, the Gentiles, as being the Uncircumcision but what is the little parenthesis that he puts on at the end of what he calls the Jews the Circumcision? He says the Circumcision 'made by the hands of men'. What are the divisions we have read about in Galatians chapter 3? 'Neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female' - divisions that were hijacked by the religion of the day, divisions that were made by men. So not only has the division come down - that wall of partition between God and men, between men and one another - but also that wall of rules that divided the clean from the unclean, the rules that we find within the word of God, the rules of cleanliness. But we must go further, because Paul talks about it as the 'things made by the hands of men'.

Let's go to 2 Corinthians this time and chapter 5. Now this - now come on, let's think about this now, these words, because these words have rattled me in the week that has gone by. Verse 16 is absolute dynamite - wait till you hear this! 'Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh' - now what does that mean? You know what it literally means? We don't look at anybody now in a worldly way. Do you do that? You don't look at a person as what religion they are. You don't look at a person as whether they're black or white, whether they're poor or rich - because there's no barriers anymore. Now, don't get me wrong: I'm not saying that everyone has entered into salvation because of this. Just wait for what I'm going to say to you, but let's look at this: 'Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God'.

What is Paul saying? What are all these verses saying? Well, perhaps we can answer them by me posing to you a few searching questions. Now, let's try and answer this: have we, as evangelical believers, erected barriers to the gospel of Jesus Christ? Have we? You see, if you search the New Testament you will only find one barrier to coming to Christ, and that is Christ. That is the gospel, that is the stumbling block, isn't it? That is the rock of offence, that is the thing that men ought to stumble over - but what we ought not to do, and what the New Testament forbids us doing, is putting other little stumbling blocks in front of those things, or after that thing. Do you understand? We are not to erect any additional barriers to people coming to Christ, other than Christ Himself, His claims and His Gospel, His cross and His blood.

Now, second question: do we judge how spiritual other Christians are by how much they're like us? Do we? Think about that! Thirdly: is our ministry one of reconciliation? Paul says we are ambassadors - ambassadors of reconciliation. It's as if we were standing in God's place, in Christ's stead, pleading: 'Be ye reconciled to God'. What he's saying is this: we have been reconciled by the blood of Christ to God - there's no more enmity between us and God - and we have a message of reconciliation to men, that they can be reconciled to God. But if they are reconciled to God, there is the opportunity and the potential for them to be reconciled to one another.

Now, I have been struck by the relevance of this message to our wee land. Because I am reconciled to God, I can be reconciled to those I am trying to spread the gospel among. I can potentially be reconciled to everyone in the world! Have you, and have I, and have we in our little land become so familiar, so eloquent with the gospel that we know so well from the word of God, that we have become ignorant of one of the crux things about it - that it is a message of reconciliation.
Now, how do you know whether that's the case in your life? Well, I begun to think about this and I thought to myself: well, if I'm hindered going to a certain district with the gospel because of a political allegiance or religious allegiance, or if I can't bring myself to speak to an individual because they have a certain political or religious persuasion - do you know what I believe the New Testament teaches? That we are seriously compromising the gospel! Now, I know that this isn't very popular perhaps where we live, but I'm not really concerned about that. I'm concerned about what God says. And the chances are down all of history, the message of God isn't very popular, sure it's not? Now, let's think about this in our minds - the implications.

Do you remember Paul had to stand in front of Peter to his face and rebuke him, because he was the one who talked about the great things that God was going to do with the Gentiles? He was the one who was given the vision. Remember the vision? 'All of what you see, Peter, you go and eat'. But he was the one that wouldn't eat with the Gentiles, isn't that right? What did Paul say effectively he was doing? He was compromising the gospel!

We can also have Christian barriers - not just barriers between us and the world that don't need to be there, but I don't know whether you've heard of black churches. That's - what I mean is not black on the outside but the people that go to them are black - ethnic churches. Maybe it's in a multi-cultural society, and all the black people go to one church, the Indian people go to another church, the white people go to another church. They're all believers, born-again, but they all segregate into their different races and cultures, and the teaching of the word of God and the teaching of the apostle Paul clearly states that this is a failure of the mystery of Christ. Now I know that like attracts like, I know that! I know that we are more comfortable with them that we know, than them that we don't know - but the New Testament isn't into being comfortable, the New Testament is into truth. And the truth is this: that when Christ died at the cross all barriers came down. For anyone who receives Him, it doesn't matter whether they're white, whether they were a Protestant, whether they were a Roman Catholic, whether they were Buddhist, Mormon, Jehovah's Witness, whether they were poor or rich - no matter what they are they are all one in Christ! Now, that's the message. If you take away from it, it's not the message. If you add to it, it's not the same message. You've got to keep it pure, the way it has been given to us in the word of God. Now this shakes me, because a monolithic church - that simply means a one-cultural church - in a multi-cultural society is a failure!

Now, listen! This is upon my heart. We pride ourselves here in Ulster for the heritage that we have, don't we? Often when we're evangelising we say that people here have heard it that much that they don't want it any more, and we'd be better going to Africa or somewhere to take the gospel to people that have never heard it before. I wonder, are we committing this sin at times? Because there are 46% of the population of Ulster that perhaps have never heard the gospel once - almost half of the population. A few hundred of them are about 500 yards down the road. Now, let's get to grips here. I don't know whether religious or political heckles, or hairs on the back of your neck are starting to come up - and if that's so, that's good because you're starting to interchange and interact with the word of God and what the Spirit of God is trying to bring to your heart now. It can be in our attitude to those outside the church. It can even be in our attitude to those within the church. If you go to America, you can go early in the morning for the old folk's meeting, then you can go a little bit later for the middle-agers, and then later on in the morning you can go for the young people's service. That's the same idea: they have not grasped the concept that the church of Jesus Christ is all different types of people joined together in Christ! You can't dilute it. You can't sever it. It's one new man. It's something different. It's something that God wants to do.

Now the challenge - come on! What about our wee land? People in Ulster that have never heard the gospel? Yes! People in Ulster that are likely never going to hear the gospel, because many of us aren't taking it to them. Isn't it interesting that in 1859, and in other awakenings where the Spirit of God came in a mighty way in salvation in Ulster - it only hit the Protestant community. Now, you might say: 'David, you're confusing a lot of things here. Paul's talking about unity in Christ with those who are saved'. I know, but don't you say
that when you preach the gospel, or when you talk to a soul, you look at them potentially as someone who can be saved, don't you? No matter what you believe. Now, therefore you must look at a person who are witnessing to and preaching to as potentially someone who can be reconciled to you. Are we getting to grips with what the Scripture says? If Ephesians tells us nothing, do you know what it does tell us? Christ is all we have. Nothing less, but nothing more! It's not Christ and the law - that's what Paul told the Galatians. It's not Christ and circumcision - he told them that as well. It's not Christ and your church, or Christ and the Mormon church, or the Jehovah's Witnesses - it's Christ alone!

Our value, and our status ladder, and the things that we think are important, really don't matter too much, because it's not simply down to what is truth - it's down to who is the truth, and if we have Him we have the truth, and everyone who has Him has the truth. Do you understand? We are united with Him, that is the only thing that brings us together. It's not whether we're Baptist, or whether we're Methodist, or whether we're Presbyterian or Episcopalian, or whatever particular denomination we are - that's not what brings us together in common. All we have is not a name, but the name of Christ! Therefore, in order that Paul brings home to us this real, new thing, this mystery that God has done, this one man that He has brought to being that can revolutionise a nation like Northern Ireland. Where we can go to someone who was born in a different way than you were born, and say: 'Listen, I have a Saviour that died for sinners, and you're a sinner - and I don't care whether you go to chapel or church - you need to know that Christ loves you! And I'm not going to let any political or religious barrier stop me telling you that!'

We do, don't we? I thought today - and I know this couldn't happen - but if the apostle Paul came for fellowship here in the Iron Hall, and he became a member. Where would be the first place he would go to? Where would it be? It wouldn't be too far down the road, would it? Do you think we could stop him? No! By all means he wants to save some, and it wouldn't matter whether when he was down there he got a beating, and he was left for dead, because that happened to him! It wouldn't matter if they took him and they pushed him into the docks, tried to drown him, tied something heavy to him - it wouldn't matter because he had a heart of love for the lost! It wasn't just his brand of lost, for there's only the lost.

So Paul is wanting us to see that this great salvation encompasses everyone who is washed in the blood of Christ, no matter who they are, where they come from or what they've done. There's three descriptions and pictures that he gives to show us that. The first you see on your handout is a nation, the second is a family, and the third is a temple. Paul is saying this great new race - the third new race of humanity that is undivided, is reconciled to God and one another. He begins to describe in more depth what they are actually like. The first thing is he says they're a 'new nation'. Let's read the verse together - verse 19: 'Now therefore ye are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints'. Now you know what it' like, don't you, when you feel national pride. Maybe you're at the cenotaph and you hear 'The Last Post' being played over a flag-shrouded coffin of one who died for freedom and democracy. There in the depths of your heart there wells up a feeling of national pride. Maybe you're at the sports field and you're watching there, or maybe you're playing for your country, and when they strike up the national anthem you feel that tingle of knowing that you're standing there for your country - and your posture straightens and something indescribable happens psychologically and emotionally. It's called national pride.

Now, in ancient times, and to the people who Paul the apostle was writing to, it was something even greater than our national pride here in Ulster. For in the Greek Roman culture to which Paul was writing to in Ephesus, citizenship was the highest personal thing that you could have. Being linked to a polis - to a city, metropolis - to a city was the greatest thing that you could have. It spoke of your identity in every way. Even the very laws of the city, as far as you were concerned, was part of your being - they defined who you were and what you were. The members of that city - you'd consider as your lifelong friends, and there was never a wrong word as far as could be possible between you and a fellowcitizen. You remember how it was talked so much in ancient days of what it was to be a citizen of Rome - do you remember what a great pride it was? So
much so that Paul himself appealed to it one occasion. That is why, in verse 19, Paul reveals something amazing to these Ephesians about the fact that they are no longer simply naturalised. They're not simply any longer Ephesians. The person that is saved who was a Greek is not simply a Greek, or a Roman a Roman, or a Jew a Jew, or an Ulsterman an Ulsterman; but he is saying this: that you become supernaturalised. You become a citizen of God's new city!

Do you see the picture? No longer strangers, no longer foreigners, but fellowcitizens with God's people. They are now, as one writer says: 'Of the supreme cosmopolitan community, the third city of the universe'. There is a teaching that's going round in our nation, and in our city, and in the world, called 'British Israelism'. It says that we here in Ulster, and a few other places, comprise a few of the lost tribes of Israel. Now, see when I was studying this truth of how we are all reconciled in Christ, and we have become one new man, and Paul's saying here: 'It doesn't really matter whether you're a Jew, whether you're Greek, whether you're Roman, whether you're bond or free, because we're all the same, we're all one in Christ'. So why would you be worried whether you were British, or whether you were Israelite, in the first place? Isn't that true? What does it matter? Doesn't matter anything to me! It doesn't add to my blessings, it doesn't take any of my blessings away. Why? Because my blessings are one - Christ! All the blessings that I have are in Christ! You can't get any more than that, you can't take away from that. This is something more than all this arguing over nationalities and politics.

We know from the word of God that Israel was God's chosen nation, weren't they? But what did they do? They rejected God's Christ. They rejected the Redeemer, and we read in the word of God that they suffered for the consequences, and the New Testament teaches us that the kingdom was taken from Israel and, it says: 'given to' - quote - 'a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof'. What is that nation? It is the new nation of the church. As Peter says: 'A chosen generation, a holy nation, a peculiar people'. If you turn to Genesis 10 for a moment - turn to it, for I don't think we're going to get through our study tonight, but it's important that we understand these things. You see that the Old Testament nations were understood by their descent from three men: Shem, Ham and Japheth. On all the nations indeed of the world today, a few of them hybrids and mixtures one with the other, but most of them you could probably trace back (and I would recommend Harry Lacey's little book: 'God and the Nations') to these three: Shem, Ham and Japheth. Now if you turn to the Acts - turn to the Acts now - Acts chapter 8. This is wonderful, because in Acts chapter 8 and verse 27 you remember Philip was preaching the word of God, and the Holy Spirit took him and transported him to a place where there was nobody only one man sitting reading a portion of the word of God. Who was he? He was the Ethiopian eunuch, he was a descendant of Ham - right? That's chapter 8. Go on to chapter 9 verse 1, what does it say? 'Saul of Tarsus' - a descendant of Shem. Acts chapter 10, look at verse 1 of chapter 10: 'Cornelius the soldier'. Guess what? A descendant of Japheth! Isn't that wonderful? The Holy Spirit is showing us: Shem, Ham, Japheth - the whole nation of the human race - all of them can be one in Christ!

We've seen in the weeks that have gone by what sin has done, haven't we? How it has separated families, how it has broken up nations, and even churches in the day in which we live. Sin speaks of death, sin speaks of separation - but Christ and His cross speaks of reconciliation. The church of Jesus Christ - and we must never forget this - means belonging. Everybody wants to belong today, don't they? To the fact of what religion you are, what colour you are. To the fact even of what football team you support. It's a sense, believe it or not, of belonging, of wanting to be in the 'in crowd', wanting to fit in. In the church of Jesus Christ, do you know what we have? We have a language of the heart that is common, it is the word of God. We have, like a nation, a heritage and a history that is common. We have an allegiance that ought to supersede all other loyalties of national and political that we can think of. We have a common goal together - the glory of God and the uplifting of Jesus Christ. And to top it all we even all have a final destination: heaven! It's the community of faith, and we have more in common - all of us in this little room who are saved - than all of the nations in the world, yet do you know what the surprising thing is? We still find things to fight about. Isn't that right? We miss the wood for the trees sometimes. We forget what we have had done for us through
the blood of Christ in reconciling us to God - that's the greatest thing - and then reconciling us to the person sitting beside you.

In Philippians 3 and verse 20 we read this wonderful verse: 'Our conversation' - or our citizenship - 'is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour'. Or as another translation puts it: 'and from there we eagerly await a Saviour' - from there! The Lord Jesus Christ! Do you know what he's trying to say? I'm not a Jew anymore waiting for a Jewish Messiah to deliver the Jews from the Romans, no! I'm waiting for a Messiah - a deliverer from there, not here. Do you know what Ulster people need to hear? We're not waiting some political redeemer or deliverer for Ulster. We're waiting our deliverer from here. Isn't that what they need to hear? For He is the only deliverer that can save - politically, religiously, socially, in all sorts of ways - He is the only one who can bring hope, and when all the other deliverers of Ulster are kicking up the daisies, Jesus Christ will be on the throne! Jesus Christ is our message, friend. He is the only hope! He is the only one who can bring that deliverance. Listen to what Kent Hughes says: 'We can travel throughout the world, or even track among the stars and sojourn in other galaxies - but as believers, wherever we go, we are free from alienation, for we are reconciled to God and His church and we belong. One day we are going to catapult from this life with a force far greater than any ascending jet, as we are drawn to our city and to our people'. That's where my people are! What does it say of Abraham? 'He died and was gathered unto His people'.

But secondly, the picture that is painted for us first of all was of a new nation, and then secondly he describes a new family. He talks about - verse 19 - 'the household of God'. So Paul is saying that we haven't only been supernaturally into the divine kingdom of God, but he's being more intimate here. It's a warmer metaphor that he is using, talking about being adopted into the divine family of God, God becomes our Father. The man beside you becomes your brother in Christ, the woman beside you your sister in Christ. We become the saints together, we have a new relationship of a family that is only in heaven and on the earth and cannot be under the earth. Think about it, what did Paul say to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5? He said, 'Rebuke not an elder but entreat him as a father, and the younger men as brethren, the elder women as mothers and the younger as sisters with all purity'. We're not neighbours - we were enemies first of all, we might have been enemies. You see, you could have a Jew and a Gentile sitting beside one another in this church even this evening, when they wouldn't have done a few hundred years ago. It was impossible even a few hundred years ago, because of anti-Semitism and because of hatred of the Jew, and the Jewish hatred of the Gentile. Even a few years ago it couldn't be done! But because of what Christ can do in a life, not only can they become neighbours and live together in peace, but the word of God and the mystery of Christ in the church is that they can become saints of God, and live together in the family of God, in the house of God! You see, when Christ does a work He does it right. And Paul says in Galatians 4 and verse 6: 'Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father'. This is wonderful!

The third description that we have: first of all of a nation - a new nation - then a new family, and then a new temple. Verse 20 to 22: Paul considers our relationship now not so much to one another but to the Holy Spirit of God. He says, verse 20: 'You are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together growth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit'. Do you see what he's saying? The church of Jesus Christ has now become a building, a place where God dwells. Now I'm not talking about a physical building, I'm talking about you and me, and all of us put together, as the church universal. God has come to dwell among us!

We haven't time to go into all of this, but in the scriptures you have two dwelling places of God in the Old Testament. You have the tabernacle, which just means a tent, that's where God dwelt. Then there was the temple and that was a more robust form, it was more permanent where God dwelt. There were three temples. First of all there was Solomon's temple, then there was Zerubbabel's temple, and then there was Herod's temple. Zerubbabel's temple was the temple we thought about when we were looking at the book of Haggai.
You all know about Solomon's temple, and Herod's temple was the temple that the Lord Jesus Christ was familiar with, and the one He talked about when He was using it figuratively for His body - how it would fall again and rise again. Now, I want you to see this: we spoke in days gone by about the Jewish psyche and what it meant to have a temple for the Jew. So much so that when David was fleeing from Absalom, his son who wanted to usurp him, remember in Psalm [61] he cried 'From the ends of the earth will I cry unto Thee'. As far as he was concerned because he wasn't in Jerusalem, because he wasn't near the temple, and because he couldn't worship God, life wasn't worth living.

I was reading today, I think it was the 85th or 86th Psalm, where David lifts his voice again to God and says 'How lovely is thy dwelling place O Lord of hosts to me. My soul longeth and fainteth the courts of the Lord to see'. The courts of the living God! You see, that's the key! For the Jew the tabernacle and the temple was the place where the living God dwelt, and if you weren't near the tabernacle or the temple it didn't matter. Now, if you were to turn to Genesis 5 (don't, we haven't time) but Genesis 5 you read this: 'Enoch walked with God'. That's the first thing: God, first of all, walked with men. If you go further into the book of Exodus He tells Moses: 'I'm going to dwell with you' - no longer walk. You can walk away but, no, this is more permanent so he tells Moses: 'Build a tabernacle. I'm going to dwell with you'. But the word of God teaches that because of Israel's sin, the glory departed. So God told them to build a temple - a more permanent structure, but because of their sin, again the glory departed. And then the Lord Jesus Christ came, and John 1 verse 14 says that God came and tabernacled amongst men, and what did they do? They took Him and nailed Him to a cross!

They all wanted God's presence, but when they had it they didn't know what to do with it. Now, this is wonderful, because the word of God teaches that now God no longer dwells in buildings made with hands. He even says through the word - Acts 7: 'Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?'. But the word of God teaches - listen: God dwells in your heart! Isn't that remarkable? If I'm out of Belfast I don't need to worry whether I'm away from God or not, because God's here. I don't care whether I'm in Jerusalem, or Rome, or Timbuktu, because God is in me by His Spirit! This is the miracle, we could go on here, how Peter talks about the lively stones.

I'll leave you with this little thought that blessed me immensely today. Peter talks about how we are built up as lively living stones together, and we make up the body of Christ, and we are built upon the living stone - the Rock who is Christ Jesus. When the first temple was built that was Solomon's temple. It was built on Mount Moriah, but there was something very peculiar about it, unlike other buildings. It was this: that each rock and each boulder that made up that temple had to be made before it was brought up. There was not to be a sound of a hammer, or a chisel, or a workman, around the temple. In fact, if you watched it being built there wasn't a sound. They were just carrying up these rocks to the temple. It was all done at home. It was all hewn away. Isn't that beautiful? That when God saves us, we're added to His temple, and there's nothing more for us to do. It's all done! All the hewing and all the chiselling was done by the Spirit of God when He was chiselling us out of the darkness of the quarry of our sin and our iniquity, and our separation from God.

Oh, there's so much I'd love to say to you tonight but, Lord willing, we'll continue next week. But let me just say this to you: the Lord Jesus is described as our chief cornerstone. Do you know what that was for? They measured all the other stones by the cornerstone. When He is in the right place in His church, all the other stones will fall into place.

Transcribed by Trevor Veale, Preach The Word - March 2001
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Ephesians - Chapter 13
"The Revelation Of The Mystery"

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Ephesians 3:1-13

1. The Mystery Made Known - To Paul (verses 1-6)
2. The Mystery Made Known - To The World (verses 7-13)
   • The Message Of The Mystery
     a. Preach Christ To The Gentiles (verse 8b)
     b. Preach The Mystery Of The Church (verse 9)
     c. Preach To Inform The Heavenly Beings (verse 10)

We're turning to Ephesians chapter 2. We are looking at Ephesians chapter 3 this evening, but we've a few verses to deal with in the end of chapter 2 that we ran out of time last week - and you're saying: 'Well, you shouldn't, you've enough time given to you every week' - but there we go! It may happen again tonight, but we'll just see how far we get. Ephesians chapter 2, and we got down (if my memory serves me right) to verse 19. So we're going to read from verse 20 and then right through into chapter 3 and through to verse 13. That's going to be the section of Ephesians that we're going to concentrate on this evening. So we'll read verse 19 just to get the flow of the sentence: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God".

We saw that we are now part of the family of God, didn't we? We're now part of the city of God. Verse 20: "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together growth unto an holy temple in the Lord". There are the three figures, illustrations, that Paul gives to us of the church of Jesus Christ: a new city, a new family, and now a new temple. "In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. For this cause" - following on - "I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words" - and you can read about that, as we did, in chapter 1 and verses 9 to 13.

He's already talked about this mystery, but in this passage he's going into it in more detail: "Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister", or a servant, "according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God. According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory".

If you look at verses 20 to 22 of chapter 2, we began last week to look at the fact that - yes - the church of Jesus Christ is a new city, the church of Jesus Christ is a new family, but it is also the new temple of God. At
the very end of our study we alluded to the fact that in 1 Peter we read that Peter says that the church of Jesus Christ is a new building. It is a building made up of lively stones. That means it's not a building of bricks and mortar, but it's a building made up of individual people, human beings - lively, or living, stones. Peter goes on to say that those living stones are built upon a foundation stone, who is the Living Stone of all stones - the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you remember we ended with that illustration? We talked about when Solomon built his temple on Mount Moriah - that there was something peculiar about it. There was something special, because each stone within that temple building went up without the sound and noise of a hammer or a workman. Why? Because each stone was carried up to that building already made, already fit to be put into that temple and to be part of the building of God. The workman would make that stone in his workshop or at home, and he would bring it, already fit to be put and planted upon the foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ. All those stones in Solomon's temple were being cemented together, one by one, and Peter is saying: 'Can you see the analogy?' The Holy Ghost of God comes and He begins to work through conviction in the heart and the life of a man or a woman, and he's starting to chip away their moorings to planet earth. He starts to chip away from the nature of the sin that is the quarry that they are found in and grounded and buried in. Bit by bit, the Holy Ghost is bringing that person out of the slave market of sin, and putting them into the redemption ground by the blood of Christ. They are not fitted into the temple of God's church until they are fit.

That's why you ought not to be a member of a church unless you're saved. Each stone was ready before it was fitted in. You will notice that today no one can hear the Gospel effectually, no one can believe unless God Himself through the Holy Ghost of God is working with a man, talking to the man. He alone can lift that man out of the dire depths of sin, and attach that man into the church of Jesus Christ. It cannot be done with the hands of men! If we could realise this in our evangelism, in the preaching of the Gospel, in the operation at large of the church of Jesus Christ: that it cannot be done by our hands. It cannot be done by our effort. The word of God says through the prophet: 'It's not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord'. We need, more than ever, for God to do a work. But isn't this beautiful? This is God's new thing. Paul calls it God's new poem, God's new masterpiece - the church of Jesus Christ. No wonder the poet could say:

'View the vast building, see it rise!  
The work how great, the plan how wise.  
Nor can that faith be overthrown,  
That rests upon the Living Stone'.

Now, Paul gives us, at the end of this chapter, three more illustrations about three elements upon which the church of Jesus Christ is founded and is resting upon. Look at the verses, 20 to 22. He talks, first of all, about 'the foundation'. Secondly, he talks about 'the cornerstone', and then thirdly, the part of the building which is 'the building blocks' - we who put the building together. Now, let's look at the first: the foundation that we find in verse 20. 'And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets'. Now, look at the order of that sentence. The apostles, first. The prophets, second. Now that makes it quite obvious that the prophets that are being talked about in this verse are New Testament prophets. Otherwise it would say 'the prophets and the apostles', inferring that it was the Old Testament prophets that came before the New Testament apostles. But no, he says 'the apostles and then the prophets', inferring and telling us that the prophets he is talking about are the prophets that you find in the book of Acts; the prophets that preached the word of God, the prophets who God spoke through before they had a written canon of the word of God in scripture. It doesn't mean, here, that these apostles and prophets are the foundation of the church of Jesus Christ. You might say, 'Well, David that's what it says - look at the verse: built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets'. Well, turn with me a moment, very quickly, to 1 Corinthians 3. First Corinthians 3 and verse 11 - now listen very carefully, we must interpret the word of God by the word of God. First Corinthians 3 verse 11, what does Paul say? "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ".

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But this verse says that the foundation is the apostles and the prophets! But what Paul is saying here is not literally that the apostles, the literal twelve apostles, and the prophets of the New Testament were the foundation, but he is alluding and inferring that what came out of the apostles mouths - or as the New Testament teaches, the apostles doctrine and the prophet's preaching and teaching. In other words, the word of the living God is the foundation on which we build - the teaching about the Person, and the work, the Deity, the humanity, the effectual death, and atoning blood of Christ! That is the foundation! In other words, he's saying the same thing. He says in Corinthians that 'Christ is the only foundation. No man can lay another foundation', and he's saying in Ephesians the teaching of who Christ is - the person, the attributes, the effectual work and the atonement that is efficacious - that is all that we rest upon! Isn't it? Now, do you see what he's saying?

But then he goes on and he says 'there is the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone'. Now, there's the second illustration: Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone. Now, for hundreds of years in the ancient world if you were reading that you would know right away what it meant, because the cornerstone was a description that had a prophetic meaning. For the Jew, the cornerstone meant the Messiah. Turn to Isaiah 28 for a moment - Isaiah 28 and verse 16 - now, I want you to keep your finger in this verse. God is speaking here through Isaiah and He says: 'Therefore thus saith the Lord God. Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone - now look at this phrase - 'a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste'. Now, most scholars, as they look at that verse and they look at Ephesians would see in the description 'the chief cornerstone', a prophetic description of the Messiah of Israel - the Christ of God. If you were to use that description in those days and talk about a cornerstone, you would be talking about the foundation of a building, which would bring stability to the whole form. Do you understand? So immediately when you said 'cornerstone' to a Jew he thought about stability; say 'cornerstone', he thought about the structure, how it was solid, how it was grounded, how it could not be moved. Indeed we're told that in the Jerusalem temple, the foundation stones, the greatest of the foundation stones was 29 feet in length. That's basically the size of a train carriage! And this great cornerstone was planted somewhere in the building and the whole building was fitted and framed around it, and that stone brought stability to it all!

Now, the scholars debate over what the cornerstone really was in practical terms. There are three interpretations and each one, no matter what one you take, speaks of Christ. There is the foundation stone - the cornerstone - the stone that we would imagine you set in the middle of the foundations, and the whole building is fitted and framed there. We can see, in that picture, a picture of our blessed Lord - that He is the foundation of the church of Jesus Christ. Like the wise man and the foolish man, unless we know that we are built upon the Rock, we will sink. If the foundation of the church of Jesus Christ (whether it be the literal person of Jesus Christ, or the teachings of the apostles and the prophets) be corroded or start to be chipped away at by liberal scholars, what will happen is the building begins to topple and eventually will crumble.

The second interpretation is that of an arch in a doorway. You know a stone arch, and some scholars think that the capstone was that stone that was in the middle of the top of the arch that held it all together - and ultimately, figuratively, held the whole building as far as you could see with the naked eye. It spoke of pre-eminence. Isn't He the pre-eminent one? Isn't He the name that is above every name? Isn't He the only name in the church that should be exalted and praised, and worshipped and adored, and magnified and served?

Then there is the idea of another capstone, which, if you've been to Egypt and you see the Pyramids, you'll notice that at most of the top of the Pyramids the bricks are actually chipped away round the peak. That is because that whole structure of the Pyramid, 3-D triangle, was there and was covered, probably in lime, and at the top there was a capstone - possibly coated in gold. A capstone at the very top! Now I happen to believe that the cornerstone here is what we would understand as the foundations - but no matter what it is, all of it
speaks of Christ! What Paul is getting across here is the whole architectural unity, symmetry and structure of this building of the church that is built upon Christ must be determined by the foundation stone. That means the lean of the building, the structure of the walls, the shape of the roof, the lays of the walls, the dimensions of the whole structure were as a result of where the chief cornerstone was, and what a good cornerstone it happened to be. All the other stones had to adjust to the shape of the chief cornerstone.

Look at Isaiah again - 28:16 - and that phrase that I wanted you to note: 'a tried stone'. F.F. Bruce, the Biblical scholar, believes that that can be translated: 'a tested stone'. In other words, a stone of testing, a stone that measures how good a building it really is. The way to measure the church of Jesus Christ is Jesus Christ Himself. He is the one who should set our standards. He is the example that we ought to follow. It is His teaching, it is His walk, it is His word, it is His Gospel, it is His philosophy of life, it is His worldview that we as believers ought to adopt. He ought to set the trend in His own church because He is the cornerstone - the stone of testing. Now, what shape are we in? Do we measure up? Do we fall into line? Verse 21 and 22, as we know from the Old Testament just as in the wilderness the Jews had the tent of God - the tabernacle. And you remember that God's presence came and filled the tabernacle. You remember we were thinking about it around the Lord's Table yesterday morning, that when the temple of Solomon was built no-one could do anything. The priest couldn't even serve - why? Because the glory of God - the Shekinah glory - came down and He filled the whole temple.

Chapter 1, in the last verse, describes the Lord Jesus Christ to be the head of the church - the gift of God given to the church, and He's described as this: 'the one who fills all in all'. Do you see the picture? 'In whom all the building fitly framed together growth unto an holy temple in the Lord', verse 22, 'In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit'. We are God's habitation! Now, let's grasp this! We, as we sit together, are the building, the place, the location upon the map where God lives. No longer does He sit or hover upon the mercy seat. No longer is He through the veil in the temple. No longer - He is in your heart, and He's in mine!

'The soul wherein God dwells,  
What church could holier be?  
Becomes a walking tent  
Of heavenly majesty'.

So Paul goes on and he goes into more detail and, in chapter 3 and verses 1 to 13, he begins to expound the mystery again. This book of Ephesians has been well called by some: 'The Mystery of the Church of Jesus Christ'. It speaks primarily about this great thing, this new thing that God has done. The first thing he says in verses 1 to 13, on your sheet, is this - of the revelation of the mystery, he says first of all: what the mystery was made known to him individually, Paul - what God had showed him, verses 1 to 6. What he has described in chapter 2 and before it in chapter 1, he describes as the 'mystery' he begins to expound.

Now, we're not talking about Agatha Christie or Sherlock Holmes or Inspector Poirot - that is the understanding that we have of 'mystery' today in our English language. But the word of God was written in Greek - the New Testament at least. Some of you ought to realise that, that it wasn't written in English, nor was it written in Jacobean English. It was written in Greek. The word, 'mystery' in Greek is 'mysterion'. It simply means something - and we've learnt this before - that is beyond natural knowledge, something that man has not had revealed to him, and something that is now in the New Testament being opened to us by divine revelation through the Holy Spirit of the living God. In Colossians 1 and verse 26 we read this: 'Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints'. Have you got it? This is a truth that has never been known before, it's a secret that is now being made open. It is the open secret of God.
You've heard of Napoleon Bonaparte, haven't you? He's famous for being a 'wannabe' conqueror of Europe. That is his claim to fame. But in July 1798 he began to occupy Egypt and in the next 3 years, just before he was ousted and pushed out of Egypt, his other passion made him conquer. His other passion was archaeology. One of his French comrades, a countryman, found what is called 'The Rosetta Stone'. You've maybe heard about it. From the Rosetta Stone they were able to look at an alphabet, the Egyptian alphabet in hieroglyphics, and it gave them the key to understanding what each letter in the hieroglyphic alphabet meant and correlated to in the English language and, indeed, any other Latin language. That stone became the key to understanding not simply a language but a whole Egyptian world and empire that had been closed to humanity before, and the door was being opened for modern Egyptian studies. Do you get what I'm saying?

This is like Paul - a mystery is being revealed to him now that was secret for all time. It had never been opened - it was there, yes, in the mind of God; it was there in His eternal counsels. He was well determined and prepared to put it into action when the fullness of time was come, but He had not revealed to men what it was. Paul the apostle is coming and he stumbles in the intellect of God, revealed to him, of God's great poem - God's masterpiece, God's new work, God's new man, God's new creation: the church of Jesus Christ. All of a sudden, when we stumble upon it in the New Testament, we find that it makes sense of the Old Testament. We find it makes sense of what the Lord Jesus was talking about and alluding to within the four Gospels. We find that it makes sense about what the apostles were saying and doing, and the foundation that they were laying in the Acts of the Apostles. We find that it examines and exemplifies everything that we have in all of the Epistles. It is the key to understanding the word of God. It is the mystery of the church of Jesus Christ. Look at chapter 2 and verse 10. We'll not read it but look at it - he is alluding to that mystery there. He alludes to it in verse 15 of chapter 2. He's alluded to it already in the verses we've looked at in chapter 2, verses 19 to 22. Now in chapter 3 it is dominating his thoughts and his feelings, his intellect and his will. He wants these Ephesian Christians to realise that he is fully informed about the matter from God.

So he begins in verse 1: 'For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles' - and then he stops. Now, I want you to see this because he doesn't continue his train of thought until verse 14. He's starting to pray if you like. He says: 'For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles' - verse 14, and then he says - 'For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. So it's as if he begins to talk in this way about how he is suffering for them and then, in parenthesis, he stops and tells them a little bit about why he is suffering, and then in verse 14 he begins to start praying for them again.

Now, look at these verses with me because Paul begins to reveal the great secret of God, never revealed in all eternity. But only in this wonderful dispensation, this age and economy and distribution, administration of God, has it ever been revealed or will be revealed. It seems, from the New Testament, that Paul was especially chosen of God to reveal this to the Gentiles. He was the one that was chosen. That's why he's so often called the 'apostle of the mystery', but that doesn't mean that he was the only one that had this revealed to him. For if you look at verse 5: 'Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy' - plural - 'apostles and' - plural - 'prophets by the Spirit of the living God'. Indeed, the Lord Jesus Christ revealed it to His own disciples when He was upon the earth. Turn with me to John chapter 10 - John chapter 10 and, first of all, verse 4: 'And when he putteth forth his own sheep', Jesus says, 'he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice', verse 16, 'And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd'.

It's clear, isn't it? You see, you couldn't be a Jew, or you couldn't be saved, technically, if you weren't a Jew. You couldn't be of the household of God. You were a foreigner to the commonwealth of Israel and all the blessings and all of the promises. But even here to the disciples, to the twelve, God in flesh is revealing the plan of God, and the counsel of the divine Trinity in heaven, of all time: that He wants people from every tribe, every tongue, every nation, every background, to be in the church of God's building. Isn't it wonderful?
He revealed it to the apostles and to the prophets. You remember that Peter had that vision in the Acts of the Apostles - that sheet let down from heaven displaying the wonderful mystery: that all nations would come to Christ and come to God in Christ. In fact, the revelation of the body even seems to have been given Paul at the very moment of his conversion. What do I mean? What happened when he saw that light on the road to Damascus and he fell before it? The Lord Jesus Christ, what did He say? 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' Why did He say that? Because if you hurt the head, you hurt the whole body. Although this mystery of the church of Jesus Christ - the new man, the third race if you would like to call it, of a unity between Jews and Gentiles - was revealed to all the twelve apostles and the prophets of the New Testament, it seems that Paul alone had revealed to him this picture of a body that we find outlined more in the book of Corinthians.

He says in verse 1 that he was a prisoner: 'Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles'. Now, in verse 1 he calls himself a prisoner. In verse 7 - look at it - he calls it, the AV says 'a minister', but it would be better translated 'a servant', because a minister is not someone that wears fancy garments or is a pastor or anything like that. That word in the New Testament simply means 'a servant', 'a servant of God'. So in verse 1 he calls himself 'a prisoner', and in verse 7 he calls himself 'a servant'. Now, listen to verse 1 in the Amplified New Testament - listen: 'For this reason, because I preach that you are thus builded together, I Paul am a prisoner of Jesus Christ for the sake and on behalf of you Gentiles'. Do you get what he's saying? The reason why I am here in prison is because I have been preaching, in the streets and in the synagogues and all around the countryside, this mystery that the Jew and the Gentile can be united together in Christ. Listen to another paraphrase of it: 'I am here in prison for the preaching that you Gentiles are part of God's house'.

Now think about that! This is the earthly leader of Jewish orthodoxy teaching that the Jew and the Gentile can be united together in Christ. This is the one who was rounding up people to be killed when Christ appeared to him. This is the one who stood holding the coat of the one who was stoning Stephen, and he is in prison for preaching the same message! You see, that's what Christ can do in your life, and only the Holy Ghost can do that. My friend, look at this please, for this is absolutely tremendous - because Paul here, we see, has a theology of suffering. You see there's a whole lot of - I'd better watch what I say - but drivel taught from pulpits: that if you're walking with God you will know health, and you will know wealth, and you will know the sun shining upon your footsteps everywhere you go. But Paul is in prison here. Was he disobedient? Was he living in sin? Had he a problem with his mind or was there something going wrong in his heart - a motive - or was there pride? Or was there something that was stopping God letting him out of prison? Paul had a theology of suffering, and here's how I know it: he says not 'I am a prisoner of Rome' but he was: he doesn't say 'I am a prisoner of these bars' or 'this house that I am under house arrest within'. Listen - look at it: 'I am a prisoner of Jesus Christ!'

Now, I believe this: that Jesus Christ had him in prison. I believe that! I believe this was in the purposes of God. I believe it! I'll tell you why I believe it: because God ordains these things for his children because there is a theology of suffering. He counted it all joy, it says, to be reckoned in God's will and to be suffering with him. If you want to know more about that you can go to the book of Revelation, and you find tribulation saints being butchered and murdered by the spirit of antichrist. And you see, in Heaven, them coming to God and saying: 'When are You going to avenge our blood?' What does He say? 'The number's not up yet. There's still more to die'. That means He had a number, and that means there were those who were ordained to martyr. Paul is here in the depths and in the bowels of a prison, and he is resigned to the fact that Jesus Christ has him where he is for a purpose - and how could He not? We are standing here this evening with the epistle to the Ephesians in our hands. Was that not in God's will, that he should be in prison to write a book such as this? Of course it is!

What strikes me is this: if Paul had toned it down a little and succumbed a little to the Jewish nationalism of the day, he could have got out. I suspect that if a Christian was locked up today for their witness, we'd all be running and saying: 'Look, tone it down, lie low for a couple of weeks and just hope that you'll get out'. Did
he? No - because he wasn't a prisoner of Rome; he wasn't looking at the Roman establishment and saying, 'They've got me' - 'Christ has got me! And Christ can have me for I am sold to the Gospel. I have died to Him, and if death it may be, then let it come!'

You remember how in the defence of the Gospel, he stood at the temple in the book of Acts. There on those stairs in Jerusalem - what happened was the whole crowd and rabble came round him, and he was announcing that God the Lord had commanded him to go to the Gentiles, to preach the Gospel that the Jew and the Gentile could be reconciled to God and reconciled to one another. It says that they 'boiled up in ire and in anger' - the Jewish hearers - and they stared and said this: 'Away with such a fellow from the earth; it is not fit for him to live'. That Gospel has him where he is now. I wonder do you ever think how much you owe to the apostle Paul, for if he hadn't done it, I doubt if anyone would have done it. He was God's instrument to getting you the Gospel here in the 21st century in Northern Ireland. Oh, how we should be thankful to him - but not primarily to him, but for the Holy Ghost that arrested him there on the road to Damascus, to the one who says within His word: 'He is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name unto the Gentiles'. Hallelujah! What a God we have - that way back there on the road to Damascus He was thinking of me, over here, 2000 years away, He was thinking of me!

We've got to go on. There's so many that we could be grateful to. There are martyrs, there are the Reformers, there are the Puritans, there are modern day people who are trying to keep and teach the Gospel and keep it pure of all nationalism, of all petty arguments, of all sorts of modern day Pharisaism that we find even in our own land at this time. We are needing - now, today in our contemporary society - to ask ourselves the question: are we faithful, no matter the cost? Are we willing to keep the Gospel pure? Are we willing to proclaim the Gospel no matter what the cost is to us, our families, our name and our livelihood?

But this is the second thing - because not only had he a theology of suffering, but he had a theology of grace. He said that he had grace to minister - verse 2: 'If ye have heard of the dispensation' - or the administration - 'of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward'. In other words: 'I've been committed this thing to commit to you. I've been given this. I have become a steward of this Gospel of grace'. He is inferring throughout the passage that he has actually been given grace from God to do this ministry. God has not saved him by grace and then said: 'Now, you push on there and get that job done; and if you fail - well - I'll raise up somebody else to do the job for Me'. He sends him out with the same grace that He saves him with, to do the job that He had ordained for him. There is a theology of grace, and Paul sees himself, in this passage, as the manager of God's grace to the Gentiles. He was distributing - that's what the word, 'dispensation', means: an administration, a stewardship - he was sending out, and handing out, the economy of God.

Now listen - that grace is still with us today, and the church of Jesus Christ is a body. There is nowhere within the New Testament scriptures that teaches a 'one man ministry', or that the oversight or the elders carry the can for everybody, and all the rest just turn up on a Sunday to listen to the sermon - nowhere! Now, I want to suggest to you that that is the greatest waste of God's grace that I have ever heard of, isn't it? For the same grace that is given to me to be the pastor of the Iron Hall, to the oversight and the deacons, is given to you to be a member of the body because we're all the same. We're all the same! The jobs and the roles might be different but we've the same God, we're in the same body - Christ. I can't do what you can do - you can't do what I can do, but we all have been given that administration, that dispensation of grace, the ability to go out and do what God has ordained for you and I to do.

Oh, there's so much we could go into here, for God had chosen the Jews - hadn't He? - from Genesis 12 when He spoke to Abraham and made him a Jew (he was a Gentile before, but He made him a Jew). Then right through to Malachi chapter 4 at the end of the Old Testament - what God did through the Jews, how He worked with them, how He talked to them, how He tried to redeem them and deliver them from every ill that they brought themselves into. Then, at the end, they rejected their own Messiah and, as a result, God
temporarily has set them aside - today God deals with everybody. It's an administration of all the nations. It's a dispensation of grace whereby - and look at what Paul is saying in verse 6 - 'whereby every Gentile that trusts in Christ can be a fellow heir with the Jew, can be of the same body as the Jew, can be a partaker of the promises of Christ, the Messiah, by the Gospel'. You can be - we can be - heirs together, members together. That word in the Greek, 'members together', is a word that Paul just makes up out of his head, because there is nothing to describe the truth that he is saying. The mystery - it's never been heard of, so there's not even a word to describe it, that Gentiles and the Jews can be united together on the same footing as one another. We can be fellow partakers in God.

Let's look at our second point. For we have not just the mystery made known to Paul, but there's the mystery made known to the world, and that ought to be known to the world in verses 7 to 13. Paul again, like I've just said, bends the language and makes up his own word to describe, in the Greek, how he feels before God: 'Whereof I was made a minister' - or a servant - 'according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints'. Now that, in the original language, is a hybrid word. It's an odd word, because he takes the Greek word 'least' or 'smaller', and he adds an ending unto it that is impossible linguistically, so that he creates a word something like 'leaster'. 'I am the leaster of all the apostles' - that's what he's saying. Now, Paul's word in Latin: Paulus - his name in Latin - means 'small'. So it's as if he's making a play on words here, and in effect what he is saying - listen to this: 'I am little by name, little probably in stature, and morally and spiritually littler than all the least of the Christians. I'm the leaster!' Small Paul! It's amazing, isn't it? This is the chief, perhaps the pre-eminent theologian of the church of Jesus Christ of all time, and he says: 'I'm the leaster of all Christians'. That's some lesson, isn't it? For whenever we think we're getting somewhere we're 'big men', aren't we? 'We've got a bit of truth under our arm, and a few notes in our Bible and we've got some theology all worked out, and everybody else is wrong and I'm right'

You see, that had to be his disposition in order that the dispensation could go forth. If he hadn't that disposition he could never be trusted, and indeed the grace that is talked about in verse 8 - the reason why he was given that grace, in a sense - is because he needed it! He recognised that he was the 'leaster' of the apostles. Now, I'm indebted to one of the brethren here for this information. Look at the scriptures, 1 Corinthians - you don't need to look at it now, but when you get home - 1 Corinthians 15:9. AD 59, Paul says: 'For I am the least of the apostles'. AD 64, Paul says - Ephesians 3:8, what we read here: 'Who am the less than the least of all the saints'. AD 65, Paul says - 1 Timothy 1:15 - he was 'the chief of sinners'. See the digression - going down: 'the least of the apostles', then, 'who am the less than the least of all the saints', then, 'who is the chief of sinners'. This tells me this: that the closer he got to God and to Christ, the more he saw his sin! Don't tell me that he had any sinless perfection because I'll not buy it. It's not here! In fact, the exact opposite is here - the more he saw of Christ and His awesome laser light of holiness, the more he fell in the dust. And as John, if we could learn it, He had to increase - He had to - and John had to decrease!

But then we see here the message of the mystery, on your sheet. This tells us that Paul had a theology of revelation. The revelation that he had was a message of the mystery, and this is it unfolding before us this evening, and we can only deal with maybe one them. The first thing was - in the mystery - was that Paul was given the dispensation to preach Christ to the Gentiles. Look at it - verse 8 - the second part: 'preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ'. The great Toscanini (sp?) once gave a concert, and the audience were so impressed and gave such an enthusiastic response that they gave him several encores. After a while there was a silence after the commotion, and Toscanini turned his back upon the audience and turned to the orchestra, and this is what he said: 'I am nothing. You are nothing. Beethoven: he is everything!'!

We are only carrying out the composition of God almighty! Isn't that right? We are His poem. We are His masterpiece. We are the players on His stage. We are carrying out what He has determined, through the grace of God that has been revealed to us by the revelation of Jesus Christ, who is the express image - the
stamp of God - who died for our sins. We have trusted in His blood and God has engaged us into the greatest counsel of all the universe: a church of Jesus Christ - spotless, washed in His blood, pure and doing the will of God. But the point is this: that if we preach anything but Christ, we're liars! Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1: 'But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God'. So he preached the unsearchable riches of Christ, and I finish with this, it literally could be translated this: 'riches that cannot be traced'. Inexplorable, untraceable, unfathomable, inexhaustible, illimitable, inscrutable, incalculable, infinite. What he is talking about is all the saving riches of God, the sanctifying riches of Christ, the relational riches that we have with Him from day to day as we carry on a relationship, the practical riches that we face day by day when we face the trials and the stumbling blocks and the pits that the enemy would set in front of us. But He practically comes with His riches and - praise God! - they are eternal riches, and they can never ever be exhausted.

We've much more to do, but let me ask you this: we all have value systems - don't we? - what we consider as important, as priceless, sentimental value. Where does Christ come on that list? For to Paul and, as far as he was concerned, to the church at large, Christ ought to be unsearchable riches. He ought to come first.

Our Father, we thank Thee for the Lord Jesus Christ: the cornerstone, not of this physical building, but of every person in this place who has trusted Christ and His blood. They are firm on the Rock, Christ Jesus. But Lord, the consequences are that we ought to fall into line. This building, and I'm talking Lord - You know - about the people, have to reflect the stature, the measurements, the whole person of the One in whom they rest. We need, like Paul, to have grace to do that Lord, so we ask, Lord, give us the grace that will be sufficient for our need. Bless us now as we part, in that lovely unsearchable name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Transcribed by Trevor Veale, Preach The Word - March 2001
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Ephesians - Chapter 14
"A Prayer For The Church"
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Ephesians 3:14-21
1. A Plan For Prayer (verses 14-15)
   a. The Posture Of Prayer (verse 14)
   b. The Person To Whom Prayer Is Addressed (verses 14b-15)
2. A Prayer For Strength (verses 16-17)
3. A Prayer For Love (verses 17b-19a)
4. A Prayer For Fullness (verse 19b)

Now let me welcome you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, to our Bible study this evening. It’s great to see you all here. There's some visitors with us, and it's nice to see you and we hope and trust, as we meet together, that the Lord will bless us under the sound of God's word. I hope you're here expecting - expecting the Lord to touch you and expecting Him to speak to you in His own living way.

Ephesians and chapter 3 - Ephesians chapter 3, and I don't know whether you kept your sheet from last week, but we have a little bit to finish off of our study last week. We're going to begin, God willing, at verse 14 right through to verse 21 if time serves us well. Let's read the whole, from verse 8 onward to get the context: "Unto me" - Paul says, remember - "who am less than the least of all saints", the 'leaster' of all the saints, as we saw that he put it, "is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ". Now, we looked last week at the message of the mystery. What was the message of the mystery that Paul was delivering to the Gentiles? Well, this was the first thing that he preached: 'I would know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified' - the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Then verse 9 - the second thing: "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory".

Now, these are the verses we want to look at specifically tonight: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" - Amen! Amen!

Now, last week we looked at the message of the mystery and we saw the first thing that Paul had to preach, and the thing that we ought to preach, is the Lord Jesus Christ. That's all we have! Whatever we are, whatever we have, is in Him! The Christian faith is not only a body of belief, but it's a body of a man that we
believe in. It is Christ - His unsearchable riches. But the second thing that Paul said that he wanted to preach and reveal to the Gentiles is found in verse 9 - to make known to all men: 'To make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ'.

Now, we saw that the fundamental understanding of what the mystery of God is, is to understand what a mystery is. It's not what we understand today as a 'murder mystery': something that we can never understand; or like a jigsaw puzzle. But the mystery of God, we have seen, is something that was in the past but was not seen. God had hidden it from men! It was a sacred secret that He had never revealed before, and now it has been revealed and it is known to all men through revelation - not something that can be learned, books can't be read about it - and that's how men came to the knowledge of it. But God had to come, and He came to Paul and to the other disciples, to the apostles, and He revealed this new thing that God was going to do - the new man, the new creation in Christ Jesus, the third race, the church of Jesus Christ - how every man in the world, no matter what creed, colour, faith, nation they were from - that they could all by faith in Jesus Christ be united together within the church of Jesus Christ. He has broken down every barrier, every wall of partition, and made one new man! That is the mystery, and Paul was preaching that that mystery comes through the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Then, secondly, in verse 9 he preaches a theology of unity - that this is a special thing; that it's not just about preaching the word of God, which is the Gospel - that Christ Jesus died for your sins according to the scriptures, and whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. That is the first step - the unsearchable riches of Christ. But then Paul says: 'I then go on to preach another thing to the Gentiles - a theology of the church: the message of the mystery of the unity of the church of Jesus Christ'. Now, you see this is important, because there are many many evangelistic societies (and I do not despise them, don't get me wrong) but the whole message of God is 'Christ and the church'. The church is the mechanism, the organism that God has chosen to work in the world. Now, your view of the church might be one thing, and its state at the moment, but that's another subject. But God has said: 'I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'. The church is God's ordained people to bring the Gospel to men and women, and this is interesting: Paul didn't leave it at the Gospel. After he preached the Gospel, and after men and women were being converted to Christ, he then revealed to them this mystery: that everyone - Jew, Gentile, Greek, bond, free, man, woman - no matter what background or status you have - rich and poor - you can be part of this community of grace.

Years ago, Johan Le Casse (sp?) of the Belgian Evangelical Mission came to the realisation that evangelism in Belgium was getting nowhere. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? The nation had a long history of Roman Catholicism. Now within the nation there was building up the success of many of the cults - the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons and so forth. People, more and more, in the whole of the Belgian society were becoming increasingly unreceptive to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And because of that, in his despair, as the head of an evangelistic organisation he got on his knees before God and he opened the word of God and began to study, in depth, what God would have to say to him about the way forward. He came up with a new plan. Do you know what he did? He gathered together different nationalities of believers - Belgians, Dutch, American, and anyone else he could find who believed in the Lord Jesus. Then the second thing he did was he rented a large house and he bunged them all in together, shut the doors, and told them to live together. Now, you can imagine the friction that set in! Different cultures, different ways of doing things, understanding of values, even eating - the things that they ate they couldn't agree on - a problem of a language barrier. But he persevered and they persevered, and what they did was their disagreements, their arguments - they turned to prayer and brought them before the Lord, and out of that situation grew an amazing sense of the fruit of love among these believers. Do you know what the unconverted in Belgium began to call them? This was their nickname: 'the people who love each other'. That's what it's all about, isn't it? 'The people who love each other'.
Now, what would you call the church of Jesus Christ in Ulster? 'The people who hate each other'? Maybe that's a bit strong: 'The people who despise each other, who want to get one over the other, who don't like the other's denomination'? 'The people who compete against one another for numbers, for converts'? What would you call us? What is the situation of the theology of unity? Now, don't get me wrong, this is 'theology of unity in truth'; this is Biblical ecumenism, not false ecumenism with the church of Rome or any other church that does not believe the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the theology of 'Biblical unity' like you find in 1 John, 2 John and 3 John where the apostle rejoiced in those who walked 'in the truth'. That's the only unity that you can have - walking in the truth with those that are born again. But listen to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ - John 13 - now let these words pierce your heart: 'A new commandment I give unto you' - new, never seen before - 'that ye love one another' - listen - 'as I' - the Lord Jesus Christ, the crucified Christ - 'loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another'.

Now, if that was the only qualification of the world knowing that we were saved - would they know it? Would they? Would the mystery of Christ and the unity of the church shine forth? Now, it's with this mystery, and I believe this with all my heart, that we, if we ever will win the world, will win the world! With the mystery that all men, no matter what their background is, can be united together in Christ. Not getting saved and then separating and segregating into their little groups, but they can be united together as one in Christ. Now, men have been trying to do this down all the ages. They've been trying to break down borders and nationalities, and bring together - the Latin language was going to be the whole language and now you can hardly learn it at school any more, and even when I was meant to learn it I couldn't learn it at school! But that was to bring the world together, wasn't it? We talk about a united Europe, the United States of America - and from the very tower of Babel, this was in the heart of men. But what they were wanting to do was do it with sin still in them - the problem of sin, the problem of jealousy, the problem of national and political pride. But here the Lord Jesus Christ is giving to Paul this vision of the mystery where the Lord Jesus Himself is uniting together every tongue, people and nation and tribe as one - without sin! Isn't it wonderful?

Now, is this the message of the Gospel that you know? Because it's an intrinsic part of the Gospel. My question is: are you understanding it? Do believe it? - and more importantly in the situation we find ourselves in, in the world: are we articulating it? Are we getting this message across that you have nothing against a nationality, or a person of another political or religious persuasion? You might not agree with their beliefs, but them as a person - that you love them and you want them to be born again. For this is the truth, just like for Johan Le Casse in Belgium, that could liberate, revolutionise and revive Ulster!

Paul preached, after he preached Christ, about the unity of the church. Then thirdly, verse 10, we see what else he preached: 'To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God'. First, he preaches the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles. Second, he preaches the message of the church, and its unity to the Gentiles. Thirdly - this is fascinating - he preaches to inform the heavenly beings! 'To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God'. Think about this! Think about this! At this moment angels are observing you. Where you sit, there are angels hovering over, looking at the situation of this church - absolutely astonished at what God has done in His church through the blood and the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is saying, 'When I preach this message of the church, and when the angels see the church, they are amazed because we are part of the mystery'. One writer put it like this: 'It is God's cosmic drama. The theatre is history. The stage is the world. The actors are the church. The writer is God, who directs and produces the drama. And the audience? The cosmic beings, the rulers and authorities in heavenly realms - and the history of the Christian church is the graduate school for angels'. Think about this! This is how the angels are watching us and learning the way they ought to behave.
It was through the old creation, the universe in the beginning, and the days of creation when God created the heavens and the earth, that God revealed His glory to human beings. 'In the stars His handiwork I see. The firmaments showeth forth His handiwork'. Isn't that right? That is how we see the glory of God with the naked eye to the human being, but it is through the new creation - the church, the mystery of Jesus Christ - that God shows His glory to the angels. You can read about it in 1 Corinthians 11 on the subject of headship. Those who could not accept the headship of God in heaven, those who shunned the authority and superiority of God, those who led a rebellion - Lucifer and all his angels - are watching, and can see that you ought to be in subjection to God.

In 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 10 to 12 we read about it. Listen: 'Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into'. This is the mystery of all ages. The prophets never understood it. The scribes, the patriarchs never had it revealed to them and, all of a sudden, the Gentile people of God who never knew God, or the commonwealth of Israel, or the promises of the covenants - all of a sudden the angels watch: 'God has revealed it unto them?' Yes, God has! That's the miracle of grace. That's the miracle of the mystery, that the assembly - the local assembly is observed by God. Look at 1 Corinthians 4 verse 9 - turn to it. First Corinthians 4 verse 9, and part of the verse says this: 'For we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men'. Does that mean that the angels know when your seat's empty? I don't know, but more importantly God knows when your seat's empty.

It's interesting, the phrase that Paul uses here: 'To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God'. Now, that's a very very colourful - literally - a colourful phrase, because that phrase that Paul is using there is a phrase which is translated in another place as 'many coloured', 'multicoloured'. Now, let me give you a bit of a language lesson here. The Old Testament is written in Hebrew. The New Testament is written in Greek. But for the Greek world, that had come about after the Hebrew world had sort of passed away a bit, they translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek so that the Greeks could read it. The Greek Old Testament is called the 'Septuagint' - and in the Greek Old Testament this phrase, 'manifold', is used of Joseph's coat of many colours. Do you understand? 'The manifold wisdom', 'the many coloured', 'the multicoloured wisdom of God' - do you see the description? God is describing a multicultural, multicoloured nation of believers, all united together as one society, one community. This is God's 'multicoloured new man', and as Satan's angels are looking on, they're gobsmacked. Isn't it wonderful?

That's why they get so annoyed at times. That's why they stir the pot in your life at times, because they see what God is doing and they know that they can't do anything to stop it. Because you can't stop God! They look and they realise that the devil has not wisdom like this, the devil has not 'manifold, multicoloured wisdom'. He has only black wisdom! They look in awe - and all the angels and principalities and powers look - and they see the consequences of the cross of Jesus Christ. Think about it - Satan kneeling there at the cross, looking up at my Saviour bleeding and dying, and thinking 'I've got Him now!' If he could only see what he's seeing now, then - a people all over the world! He thought he was only up against the Jews, but people from every tribe and tongue and nation united together as a new creature that has never been seen before - and he's got it in the neck, and praise God he has. Praise God, there's a day when he'll be cast into hell with all his angels, and he knows it! What a mystery! What a sovereign eternal plan of God!

Look at verse 13 - that is why Paul says this to his people: 'Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory'. Paul, remember, was in prison. He was willing to pay the price. We
learnt, verse 1, that he was in prison because he was preaching this Gospel about the Gentiles, about the fact that the Gentiles could trust in Christ. Paul was willing to pay the price, that the church of Jesus Christ might go forward. Are you? Are you willing to pay the price in your life of time, of a night in the week, of some money, of your reputation, of perhaps the status within your business and climbing a ladder? Are you willing to do that to give some time - some time - to watch the church of Jesus Christ go forward? Or is that too big a price?

Verse 12: he says: 'In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him' - or that could be better translated: 'by the faithfulness of Him'. We come to God and the angels watch us come to God. Why? Because of Christ's faithfulness in going to the cross and dying for us. We can be absolutely confident that when we come to God in prayer, when we come to Him in worship, that we are being accepted, that we are being heard, we are being seen - not upon what we do, but because of the faithfulness of Him. Confidence comes from conviction, and if you've confidence you have conviction that Christ died for you and that Christ is pleading for you in heaven. Conviction comes from the word of God. So the formula is: confidence, conviction, the word of God. Take the word of God out - don't read it, don't study it, don't listen to it in the church - confidence and conviction disappear! Now, if you're absent of confidence before God and if you've no conviction (like half of the church of Jesus Christ about everything now) the chances are you're not reading the word of God. Do you see it? We have boldness, not because of our faith, but because of His faithfulness or the faith of Him - Jesus Christ, the righteous, the Son of God. Are you convinced of this message? Are you? Are you absolutely confident of what this message can do in our land, in our homes, in our nation, across the world for the many problems that we have?

This man Paul amazes me, and the amazing thing about him to me is that he's a man - and he's a man like you or me (or a woman). He is a sinner. Now, don't canonise him now or make him some holy thing that none of us can reach to. He was a man saved by the grace of God, and I know he was ordained for a special reason and a special purpose, we saw that last week - but he was a man! You have the same God - the same grace imparted to you, the same opportunities! It's amazing! He lived the Christian paradox. He's lying in prison - now don't forget that - but he's seated in heavenly places. Isn't that right? He's less than the least (or less than the 'leaster') yet he describes himself as the recipient of God's revelation, God's holy oracles. He has lost his life to find it! This was the Christianity that pushed the church of Jesus Christ forward. This was the faith - this wasn't a 'Sunday only Christianity'! This wasn't a 'wink and nod Christianity'! This was a Christianity that you would die for! I strongly suspect, according to the word of God, that if you don't have that Christianity, you don't have Christianity - because that's the only one I find in the scriptures. I don't find too many backsliders in the New Testament. I'm not saying there aren't any, but the streets around this hall are filled with them - filled with them! The New Testament's not!

That is the church that Paul portrays - and listen: the church is not an option! It comes with Christ. But let's look at our passage for tonight (if we can!): 'The Prayer For The Church'. Now, one of the greatest problems that you may face, and I face in prayer, is keeping your mind on it - and we often have a wandering mind, don't we? We're thinking about one thing - maybe we're praying about mum or dad or someone who's ill, and then we make an association with them. Maybe it's the fact that their auntie's not well or going away on holiday, and then we think about that we're going away on holiday, and then we think about all we're going to do on holiday - and, before you know it, you don't know where you are, and you've forgotten where you've come from, isn't that right? Your mind wanders in prayer, and you might start off well and then you just think about something else, and you lose it. Now, it's interesting that Paul did this, but he lost it in a spiritual way! If you look at verse 1 he started off with prayer: 'For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles' - and then, if you look at verse 14, it flows beautifully: 'For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. So he's about to get on his knees for prayer, and then he got digressed by the wonderful mystery of the church of Jesus Christ.
Now, if we could have a few spiritual digressions it would be a bit better in our prayer life. But you see what he was talking about - he was about to get onto his knees! Now, Paul had a prayer list for the church of Jesus Christ - and I would advise you to get a prayer list. You need a prayer list! How can you know what to pray about if you don't have it written down? Unless you have a photographic memory! He had a plan for prayer. Look at the first point - verse 14 and 15: 'For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named'. Now, the first thing I want you to notice about this was: his posture of prayer - 'I kneel'. Now, perhaps you already kneel when you pray. Sometimes I kneel and sometimes I don't kneel - it's not a 'have-to-do' thing. It's not compulsory to kneel, because the psalmists say that you can talk to God as you're walking, as you're sitting, as you're lying down even on your bed. The psalmist said: 'I cry out to God lying on my bed'. Now, I wouldn't advise that - to lie on your bed and cry unto God - but you can pray in any place, at any time, in any way, in any capacity or circumstance. So why is Paul saying, 'I kneel'?

It's even stranger when you think that, for the Jew, it wasn't a custom to kneel and pray. Most of the Jews stood and prayed. In fact, if you go to Jerusalem today, you'll know that there at the Wailing Wall they're all standing and they're praying. They stand to pray normally, and for the Jew to kneel and pray meant that it was something extraordinary, something unusually passionate, that the person that was praying was doing. If you go into the Old Testament, King Solomon when he was praying to dedicate the temple, he knelt on a wooden platform before the people, he lifted his hands toward heaven in prayer and God came! It was a special event when he knelt. In Gethsemane, the night before the Lord Jesus Christ was taken to be crucified, He fell prostrate on the ground on His face and on His knees in agony and prayed. Incidentally when Paul made his emotional, tearful departure from the elders in Ephesus, do you remember? He knelt and he prayed with them!

Now many Christians in Ulster, excuse the pun, as a knee-jerk reaction against ritualism and against the empty procedure of a dead denomination, don't ever kneel because 'they' kneel. I don't think it would do us any harm for all of us to get on our face before God for a few hours. But the point of Paul kneeling was not some ritualistic, outward conformity to a rule, but it was mirroring the disposition of his heart! The fact that he was on his knees physically was demonstrating that inwardly his spirit and his soul were on their knees, metaphorically speaking, before God - he was submissive to God in everything.

Now, to the Jew, that meant that Paul had a deep emotion within his heart. Now what was the deep emotion that drove Paul to his knees? The first thing was this: his thrilling, thrilling emotion with the mystery of the church of Jesus Christ that God had revealed to him. That God was delivering to him by revelation, he was so thrilled with it, that he fell to his knees, he praised God and he was bringing the beauties of the church before God. Now if you preach the word of God, and it doesn't thrill you to your knees, you might as well forget about it. You know, our wee land is dogged with preachers who aren't thrilled about what they're saying - and you can see it! They're not thrilled. The zeal of God's house - and I'm talking about the church now, the body of Christ, full of believers - it doesn't thrill them, because the realities that they speak about are not in the depths of their soul. They're in their head, they're in their intellect, but they have never reached the deep recesses of their being that God can touch, it doesn't thrill them any more!

Now don't try and imitate it, because I believe people see through that as well. How easy it is to be like the railway conductor who, after daily shouting out destinations of Bangor and Holywood and Conleigh, imagines that he's been there! But those places, he has no idea about the realities that lie behind his own words. You've heard the word of God, maybe you've preached the word of God - let me ask you, in Jesus name: do you know the realities, and do they still thrill you? Do they?

It's interesting that it made him fall on his knees. You know, there have been times that I have been studying this wee book, and do you see after I finish it and get it ready for Monday night? There have been times that
I've just stood in the presence of the Lord, with all these wonderful thoughts flooding through my mind and my heart, and I can't say a thing to the Lord for it's just wonderful. That's falling on your knees.

Do you know what Martin Luther said? 'The best study is prayer'. I think if I had the choice - I haven't had it yet - between studying and praying, I would choose praying because I need God more than I need knowledge. Is that not right? Do we not need God? The truths of God that thrill us so much, we need to see that the secret of Spirit-filled preaching is praying. Spurgeon said: 'Bathe, saturate your sermons in prayer and when you preach then there's a follow up work to do'. So much of the time we pray before we preach and then, when we get it out, then we forget about it and go on to the next thing. But one of the greatest works is to follow up your preaching and your work with prayer. To pray the seed of the word of God in after it's been preached, to cultivate it, to water it, and pray that God will water it with your prayers.

The second thing in his plan of prayer was the Person to whom prayer is addressed. Verse 14b: 'To the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Fathership of God, 'of whom the whole family in heaven and in earth is named'. Now Jesus Himself taught us to pray 'Our Father' didn't He? Luke 11: 'Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name'. Now the first thing that God is Father of is a special Fatherhood: the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. But then Paul says: 'Not only is He the Father of the Lord Jesus, but of whom the whole family in heaven and in earth is named'. Another translation translates it like this, and I like this: 'From whom every family in heaven and on earth is named' - every family in heaven and on earth, He is the Father of the redeemed. First of all: Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, secondly: He is the Father of the redeemed in heaven who have already gone on before and those left on earth. He is their Father, He is our Father - but! He is also the Father of everyone. Don't get me wrong now: in creation He is the Father of all, He has created all things, He has made all beings, whether human or angelic, in the creation of all things. Phillips translates it like this: 'From whom all fatherhood, earthly or heavenly derives its name'. Now what is Paul saying, he is directing our thoughts to who we are praying to. Do you get it? The Father of the Lord Jesus Christ - we are in Christ, He is our Father, the Father of the church in heaven, the Father of the church on earth, and indeed the Father of all creation and all angelic principalities and powers. We are coming to this sovereign, eternal, everlasting King. That's what he's getting at. He wants you to see not your ingrown toenail, but your God! The God that you are coming to, the God that you are prostrate before.

Someone asked a tremendous favour of Napoleon, and every time Napoleon was asked a tremendous favour he always granted it, do you know why? He said this: 'Because he honoured me by the magnitude of his request'. You can't ask God something too big! Do you know what God hates? - and I hope I hate it in His Spirit: unbelief! Men that pour cold water on faith, men who will not believe! Remember Jesus - that makes me shudder - He went into that town and they could not believe! Could not! Unbelief - how can you have it? You have a Father of all creation? How can you have it? The hymnwriter said:

'Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring,
For His grace and power are such
None can ever ask too much'.

The second reason for Paul's emotion to fall on his knees is simply because of the awareness of the love and concern that such a heavenly Father would have for His children. It's wonderful isn't it? Who we are praying to, how much He loves us, how much cares for us, how much He wants to bless us! Well if that doesn't make you excited, you'll never be excited! This is wonderful! So Paul gives the prayer list that the church ought to pray for one another, that he is praying for the church - and, I believe, we ought to pray for individually within our lives.

There are three things that he prays for. First of all, look at your sheet: a prayer for strength. Secondly: a prayer for love, and thirdly: a prayer for fullness. Let's look at the first one: a prayer for strength. Now the
idea of what Paul is saying here, look at verse 16 and 17, let's tease it out: 'That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man'. Now you see when you're ill, or sick, or in a hospital, or you're weak or drained - the nurses and the doctors, they strengthen you for one reason primarily: so that you can face life, isn't that right? So that you can face all the processes of your bodily functions, so that you can live, intrinsically continue enjoying and enduring everything that life gives to you. Now this is the same in the inward as it is in the outward: you need to be strengthened inwardly in your spirit and soul to receive all the blessings of the new life that God wants to give to you. But do you know what our problem is often as Christians? We're like wet paper bags and God has a big, gold bullion bar that He wants to plant into us - a blessing! - but He knows that if He puts it in it would fall out the bottom. Isn't that right? That's why Paul says: 'You've got to be strengthened in the inner man' - and if you let God do that He will strengthen you. Look at verse 16: 'According to the riches of His grace'. That means that, no matter how great our request is, the resources of His riches are abundantly greater, because we come to a King! We don't come to a pauper God who we need to bring things to, to make Him richer or to make Him happier, but we come to a God that we cannot better, we cannot add to His riches, His worth, or His grace. He is exceeding rich and He gives according to His riches, not out of His riches now! Doesn't give us a few pounds, He gives us in measure, in parallel, according to them - so we can be sure that we have more than we need, and more than we will ever need! Should that not make you optimistic? God deliver us from pessimism. How could you be pessimistic with a God like this?

He says that we can be strengthened with His riches, strengthened by the might of His Spirit in the inner man. Look at that: 'by the might of His Spirit in the inner man'. Now turn with me quickly to 2 Corinthians 4, for Paul talks about this, 2 Corinthians 4 verse 16: 'For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day'. Grey hair, baldness, teeth falling out, gammy leg, do you know what I'm talking about? The outward man perishes. But although the outward man is fading and essentially is dying from birth and even - who knows - even from the womb, perhaps, the process of death begins. Because once life begins, death begins, because sin began in the Garden. But what a wonderful thing that God has done, He has turned the tables, and though everything is falling off us, our spirit can be strengthened within the inner man. The Holy Spirit - and this is what you have to get as a Christian - it is the Holy Spirit who is the instigator and the administrator of this strength within the inner man. Please do not forget the Holy Spirit - He is the third Person of the blessed Trinity. He is what the church had to wait on before they could do anything, lift a finger. Just because the charismatics have hijacked Him, don't you despise Him, whatever you do - you need Him! But do you want Him? My friend if you don't have Him, if you don't have Him you will never know - I'm not talking about possessing Him, because every believer has the Holy Spirit - but if you don't have the realization in your mind about the fact that you need Him, you will never grow stronger in your Christian faith and your body will grow weaker, and your soul and spirit will stay the same, unless you are strengthened in the inner man by the Spirit of God. What happens when that happens is we become full of Christ. Look at verse 17: 'That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith'. That's the whole purpose of the Spirit coming and strengthening you in the inner man, what happens is: it makes the access that the Lord Jesus Christ can come and dwell in your heart.

Now this is an upward spiral, in a literary way, with Paul - and I want you to see this, how he builds one thought upon another. He talks about our capacity, being strengthened according to His riches - our capacity, our ability to hold the Lord Jesus Christ in our heart, is widened by the riches and to the extent of God's grace and wealth. So that we may appropriate His life, so that Jesus Christ may come in in a full sense - and then, when His life fills us and thus enlarges our capacity more, so that we can hold more of Him within us! It goes onward and upward until we get to glory and we're like Him!

Kenneth Wuest translates it like this, this is wonderful, that: 'When you let your inner man be strengthened by the Holy Ghost, Christ will settle down and feel completely at home in your hearts'. Is He at home tonight? Is he? Can He go into every room? Can He look at every picture and painting that has been etched
upon your conscience and your psyche, can He? Has He the keys to every door of every compartment of your recesses of your mind, conscious, or unconscious.

For years I have studied this subject of the fullness of the Holy Spirit, because I realize how important it is for the believer. There are so many diverse understandings of it, from a charismatic second blessing to a dead nothing. I asked a wise man one day what it was, do you know what he told me? Listen, he said: 'David, I've searched as well, I've looked into this subject for years, and do you know the conclusion I've come to? It is the split side, the other side of the coin of the Lordship of Jesus Christ'. In other words: if He's lord of your life, you'll be filled with the Spirit, if you seek the Spirit's filling. Do you know what he said to me, this is the comment: 'You'll know when you're filled with the Spirit, when you and Jesus aren't arguing about anything'. Isn't that brilliant? It's not so brilliant when you think about it: when you and Jesus aren't arguing about anything! Do we know this? The result of this that we find, and I'll close with this because I know my time's just over: you will be rooted and grounded in love. Isn't that wonderful? Those two metaphors that Paul is using, the result will be - it's an agricultural metaphor, 'rooted', you'll get your strength from the love of God, you'll get you sustenance from Him, you will be rooted. Then a building metaphor - 'grounded', 'built', He will be your foundation, and the foundation of your life will be His love.

'The love that Jesus had for me,  
To suffer on the cruel tree,  
That I a ransomed soul might be,  
So more than tongue can tell'.

It's taken me fifteen weeks so far, and we're still telling it aren't we? We could have taken longer, and we're going to take longer. Next week we're going to look at 'A Prayer For Love, and 'A Prayer For Fullness' - and then that wonderful verse that 'He is able to do exceeding abundantly more than we can ever ask or even think'. It gets better, I can hardly believe it, but it gets better. If you're thrilled with it shout 'Hallelujah' - Hallelujah! Amen!

One more study in the book of Ephesians, and then I'm flying off on my holidays, and then there's still two more Bible studies. So don't leave, two more Bible studies, and we'll begin Ephesians again in September. So come back next week, and we'll continue in September.

Let us pray. Our Father we thank Thee for so great salvation, and what a great Saviour we have that He has saved to the uttermost and He gives full salvation, right from election right through to consummation - when we will be conformed to His blessed image. Lord, we have really not entered into this, we're only paddling at the shore of Thy great ocean - but Lord, take us deeper, take us deeper into the knowledge of Him, and bless us until we come back next week. In Jesus name, Amen.
Ephesians - Chapter 15
"Our Mind-Blowing God"

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Ephesians 3:20-21

1. Give God Praise (verse 20a)
2. Experience God's Power (verse 20b)
3. Demonstrate It In The Church (verse 21)

Let me welcome you to our Bible Study here tonight. It's great to see you all here, there are some visitors with us and let me make you especially welcome - and it is our prayer that, as we look at the word of God collectively together, that the Holy Spirit may come to us in a special way, and reveal Christ, and reveal the blessings that we have in Him together as the church of the living God.

Ephesians and chapter 3 - and we'd planned on finishing this chapter last week, but it didn't happen! So we're going to look at the final verses of the chapter - and I've entitled my message this evening (as you can see from your handout) "Our Mind-Blowing God". We're going to begin reading from verse 14, which is the passage that we looked at last week, so let's look at verse 14 right to the end of the chapter. Paul says, and remember he's coming from the context of verse 1 of the chapter - he began by saying 'For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles' - he's about to pray for them, 'I Paul am about to pray for you Gentiles'. And then he gets a digression, a massive digression, of a load of verses talking about how the Gentiles have been brought near to Christ. And then he talks about the mystery of the new man, that two exclusive opposites have been united together in Christ - the Jew and the Gentile, the Greek and the Jew - and that there's no difference now, that middle wall of partition has been broken down. So you know all that - and then he gets round to praying.

So he's gone from verse 1 and eventually in verse 14 he gets to the point (he's a bit like me!). He gets to the point and he says: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" - and then we learnt how we ought to pray for the church, what we ought to pray for the church worldwide, what we ought to pray for the Iron Hall, what we ought to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ and ourselves - the priorities. "Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory" - one - "to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love". First thing, being strengthened in the inner man by the Holy Ghost. Second thing, knowing that love of Christ and being rooted and grounded in His love. Then verse 18 extends that: "[that we] may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God" - the third thing. First of all, strengthened in the inner man, in other words the capacity to hold Christ in yourself, being 'widened' by the Holy Spirit. Secondly, that you might know the love of God in Christ; and thirdly, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God. Here's his doxology: "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen". Amen's right! And we'll say 'Amen' - hopefully - by the end of this evening.

We're going to look, and finish off looking at verses 17 to 19, that we didn't finish off last week. And the third point that Paul was trying to get us to pray for, and was praying for the church at Ephesus, was the prayer for love. Look at verse 17: 'that ye being rooted and grounded in love'. Now you're taught at school
not to mix your metaphors, but Paul often mixed his metaphors - in fact, he created words that didn't even exist in his language (and that speaks to me!) - but he mixed his metaphors, why? Because the language that he was speaking was inadequate to explain to his readers and his listeners the deep love, and the love as Christians that they ought to enter into experientially, that they had already experienced in salvation through Christ. What he was talking about here: being strengthened in the inner man, having your capacity widened to hold God's Son, Christ, spiritually in your heart.

Secondly, to know that love of God that passeth all knowledge - it is so immense, so high, so deep, so wide and so long, that he couldn't express it grammatically, so he mixes his metaphors. Look at verse 17b, he says you need to be rooted - rooted! Now that's an agricultural metaphor, and what it's saying is: to be rooted in something means that you're getting your nourishment from it, your life, from the water, and from the nutrients and minerals in the ground - you're absorbing all the life of the love of God. That's what's making you live! That's what's making you alive - you're drawing upon the love that is in Christ Jesus. Now then he mixes the metaphor and he talks about 'being rooted and grounded' - literally 'founded' - that's an architectural metaphor. To build upon a foundation, a house, to build, to be founded, to be grounded - do you see what he's doing? He just can't paint the picture adequately enough, so he mixes all the metaphors: to be rooted and to be founded, like trees, sapping your life from the love of God, being planted deep and wide with your roots in the ground of God's gratitude and love. Like buildings, our lives are to be built deep in the foundation of God's love.

Donald Gray Barnhouse, that great preacher years ago, once pointed out that 'Love is intrinsic to all the fruit of the Spirit'. Now if you go to Galatians 5 and 22, you don't need to turn to it now, but if you look at it at home, you see all the fruit of the Spirit. This is what Barnhouse said about it: 'Love is the key to the fruit of the Spirit. Joy is love singing. Peace is love resting. Long-suffering is love enduring. Kindness is love's character. Faithfulness is love's habit. Self-control is love holding the reins'. See it? Love is everything! It's the rooting and the grounding, the founding of everything that we have in Christ. And what Paul is trying to get across here is that love is not an option - it's a fundamental of our faith!

Now turn to that great passage on love for a minute, 1 Corinthians 13 - 1 Corinthians 13, and there's one man here tonight, I think he knows this off by heart! 1 Corinthians 13 and verse 4, and the AV says 'charity' some other translations say 'love', and it's the same word but I like the word charity, because charity is love in action - and that's what love is, it's not a feeling, it's an act of your will. 'Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself', [that] means it's not proud, 'is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never fails'. Never fails! Now Paul said in this passage, 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am nothing'! Now grasp that! Paul is speaking there, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and he says 'I don't care what you have, I don't care if you have a degree. I don't care, even, if you're saved alone. I care not what doctrines you believe in, or what you look like, or what you carry under your arm, or what you wear. I care that you primarily have love! That the foundation of your life is love - and if you don't have it, it doesn't matter what you have, it's nothing!'!

Now Paul turns in Ephesians, look at the chapter again - 3, to show us the way to learn to love each other, and to love the world around us. And he tells us that the only way to grow in love for one another is to get to grips more, day by day, in understanding the love of God toward us in Christ Jesus. Now look at the passage, verse 17 and verse 18, especially verse 18 - he uses four dimensions: breadth, length, depth, height. The breadth of Christ's love, let's think about it, what was the breadth of Christ's love? John 3:16, 'For God so loved the world', the love of God is broad as the world - every nation, every status, every class, every person - the love of God is broad as the world.
Breadth, length - what is the length of God's love? Well, the length of God's love is forever. What does 1 Corinthians 13:8 say? 'Charity never fails'. Love never fails, true love never runs done - that's it's length, it's eternal. God says to us, 'I have loved you with an everlasting love'.

What about the depth, what was the depths of God's love? It can be summed up in a few words, 'Even the death of the cross'. I'm not going to try to plumb those depths tonight. But think of it! 'Even! He humbled Himself, He became one of God's creatures, in the sense that He became a man. He humbled Himself to that status, and we can't even conceive what He left in Glory to measure up and compare it, relatively. We can't do it! Yet it goes on, 'Even the death of the cross'.

What is the height? The height of God's love is found in 1 John 3 and verses 1 to 2: 'Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed', revelled, 'upon us, that we should be called the sons of God...but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is' - the height is heaven! The breadth of God's love is the world; the length is forever; the depth is the cross; and the height that He takes us to, from the depth of our sin, and our shame, and our hell, is heaven itself!

F. B. Meyer said, 'There will always be as much horizon before us, as behind us, with regards to the love of God. And when we have been gazing on the face of Jesus for millenniums, its beauty will be as fresh, and fascinating, and fathomless as when we first saw from the gate of Paradise'. Isn't that right? We'll never be able to plumb these depths. But you know, I wonder did Paul have the mystery of Christ's church in mind when he was talking about these four dimensions. What we are saved from, and what we are brought to in this new nation - the 'third race' in Jesus Christ - if you think about it, the breadth is immense. Look at chapter 2, chapter 2 of Ephesians and verses 11 to 18, we'll not take time to read them, but Paul talks about 'Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles' and then he expands it all. He amplifies what it meant to be a Gentile to a Jew, what it meant to be a Gentile to God, you were separated from all the promises - but the breadth of God's love in the church is the fact that Jews and Gentiles, that are two poles apart, can be brought together! That's the breadth of God's love, and God's work, at Calvary. What about the length? Look at chapter 1 and verse 4: 'According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love'. Chapter 2 and verse 7: 'That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus'.

What is the length? The length is from eternity in the past - if you can even say that - way back before the foundation of the world, where God chose you; and it goes as broad to the eternity future, right after the millennium where God will show, through us, His exceeding riches of His grace! That's some length, isn't it? What about it's depth? Chapter 2 and verses 1 to 3: 'You hath he quickened, who were dead' - dead, we looked at what dead meant - 'in trespasses and sins: Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past lusting in the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.' - what a depth that God has reached down to, to make a people and a church onto Himself from the depth of sin! What height has He gone to? Look at verse 6 of chapter 2: 'And he hath raised us up together, and made us to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus'. Marvellous, isn't it? It's wonderful - no wonder!

But you know there's a wee problem about this verse - it's not a problem for God, because nothing is impossible for God - but you're also taught in school that there are only three dimensions. Isn't that right? 3-D, three dimensions, and we have four dimensions here - look at it: breadth, length, depth, height. Now why is that? You couldn't draw a picture of this. The Holy Spirit has put all these four dimensions in for a reason, what is He trying to say, here, to us? The old philosophers, old Greek philosophers, used to reason about a possible fourth dimension - and do you know what they concluded? That it was 'a strange kind of spiritual dimension'. It took them a long time doing that, didn't it? There's nothing 'strange' about it, it's as real as the
other three dimensions, but the problem is that men and women in this world are blinded to it. But A. W.
Tozer, describing this fourth dimension and the great plan, and scheme, and architectural vision that God had
in His mind, portraying it to Paul of this great love of Christ - this is what Tozer says of the incalculable love
of God: 'Because God is self-existent, His love had no beginning. Because He is eternal, His love can have
no end. Because He is infinite, it has no limit. Because He is holy, it is the quintessence of all spotless purity.
Because He is immense, His love is incomprehensively vast, bottomless, shoreless, a sea, an eternal ocean'.
I'm sure that it didn't pass the mind of the hymn writer when he wrote his hymn, 'The love of God is greater
far than tongue or pen can ever tell, it stretches to the highest heaven and reaches to the lowest hell'.

And it's because of this greatness that Paul prays that you and I - look at chapter 3 and verse 18 - that you
and I would be able to comprehend with all the saints, he wants us to understand. Do you know what that
word 'comprehend' is in Greek? It literally means 'to take hold of', 'to seize'. Now what's the picture here?
This four dimensional figure that you couldn't draw, but is seen by Paul and in the mind of God, God wants
you and I to get hold of it! To hold it! To embrace it! To seize it! To comprehend what is that love! Now,
that is impossible to do, you can't do it - you will never in this world, or even perhaps in the next, be able to
plumb the depths of the love of God. But do you know something? It's got to be the Christian's life
occupation to try to do it. That might confuse you, but the Christian is told to be perfect, isn't he? And by the
way, perfect means perfect. But you'll never be perfect in this world, so why does God tell you to be perfect?
Because you're to strive after perfection, and you're to strive after, to seize and to hold onto, the love of God
to get grip of what it means that God loved you in Christ. You'll never do it to a full extent, but we are to try
in our lifetime to plumb those depths. That's why, in verse 19, he says exactly that - he almost contradicts
himself, he says that he wants us to comprehend with all the saints, yet he says [in] verse 19: 'to know the
love of Christ, which passeth knowledge'. Now, get what he's saying here: he's basically saying 'To know the
love of Christ which you can't know'.

Now what does he mean? What does 'surpasses knowledge' mean? Well the Greek word 'surpasses
knowledge', it means to 'throw beyond' - something that is beyond you. And Paul is saying that the love of
Christ, the love of God transcends us, exceeds our abilities of knowledge. He's saying that it's beyond
knowledge, but you can know the love of God in your heart! It's like the wee baby that's in the arms of its
mother, and maybe you come along and you want to nurse, and you take the baby and you start nursing the
baby, and then it starts screaming and shrieking - why? Because it knows it's not with its mother, and maybe
it's thinking to itself: 'Does this person love little babies? Am I safe with this person?'. Now what does a baby
know about the love of a mother? Nothing really, does it? It doesn't really, does it? It doesn't really, but it knows an instinct, deep in
it, that the love of the mother is priceless, and it enjoys it even though it cannot understand it, or take it in.
This is what Paul is saying here: you can never, intellectually, or perhaps experientially in your lifetime,
really get to grips and comprehend the love of God, which is incomprehensible - but you can start, in your
lifetime, to know it! To experience it, and seek a deep experiential knowledge of the love of God in your life.

Samuel Rutherford, who was imprisoned in a cell in Aberdeen, listen to what he said about the love of God:
'Love, love - I mean Christ's love - is the hottest coal that can ever be felt. Oh, but the smoke of it can be hot,
cast all the salt sea on it you like and it will flame! Hell cannot quench it! Many, many waters will not
quench love!'. Samuel Pierce says that, 'The love of God is a subject altogether too wonderful, too
mysterious and divine, so great and so immense that the more real saints think of it, the more the Holy Spirit
is pleased at any time to give them spiritual conceptions of it - and they cry out 'Oh! The depth!''.

I'm afraid, as a preacher tonight, I have nothing in nature to illustrate to you the love of God. Because there is
nothing, you can't grasp it in any way, but God wants you to get into it. In fact the only illustration that we
have, perhaps, of the love of God is found in John 15 and verse 19, where Jesus said - now listen to this: 'As
the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you'. Now if you can understand the love that the Father loved the
Son with, you're a good one! No one can. For the love of God must be an eternal love, a pure love, a spotless
love - and that is the love wherewith Christ loves you. It's wonderful isn't it? But note that Paul says that 'we are to be able to comprehend with all the saints' - with all the saints. Now that's important, that this love that we are to comprehend is done so among the believers, the assembly, the church - and we ought to learn and understand the love of God through the community of God's church. That's how we're to demonstrate it, with our love to one another, with our love for Christ, as we serve Him and as we worship Him - that is how we comprehend it, with all the saints. That means that you need to be where the saints are. Now if you're not there, you will never comprehend the love of Christ.

Then in, verse 19, he prays a prayer for fullness, and he says: 'to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God' - a prayer for fullness. Now this is mind-blowing, it is unbelievable, because the fullness that Paul is talking about here, is the fullness wherewith God fills Himself. I'll repeat that: the fullness he's speaking of here is the fullness with which God fills Himself, all that He is and has within His being. You'll remember in 1 Kings 8, when Solomon was dedicating the temple, that he prayed this: 'But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?'. Solomon realised that God could not be contained, but Paul prays that the church should be filled with all the fullness of God - the fullness wherewith God fills Himself, in His being. Well might Solomon have asked the question, 'Will God ever dwell on the earth?'. for in Colossians 1 and verse 19 we find out that Christ, who tabernacled among us, who pitched His tent in our presence, it pleased the Father that in Him should all the fullness of the Godhead bodily dwell. He is the fullness of God and we are complete in Him! We are finished, we are perfected in Him - and the more that you dwell on Him, and His love, and the more He dwells in your heart by faith, the more and more and more you are filled with all the fullness of God.

When Dr Douglas Brown went and preached in Wales, there was one message in particular that blessed the people, and he could sense that the message was blessing the people. He preached on the fullness of the Holy Spirit. And after that meeting one young man ran after him, literally, right into the little inquiry room, and he said: 'Sir, Sir it's alright you telling me to be filled - but I'm full of...', he didn't know what to say - and then he pointed to the little waste-paper basket in the corner of the room that was full of cracks, and he said: 'Yes! I'm full of cracks!'. Isn't that what we feel at times? Do you know what Dr Brown replied? Listen: 'What if you are? If you were a basket, and you were lowered into the sea, it will be filled! And it will remain full, and if it abides in the ocean it cannot be emptied - even with all its cracks, the basket will only lose its content if it is removed from the sea! Young man, cracks or no cracks, if you abide in Christ you will always be filled with the Spirit!'. Isn't that wonderful!

Some writers have illustrated this, and they've tried to illustrate it, but you can't - how can you illustrate how a man can be filled with all the fullness of God? Some of them have talked about a wee thimble, and taking it to the side of the ocean, and walking into the ocean and filling the thimble up with the ocean. That might illustrate a small part - but it can't - you can't get the whole ocean into a thimble! And that's what God's Spirit is saying: 'We are filled with all the fullness of God', and that's why, in the last two verses that we're going to look at before we finish our meeting tonight, verse 20 and 21, He is bringing to these people, that the God who Paul makes these requests to has a capacity which exceeds the people's capacity to ask! That's what He's leading them up to. That God here, that can fill you with all His fullness, is so great, He's done that impossible thing already - hopefully - in your life, that He can exceed the capacity of your asking. He can do much more through the power of the Holy Spirit that is realised within you.

And that brings us to our first point on your sheet. Paul gives God the praise in verse 20, and we have here a doxology that you often hear quoted within our meetings, and so forth, as a promise and as a prayer perhaps at the end of the meeting: 'Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us' - and what does he do? Well he's bowing his knee unto the Father, that's the first thing: 'Now unto Him'! You know, in the prayer meeting we pray unto Him, not unto
the elders, or unto the Pastor, or the folk around you - we pray unto Him. At home you pray unto him, maybe that's why we don't pray as much at home, because no one's listening - we pray unto Him! Unto Him! He gives God the praise, and if we don't give God the praise, we're lost, we're done for in this place - if God doesn't get the praise.

And then secondly, he exhorts the Ephesians to experience God's power. Now I want you to notice this, because this is one of the most mis-quoted verses in the whole of Scripture: 'Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think', not 'we can ask or think' - because the whole prerequisite of this verse is that you do you ask! It's not what you can ask! God isn't going to do exceeding abundantly above what you can ask, but you never do ask - you've got to get on your knees! You've got to cry to God! And today in a generation that does not pray, and a Christian church that has lost the secret of intercession, and supplication, and breaking their heart in brokenness before God - you've got to ask! And if you don't ask, you'll not get, my friend. 'Ye have not', James says, 'because ye ask not'.

But what is the key, and what is the heart, to this soul-inspiring doxology? His previous request was for what? Three things: strength, love and fullness. And you would think that was great and that was bold enough, but Paul is saying that God is willing to do more than even these things that he's exhorting us to ask. The extent of His ability is seen in the manner in which Paul pyramids this whole verse, words piling upon one another, all the super-abundant blessing, words stacked upon words, he paints an incredible picture of the resources of God for us! Look at the back of your handout:

[Back of handout looks like this]:

- Able
- Able to do
- Able to do what we ask
- Able to do what we think
- Able to do what we ask or think
- Able to do all that we ask or think
- Able to do above all that we ask or think
- Able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think
- Able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think

Now this is what Paul is doing: he's pyramiding, and piling upon pile. You would think it was great enough if someone said to you, 'You know, my God's able'. Isn't that wonderful, even in itself, that one word: God is 'able'? But then he goes on, 'God is able to do', He's not just able to be, He's able to do! And then, 'He's able to do what we ask', what I ask, what we as an assembly ask! 'He is able to do what we think', not just what we ask, but what we think - he's able to do all that we ask or think! He's able to do above all that we ask or think! He's able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think! And he's able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think! Now you know why I call Him 'Our Mind-Blowing God'. Isn't it wonderful? That means - now listen, let this sink in - that you cannot ask too much! You can't! Because it's not our asking that He's answering, it's not even our thinking - if we do any kind of spiritual thinking, at all - He is able to exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or even think! Because - why can He do it? - verse 16, because He is doing it according to the riches of His grace - and you can't get any richer than that!

There was once a man asked the King, he came into his presence and he asked him for something, and the King gave it to him in abundance - he gave him as much treasure as he could. And the man exclaimed, 'Your Majesty, that's too much! That is far too much!'. And the King smiled and said, 'It may seem to much for you to take, but it's not too much for me to give'. Oh, we live such poor lives in Christ at times - because He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think - or think! I want you to think about that! He's able to supply what we ask, but even the things that we don't ask, and we think about - all the possibilities
that we feel we couldn't even ask God for, because we've so little faith, we're maybe afraid to ask for the things, to be presumptuous in the sight of God. Think of all the dreams that you've ever had, spiritually speaking! What you want to be, the man of God that you want to be and you feel you'll never be, the times of prayer that you want to spend before God and you feel that you'll never do it because the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, and everything is against you in the home and at work, and everything just seems to cave in on you, and you'll never be what you want to be...but you've that dream - He's able! He is able to give you that dream! The things you want to accomplish for Christ in your wildest imaginations, God is able to do those things - but hold on! You know, He's not able to do those things - He's able to do exceeding abundantly more than those things! He can make you someone you haven't even thought about! He can do something in your life that you have never conceived - and let me say this - that you've never read about in a biography, He can do more than that! It's mind-boggling, isn't it?

Exceeding abundantly above all. Now here he goes again, he combines these words in a unique compound - he combines three Greek words to make one word. He uses first of all, and I'm talking about the phrase 'exceeding abundantly', that's all one word in the Greek - first of all he uses 'hooper' (sp?), which means 'above' or 'beyond', above or beyond what we can ask or think. Then he joins the word 'ek' to it, which intensifies the force of the verb, to which it is connected, to a level of perfection. So what he's saying is 'hooper' - above - 'ek' - above, to a level of perfection. 'Perusso' (sp?), the last word he combines, which means to exceed to a degree that you go beyond all things that can be. Are you getting this? 'Hooper-ek-perusso' (sp?) literally means 'to go beyond all things in an inexhaustible way'! What a God we have.

Sure, we know that He's able, don't we? He's able to save, and if you're not saved tonight, you need to know that. He is able to save, if you're a backslider and you're living in your sin and the devil's telling you the lie that you can't do it and you can't get out of it - listen, He is able, Hebrews 7:25 'Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them'. You're able to walk a holy life because Christ is alive. He's able to keep - and don't you tell me that this Christian life's too hard. It is hard, but it's not too hard. 2 Timothy 1 and 12, Paul said: 'For I know whom I have believed, and I'm persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day'. This verse that we're reading tonight tells me, He's not only able to save and able to keep, but He's able to do the impossible! I wouldn't another God, frankly. Don't give me a cold, intellectual, pharisaical god, because I don't want him. I frankly don't want him. I want reality, and I have a supernatural God, my friend - and don't you ever deny it! He's able! More than able! Exceeding abundantly above, inexhaustively able in anything I can even think about!

And why is it? Well the means that He uses to produce all this in us is 'according to the power', at the end of verse 20, 'that worketh in us'. What is that power? The Holy Spirit. I feel we are - I think it was John Owen said in his day, that the church has got stuck between Calvary and Pentecost. We forget about Him, don't we? If you forget about Him, well you can forget about your Christian life, because you need Him. And it's that power that works in us that is able to do this, and it's even in prayer - don't forget Paul's talking about prayer. And we hear so many prayers today, and it's like a 'lucky-dip' - 'If it's Your will, or if it's not Your will, Lord, You do it'. It's like pinning the tail on to the donkey, you might get it, you might hit 'bingo' or not. That's not prayer - prayer is seeking God's face, prayer is something that must be definite, must be intelligent. We ought to be consciously praying in the will of God, in a definite assurance that because God has said He will do something, that we will hold onto Him to make Him to it! To hold Him to His word, because we are praying according to His will.

How does He do that? Well usually He does it through planting a verse in our hearts by the word of God - that means you have to read the word of God. You can't run around saying 'You're going to be healed, and you're going to be healed, and you're going to be healed' - God needs to tell somebody that someone is going to be healed, and He does that through the word of God, through God speaking. And the faith is not in the
person, that they work up, and they're so faith-full - full of faith - that they can touch a man and they can be healed. That's not faith, faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God - and it's when God says something, and gives that promise to you, that you can claim it, and you don't go out and shout it from the rooftops, but you seek God, and pray to God, and cry upon God. But the bottom line of the promise of God is this, listen: the more we yield to Him, the more our prayers will be answered in a greater way than we could ever imagine. How do I know that? Because Paul told us at the very beginning in chapter 1, 19 to 23, that the power that now works in you, is the power that raised Christ from the dead. That's how we know.

But thirdly and finally, it's to be demonstrated in the church, verse 21: 'Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end'. Men! What are they like in their sin? We thought about it yesterday morning: naturally and sinfully they seek to glorify each other and their own selves, but God takes away their little flickering candle lights and He replaces them with the sun of the blaze of His own sovereign glory! And who cares about friends, if we lose them for a deeper knowledge of God? Who cares about our reputation in intellectual circles, or in the establishment, or in the middle-class, if you going to get to know God more? Who cares! Are you willing to lose it all? Are you willing to say like Song of Songs: 'As the apple tree and as the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house and his banner over me was love. Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples, for I am lovesick!' Are you?

You know, God is worthy of our eternal praise. We don't have time tonight, but if we were to turn to the 148th Psalm you would see that God's greatness is displayed in angelic hosts, it's displayed in the cosmos of the sun, the moon and the stars, the mammals, the fish, the birds, the reptiles, insects, the fire, the hail, the snow, the mist, in the wind, in the mountains, in the hills, in the trees, in kings and in people, in old men, in young men, in Israel and in the nations - and it's all intended to bring praise and glory to God. But there's one group that's not mentioned in the Old Testament! That's right, it's the church. The church of Jesus Christ, and that mystery is what is going to bring eternal glory to God, forever and ever and ever! Williams says: 'The eternal glory of God, as God and Father, will be made manifest throughout all ages in the church and in Jesus Christ' - amazing statement - 'Christ and the church as one body will be the vehicle of that eternal demonstration. God has said "This people have I formed for Myself, they shall show forth My praise".

William Kelly believes that the tabernacle of God coming, dwelling with men in Revelation 21 is the church of Jesus Christ - bringing glory to God. I don't know whether that is so, but I know this: that the ages heaping upon one another - we will bring glory to Him! Now my question is this: if we will do it then, we ought to do it now!

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - August 2000
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Ephesians - Chapter 16

"Lessons On Walking In Church"

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Ephesians 4:1-6

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We're turning to Ephesians chapter 4, and we began our reading there - and we'll take a few moments to recap on what we've been studying in the year that has gone by. Ephesians chapter 4, and we're going to look at the first six verses (as your study sheet shows you) of this little chapter. The first six verses are out of a contextual passage which deals with verses 1 right through to verse 16, so in order to get the flow of all that Paul is saying to us, and the Holy Spirit is saying to us, let's read all these verses together.

Verse 1: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love".
The title of our subject this evening is: 'Lessons on Walking in Church' - how we ought to walk and behave within the church of Jesus Christ. In the church age in which we live - in our particular peak or trough, whatever way you want to look at it - the comment is often heard: 'Don't talk to me about doctrine, I want to live out my Christian life. Christian life is important, what you do, the way that you walk - not necessarily what you believe'. You often hear it said: 'It makes no difference what you believe, as long as your life is right and you walk with your fellow man and before God in holiness and righteousness'. That may be well, it may tickle the ear of many in our world today, it may appeal to sociality that is abroad - but as we look, in the light of Scripture, it does not measure up. Indeed, the very first word - almost - in our passage absolutely refutes such a view.

Look at it, verse 1: 'I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord' - and perhaps, as a young Christian, you learnt the invaluable lesson that where you read 'therefore' you [ask] 'wherefore?'. You find the word 'therefore', and that means that the writer, and indeed the Holy Ghost inspiring these pages, is coming from a subject and is wanting to build upon it. So when Paul says: 'I therefore', we can see that he is alluding, and looking back, to something that he has already said - and indeed, it is the passages that we have been studying in the year that has gone by, chapters 1 to 3.

Many commentators divide the book of Ephesians into two parts, chapters 1 to 3, and chapter 4 to 6. They look at chapters 1 to 3 as belief, and chapters 4 to 6 as behaviour - 1 to 3 as doctrine, 4 to 6 as duty. If you like, the first half is exposition of what we believe, and the second half is exhortation unto holy and godly life. If you turn to chapter 1 of Ephesians, and that great verse that we are building everything that we study upon, we see that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus - verse 3. That is the beginning of Paul's discourse and homily of the wealth that we have in Christ. Isn't that right? Chapters 1 to 3, the wealth we have. We spent many beautiful weeks - I hope, for you - as we looked at the wealth that we have in the Lord Jesus, the great Christ we have that has taken us - we saw it in chapter 2 - from the depths of our sin to the heights of His holiness, and blessed us with all kinds of spiritual blessings in heavenly places. Now what Paul is doing, he is saying: 'I therefore', because of this, look to this - because of your wealth, I want you to look to your walk.

That's why we're looking tonight at lessons on walking within the church of Jesus Christ - from theology to practicality, and that is the balance that we need to get. It's not all head knowledge, but it has to be balanced with carrying out what we know of Christ, what we know of God and His gospel, into our everyday life's experience. The key word within the second half of this epistle, from chapters 4 to 6, is the word 'walk'. Walk, walk, walk - the key word in the first half 'wealth', but now it is 'walk'. Look at chapter 4 and verse 1, we've seen it: 'walk worthy of the vocation', or the calling, 'wherewith ye are called'. Verse 17: 'This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind'. Chapter 5 and verse 2: 'And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us', verse 8, 'For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light', verse 15, 'See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise'.

Do you see the order? The first half of the book - wealth, wealth, wealth - all the riches of knowledge and wisdom that we have in Christ Jesus, what we have been blessed with through the blood of the eternal covenant. Now Paul moves from that wealth to the walk. With every privilege that we have in the Christian life, and indeed every privilege that we have in human life, it brings the responsibility - and Paul is saying: 'With the privilege of your wealth, wealth, wealth - here is your walk!'. There are so many walks, and indeed if we fail to learn within the Christian life that doctrine must turn to duty, we have missed the mark. We have missed the point of doctrine and belief, if we do not see that the reason for what we believe is for the way we behave - that is why we have belief! That is why we have doctrine: that we may order our lives aright in the sight of God.
Now, it would be wrong to separate doctrine from behaviour. Perhaps the severing of these chapters, chapter 3 and 4, as wealth and walk is not as distinct as some commentators make it - because both duty and doctrine are intermingled. You can't separate them! As you look at chapters 4, 5, and 6 of Ephesians you find that - that it is mingled theology with practicality, it is belief with behaviour all the way through, for you cannot separate them. The more I read the word of God, and the more I study the pages of inspired Scripture, I find that human obedience is always a result and a response of godly grace. Isn't that right? Human obedience, wherever we find it within the word of God, always comes from the operation of the grace of God in a human life. Isn't that what it was at salvation? Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, isn't that right? We could not - we remembered last night - we could not pull Him down from heaven, He had to come. He came among His own, and His own received Him not. He came to this earth to save us, and even, indeed, in our individual experience of salvation it had to be - it had to be - the operation of the Holy Spirit that brought to our minds our need of Christ. It had to be the Holy Spirit that convicted us of our sin, and out of that godly grace that was shown to you and I, we realised our need and we were obedient to the gospel.

Paul is saying the same thing here - God acts, and we now have to respond. 'Therefore' - do you get it? 'I therefore, the prisoner', look at verse 1, 'of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called'. 'I therefore', what does he say? 'Beseech you'. You find that this is the pattern of Paul on many occasions. If you were to turn to Romans chapter 12 - you can do it if you wish - and verse 1, you see that for those first few chapters, from chapters 1 to 11, Paul is labouring in doctrine. Then he turns to practice, and tells those Romans: 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind' - be transformed because of what you have learned of the salvation of God which you have come into!

Time and time again Paul makes this transition, and he comes before these children who he has spawned in his own spiritual life, and he beseeches them. I like the fact that that is a very tender word: 'beseech' - 'Therefore I beseech you'. You see, where grace rules the soul the word of law 'I command', is changed to the word of grace 'I beseech'. There is a different relationship now: God urges us to live for His glory. He does no longer command us - it's not like the Old Testament where God said to His people, Israel: 'If you will obey me, I will bless you', 'By the word of the law ye shall live, if you keep the law'. But now God says to His children: 'I have blessed you with all spiritual blessings - now, out of gratitude, obey me'. Do you see the difference?

Our Christian lives, just like this epistle, our behaviour is to be a response coming out of the love and the grace that God has shown toward us. One man put it like this: 'Christ has done so much for me, the rest of my life is a P.S. to His great work' - isn't that lovely? His life started in Christ, with Christ, with the grace of God that was shown to him at Calvary, and now he is determining that the rest of his life would be dedicated to Christ, because Christ dedicated His life to him. Do we live up to such a calling? Do we? 'I beseech you brethren, therefore, that ye walk worthy of the vocation' - and that word 'calling', it's not some kind of ministerial calling, but 'vocation' means 'calling' - the fact that you are called by the grace of God. Do we walk worthy of His calling?

Old Gypsy Smith, that famous evangelist, often sang a hymn which asked the question, listen: 'How shall the world know Jesus, if they cannot see Jesus in me?'. It's a good question, isn't it? If what we believe doesn't weigh up with what we behave, there is something tragically wrong in our spiritual life. Our conduct, if it does not endorse the gospel, contradicts the gospel. The world at large will see that as a contradiction of fact. Now, look at what Paul is trying to get to us now - the Holy Spirit is wanting to impress upon your spirit, after studying chapters 1, 2, and 3 of this epistle, look at it. Chapter 1, look at chapter 1, our wealth is found in it, isn't it? In chapter 1 we find the wealth that we are called by grace into the body of Christ, even before the world began we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and then Christ called us and
put us into the body - that is our wealth. Look at chapter 4 - verses 1 through to 16 is now our walk. In mirror of that wealth of being called and put in the body, now there is a responsibility of walk - walk worthy of the call in the unity of the body!

Look at chapter 2, verses 1 to 10 that we spent so much time studying, the beauties of how we have been raised, spiritually, from the dead. What a wealth! To be raised from being dead in sins, to being up with Christ in glory! But then Paul brings the mirror of that wealth to our walk in chapter 4 right through to chapter 5 verse 17, where all his theme is this: 'Therefore, because you are raised, put off the grave clothes, walk in purity'. Chapter 2 verses 11 to 22 speaks of how we are reconciled to God. You remember we looked at how every nation in the world, and especially and specifically the Jew and the Gentile who fought the bit out all of their lives, how they - enemies for all time - can be brought together in the reconciliation of God. That is the truth, but Paul says from that wealth - look at chapter 5 verse 18 through to chapter 6 verse 9: 'Walk in harmony. If you're reconciled to God, don't believe it, live it!'. Finally, in chapter 3, we read of how Christ is the victor over Satan and hell and all of his works - that is a great mystery we find in that chapter, but the mirror of it in our walk is found in chapter 6 verses 10 to 24: 'Walk in victory in the armour of God'.

Do you see it now? 'Because of this, live like this'. What way do we live? Well, he tells us in our first point: walk worthy, verses 1 to 3. He is saying in view of these facts - in view of the fact that you have been placed in the body of Christ, in view of the fact that now, in the faith, you are part of the habitation of God, you have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, you're a member of His body, the word of God says you are a member of His flesh and blood, you're a living stone, a lively stone in the temple of the Holy Spirit - and in view of that, your life should be...A...B...C.

That word 'worthy' that Paul uses: 'walk worthy of the vocation', is a Greek word pronounced 'axios', and the root of that word has the idea of weight. Axios - weight - 'walk weightily in the walk and the calling wherewith ye were called'. Our English word 'axiom' is derived from it, and it simply means 'to have equal weight', to have a balance. If you were doing a mathematical equation this evening (and I wouldn't be one to do that!), but if you were to take away something from one side, you will have to take something away from the other to make the equation equal - to make it true, as mathematicians say. That is described as 'axiom' - when you do something to one side, you have to do it to the other side to make it equal. If you think of a balance: if you put a weight on one side, you must put a weight on the other to make it balance.

'Walk axios', 'walk weightily' - what is he saying? 'I have put three chapters, my Christian brethren in Ephesus, three chapters on the weight of what God has done in Christ for you. That is weighing over on this side, and now I want you to put all the implications of that life, and that belief, and that faith, on the other side'. Now please listen to this, because this is so important: that means that what we learn as believers must be followed through as behaviour! The more we learn, and the more we grow, and the older and more mature we get in the faith, there has to be a change within our walk - we must walk more and more worthily before God! But the reality is that there are a great deal of people who know a lot, but don't live a lot - and that is not New Testament Christianity! There must be that axiom, that balance of weight, where we learn and then we live - and that entails a responsibility to live a life that is pleasing to God.

As we see from this passage of Scripture, in verses 1 to 3, that responsibility is to others. We have spent much time in the first three chapters of this book looking at what we have, individually, in Christ Jesus, and indeed corporately as the church. Now Paul is telling us: 'This is the axiom, this is the way you balance the doctrine with duty: that you live a life that is pleasing to God among the brethren and sisters within the church of Jesus Christ'. Kent Hughes, in his commentary on Ephesians, says this: 'Life today in the twentieth century, life is like an elevator ride - everyone is facing forward, no eye contact, no conversation, no interaction, and everyone races to their faceless endeavours'. We live in a society where everyone is a number, social interaction is at an all-time low - and that can happen within the church of Jesus Christ, where
people become alone, people feel aloof, people feel not wanted, because of the behaviour of those within the church of Jesus Christ toward them.

That author goes on to describe a man from the United States of America who was wheelchair-bound. Because of that he got so frustrated that he set his chair alight while he was sitting in it - and the US Fire Department ticketed him for setting fire to his own armchair! This is what he said: 'I did it because I'm here myself, I was afraid, I didn't care! I wanted to get attention, I set fire so someone would get me out!'. The reason why he was ticketed was for 'Misdemeanour Arson'. The Fire Chief said this: 'We did it to discourage him from doing it again, and maybe he'll realise that it's serious' - but I think, don't you, that he already realised how serious it was! That he was driven to such an extreme through ostracism, he felt so alone in the world, that he went to the extent of setting himself alight to get attention! Hughes says that recently he spoke to a young man, who was so starved for attention in his life, that he went and got his hair cut every single week in life - just so that he could be touched by another human being in a non-threatening way. Does that touch a nerve?

So many breaking hearts, but you know the walk of the worthy is meant to be different. It is meant to have a place for those people, and the first place is in practical humility. Look at your first outline, the first heading in your first outline: in practical humility, verse 2. Paul goes on, this is the worthy walk: 'With all lowliness and meekness' - all lowliness and meekness. Now that word 'lowliness' is only found in one other place, in Philippians 2 and verse 3 speaking of the humility of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek word actually means 'modesty', negatively speaking it means 'a lack of self-assertiveness'. We are taught today, and indeed I was taught, self-assertiveness at school. That's what we have drilled into our minds from the youngest age, but Paul is saying that this lowliness of mind is a lack of self-assertiveness - not being proud at anything. If we are not proud of something in our lives, and many of us are - our achievements, our gifts, what we have done in education, what we have done in business or in our career, whatever it may be - if we are not proud of something we have done, at the other extreme there are those who are proud of what they have not done. Especially within the church of Jesus Christ, and indeed within our circles, there are those who are proud of their ignorance - you might find that hard to believe. The next time you hear someone saying: 'Oh, I couldn't do the like of that', or, 'I couldn't be involved in that' - and verobesly they boast their ignorance! A false humility of what they cannot do!

A young minister once stood, at a Methodist conference, to his feet and said these words: 'I am against education, I don't need to read books except the Bible, I don't profess I know nothing about literature or anything of that kind - I am just an ignorant man, but the Lord has taken me up and is using me, and I am not at all interested in schools or colleges or education. I am proud to be just what I am'. An old preacher rose to his feet and said: 'Do I understand that the dear young brother is proud of his ignorance? If so, all I have to say is that he has a great deal to be proud of'. Isn't that right? We can boast about how we don't do this, or we don't have this, but my friend there is an equal sin in boasting our ignorance to boasting what we have. It is no different, for all boasting is wrong - for we are to boast in nothing but the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to take no pride in anything, even in ignorance. But it is our natural instinct to boast, isn't it? Parents - not that I would know, but I would advise you from the earliest age of your child to curb the natural instinct of boasting in them, for it's in us all. The quicker you can get that boasting out of them the better, for Paul says it is humility!

Humility was even despised by the Greco-Roman world that Paul is writing in. In fact, the word that he uses for 'humility' is the word that is used of 'slavery'! It's despised, it's shameful! Paul says this is the walk of the child of God within the church of Jesus Christ - the Greco-Roman world wanted a great souled man, a self-sufficient man, that was great, but not with Christ! Lowliness, which is a consciousness of your nothingness before God, it is an absence of conceit - and listen: it is an absence of arrogance! Today, in our circles, there is an awesome presence of arrogance.
Lowliness, and then he says 'meekness'. Eight times we find that word 'meekness' within the New Testament. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself used it in Matthew chapter 11 and verse 29, where He said: 'I am meek and lowly in heart'. If He is meek and lowly of heart, ought we not to be so? The Greek word means 'humility', almost the same as 'lowliness'. It was used in the Greek language of a soothing medicine, of a colt, an ass, that was broken and tamed. It's a word that was used by mariners to describe a soft soothing wind. My friend, if you walk and you are broken before God, you are meek. The opposite of a broken colt is a wild beast, and there are plenty of wild beasts in the church of Jesus Christ! This meekness speaks of control, control of your temperament, control of your senses and who you are - it is a spirit that doesn't take offence at what others say. But when others say things to us, what do we do? We flare up at their accusations, at what they say, the old man rises from the grave again!

Dwight Pentecost tells the story of a split in a church, and it was so serious that each side filed a lawsuit against the other to dispossess them of their land. They totally ignored what the word of God teaches about taking another to court, who is in the Lord. The court threw it out, the Judge threw it out of court, and it went to a church court - where it should have been in the first place. What the Judge did was, he awarded the property to one of the two factions, and the losers withdrew red-faced and riotous - and they formed another church down the road. During the proceedings, during that court trial, it came out that the conflict began at a church dinner when one of the elders received a smaller slice of ham than a child that was seated next to him. Isn't that the way it always is? We flare up at the least thing!

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was called a drunkard, He was called a Samaritan - they said: 'He casts out demons by the prince of demons!' - they said He is the devil Himself! But when He was reviled, He reviled not again. What meekness! Meekness is not weakness. Moses, one of the strong towers of strength in all Israel, was described as the meekest man that ever walked upon the face of the earth, save our Lord Jesus: 'I am meek and lowly in heart'. Can we be like that? For if we are not like that, we are not walking the way Christ would have us walk within the church of Jesus Christ. Are you under control in practical humility?

Secondly: in patient charity - 'with longsuffering, forbearing one another', verse 2. 'Longsuffering', that was a favourite word of Paul's - he uses it many times within the New Testament. It means 'long-tempered', twelve times he uses it. Someone translates it like this: 'To endure with an unruffled temper'. The old preacher said, about marriage: 'The secret of a happy marriage is five bears: bear and forbear' - isn't that right? 'Bear ye one another's burdens, and forbear one another' - that is the church of Jesus Christ, it is exactly the same. Indeed, in any relationship it has to be the same, there has to be this patient charity with one another: longsuffering. 'But if they had said what was true, David, then I wouldn't have reacted like that - but what they were saying wasn't true, it was all lies, they were throwing accusations at me!' - listen! That is the way the flesh talks! The flesh speaks, and the flesh panders to the little foxes that spoil the vines.

Imagine a big dog and a little puppy, maybe you've seen it in advertisements on the television. The big dog is standing there, big and strong, and the little puppy is yapping down from below - and he begins to worry the ears and the paw of the big dog, and the big dog in one bite could swallow that little puppy up - but he stands and he puts up with it! That is forbearing, that is longsuffering in the face of God, and what God allows in your life. Forbearing: it literally means to put up with what people throw at you. It doesn't just mean maintaining an outward facade, whilst inwardly you could kill a person, but it means love - forbearing one in love. That word 'love' is agape love, a committed love, the same love that God showed toward us in that while we were yet in sin Christ died for us!

That's the love - when someone's spitting in your face and you can say, like Christ: 'Forgive them'. Oh, it's easy to forgive - didn't He say the Gentiles and the Publicans can forgive a man that's good to them? But it is the man that reviles, persecutes, yet you persecute not again and you show love towards them - that is the
Ephesians

Pastor David Legge

To walk worthy we must walk in practical humility, in patient charity - and thirdly, verse 3, in peaceful unity. 'Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' - now, look at that verse: 'Endeavouring to keep'. You can only keep something that has already happened. You do not create the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, it has already been created. As the Amplified Bible puts it: 'Be eager, strive earnestly to guard and to keep the harmony and oneness produced by and of the Spirit in the binding power of peace'. This is produced by God - don't you try and produce peace within the assembly, you'll never do it! God has already done it, we are to maintain it - and if it is not there it is because we have not guarded it.

We are to guard it, that unity of peace. You might look at the church and say, like many say: 'Look at the unity, there is no unity, there is disunity. There is a heartless division right through the whole church that is rending the body of Christ!' - but think about this. In New Testament theology, think about it, the body of Christ is not rent, the body of Christ is not severed or split in any measure. That is a thinking that believes that the body of Christ is built up of denominations and of sects. I argue that if you take all the denominations and all the sects and put them together - do you have the church of Christ? No! For within them you have unbelievers, you have clergy that are reprobate and damned unless they find Christ. Indeed, outside of those denominations you could have those who are regenerate - so by bringing them all together does not make the church. Therefore, by them being all split apart, it does not split the church - for the church of Jesus Christ is something bigger than all of that. The church is every single person that is regenerated of the Spirit of God, and divisions in Christendom cannot rend the body of Christ - but I'll tell you what it does do: it denies the unity in Christ.

It does not guard, it does not keep it. If we are to be true to the New Testament, and to the word of God, we must recognise that there is a unity through all believers who are founded on the fundamental truths of the word of God - and it is our duty to guard it! 'But they don't believe everything we do. They don't believe this, that, or the other' - listen, my friend: if they are saved by the grace of God through the fundamentals of salvation they belong to Christ, you belong to Christ - therefore you belong to them, and they belong to you! The arm can't say to the ear, the eye, the nose, or the foot: 'I have no need of you'. When we are scriptural about these things, we find that perhaps are not as they seem - because the ligament that binds the members of the body together is peace! I grant you that there are many different wide spaces between many of them - but in theory we all belong to the same denomination. Who is that? David's denomination - he said: 'I am a companion for all them that fear Thee and keep Thy precepts'. That's the way we ought to look at it - a companion of all them that fear the Lord and keep His word.

If you think for a moment of all the differences within the church of Jesus Christ. The diversity, mentally speaking, the abilities of some men, translating the word of God, and some simple men whom God has used in a miraculous way. The social differences of class: middle-class, upper-class, lower-class, working-class - the whole lot of them, the differences of wealth, poverty, riches. The difference of size: tall, short, fat, thin. Differences of race: black and white. All sorts of differences - temperament: people with short temperaments, people with longsuffering temperaments. All different, but all of them by the grace of God can be kept in the bond of peace. Isn't that a miracle? No other organisation in the world can do it. All other organisations, do you know what they do? They go with people that are the same as them, isn't that right? 'I believe in this. I go to the left, you go to the right. I'm middle, I'm left of the middle, I'm right of the middle' - and they join together with all them that they agree with. Not the church! The church is an odd bunch of different grapes.

Oh, are you living in peaceful unity with God and His children? Finally, look at the second point. We're to walk worthy in practical humility, in patient charity, in peaceful unity - and that is to be motivated because of
the theological unity we have in the body of Christ. We are to live in this unity that already exists, we're to guard it and practice it. It's interesting that there are seven of these facts that Paul outlines for us - perfect number, isn't it, within the Scriptures? He is saying: 'This is perfect unity, it's not to be strived after in the sense of it not being there, but it is to be guarded'. So many ignore these seven facts and unite together without them, and that is false ecumenism. These seven positive realities form the basis of true unity and true ecumenism. Instead of magnifying the differences we ought to look at these seven similarities, and rejoice in the peace of the unity of the Spirit within them.

Now, if you look down these verses, you will find that the unity of the Spirit is found within the Trinity. Look at verse 4 - you find the Spirit: 'One Spirit'. Verse 5: 'One Lord'. Verse 6: 'One God and Father'. You have the Father in verse 6, you have the Son in verse 5, and the Spirit in verse 4. The unity of the whole body of Christ is found in these seven things within the Trinity of the glorious Godhead. The first is of body - live in unity of body, verse 4a: 'one body'. Despite all the differences - think about it for a minute, all the differences - we are united in one body. From Pentecost at the birth of the church, to the second coming of the Lord, one true church - no wonder the hymnwriter could say:

'Let names, and sects, and parties fall
And Jesus Christ be Lord of all!'

There is one body, but my friend that one body does not exempt you from membership within the local assembly. There is one body, but God calls upon you to be part of the local assembly, because there is unity of body and unity of Spirit. Look at verse 4b: 'one Spirit' - the same Holy Spirit that indwells each of us, indwells the whole temple of God, the whole church of Jesus Christ! Twelve times Paul refers in Ephesians to the Spirit of God, and he is telling us: 'The Spirit of God is for you, you have Him, you need Him, you must recognise His work in your life'. There are many today claiming the Holy Spirit, but it is not one Holy Spirit - because you have the Holy Spirit of this denomination, and the Holy Spirit of this other denomination, and both of them do different things! But there is one Spirit, that is why John in 1 John 1 verse 4 says: 'Test the spirits whether they be of God'.

One body, one Spirit, one hope - the unity of hope, verse 4c. 'One hope of your calling' - it's lovely, isn't it? That whether you're from Romania, or whether you're from East Belfast, you have one destiny - one destiny, to be with Christ, to be like Christ, to enjoy the glories of Christ for an endless eternity, to wait for the second coming of Christ. What a comfort! What a hope! We saw that in chapter 1 verses 13 and 14 - the deposit and the guarantee of the Holy Spirit which is in us, so that we may know that we are going there.

Fourthly: live in unity of Lord, verse 5a: 'One Lord' - and it is the Lord Jesus Christ. It amazes Paul, I believe, that there could be two believers who are following the one Christ, yet they are not able to walk together! How can that be so? I'll leave you to answer that question. There is false profession: 'Lord, Lord, did I not prophesy in thy name, cast out demons in thy name?' - but the Lord says to all of us today: 'Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?'. Do you believe in one Lord? Follow Him! Follow Him with all your heart within the faith, because it is unity of one faith, verse 5b. What is the faith? We learnt in the book of Jude that the faith, as the RV says, is: 'once for all delivered to the saints' - it is the body of doctrine within the New Testament. It's not the faith we exercised to be saved, but it is the belief that determines the way we behave.

Does your belief determine the way you behave? Someone asked Gandhi on one occasion, who was not a believer: 'What is the greatest hindrance to Christianity in India?', and just like that he answered this: 'Christians'. What is the greatest hindrance, perhaps, to Christianity in Ulster? I know, friends; I know, family - the hindrance is Christians! We must live and behave with the faith, and in essentials it must be unity, and in doubtful questions it must be liberty, and surely in all things it must be charity. [We are] even to
live in unity of baptism, verse 5c - one baptism in the Spirit that has placed us in the body of Christ, one baptism of confession: identifying that we have died, we are buried, we are risen with Christ to life eternal in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost - one baptism!

Finally: one God, verse 6 - 'One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all'. The Father of all, and that is not the modern doctrine of universal Fatherhood, or the brotherhood of man - but every child of God recognises that God is the sovereign Father of all creation, and every creature that has been born into the world will have to do and answer to God - why? Look at the verse: for He is above all, supreme, Sovereign of the universe - He is through all, He acts through every creature that is, and even the very evil in the world He channels through to accomplish His sovereign purpose and plan. Finally he says, He is in you all. What a glorious note to finish on: He is in you all! You don't need to seek Him, you don't need to pray for Him, but you need to pray to recognise Him, my friend. He's in you, but do you realise the potential of Him in you, that He is in you in order that He may accomplish His sovereign plan in your life - are you letting Him do that?

What a wonderful passage of Scripture! What God the Spirit is saying at the end of this passage is this: our unity in the church is eternal, it is unbreakable. It is no more possible to split the church than it is possible to split the Godhead! It is indestructible as God Himself! Therefore, do you walk worthy? Are there no rivalries, hatreds, factions, cliques? Are you? Go home and focus on these seven facts of unity, and focus on the humility of Christ and ask the Spirit's help, and guard the unity of the peace of the Spirit in this place - to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Father, we thank Thee for the way that our Lord walked. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the cross. Therefore let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus - and Lord, we pray that that mind would be in us. A mind of meekness and lowliness, of patient charity, of guarding peace among one another - and Lord, that we would unite our hearts in those fundamental facts: one faith, one hope, one baptism. Lord, we are told in Thy word what Thou canst do with such a band of people saved by the grace of God, and aware of the blessings of God in their life. We pray that Thou mayest do it, and do it soon - for we realise that that hope of our calling is very near. Hear us we pray, in Jesus name, Amen.
We're turning in our Bibles to Ephesians chapter 4 again. We began our studies in chapter 4 last week where we looked at verses 1 through to 6. This week we're going to look at verses 7 through to 10. Let's read - to get the context - those first six verses that we studied last week, and remind our hearts about the unity and the bond of peace, and so forth, that we learnt about, that is to prevail within the church of Jesus Christ.

Verse 1: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love".

We're looking this evening at: 'The Bounties of Our Conquering Christ' - verses 7 to 10. Verses 1 to 6, that we looked at last week, told us of the commonality within the church of Jesus Christ. We studied how we are meant to be kept in the bond of peace, because all are equal in the sight of God within the assembly, and we're to treat one another with patient charity, love, and look after one another in the spirit of Christ - the spirit He had for us. Now Paul continues throughout this chapter, and he moves from the commonality within the church of Jesus Christ of its members, to its individuality. He has first been looking, at verses 1 to 6, at the body of Christ as a whole organism - a group of people that makes up one organisation, which is the
body of Christ, and which is to operate as such within the world. But now he is moving away from that, and he is looking at individually, one by one, each Christian that makes up the church of Jesus Christ, which is the body of Christ.

He is telling us how we are to use what God has given us with regard to gifts. Gifts, spiritual gifts, have been given to the church of Jesus Christ, and individually have been given to Christians to make up the church for one reason: to edify, and to unite, and to build up, the church of Jesus Christ. So you can see the progression of thought in Paul's mind. First of all he's talking about how we relate to one another, how we walk in the church of Jesus Christ - walking worthy of the calling wherewith we are called, looking after one another, treating one another well. Now he continues, as to how we can actively build up the church of Jesus Christ by the spiritual gifts that God has given to us.

If you were to go into any evangelical bookshop today, you would see great reams and shelves of books on church growth. Mechanisms and principles, schemes and ideas, of how we can build up our individual local churches and make them burst at the seams with people. A lot of those books are orientated by the 'numbers game' - but real church growth, and a real manual and book for church growth, is the book of Ephesians. For Ephesians tells us the way in which we can be sure, 100% sure, of building up the local church and edifying the whole body of Christ - the church of Jesus Christ worldwide.

Now to do this Paul begins speaking of spiritual gifts - he says in verse 7: 'But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ'. Then he goes into verse 8, and he quotes from the Old Testament as you'll see from your margin, he quotes from Psalm 68, and he says this: 'Wherefore [Jesus] saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)'. One of the principles that we should adhere to within the Scriptures, and especially within the New Testament, is whenever an apostle or a writer quotes the Old Testament, we should go back to the Old Testament and understand the context of what he was quoting in its original context, historically speaking, within the Old Testament.

So, we're going to do that. Look back to Psalm 68, and we're going to take time to read quite a number of these verses within the Psalm because this is foundational for our understanding of what the apostle is saying to us in these verses. Psalm 68, a well-known Psalm, and the Psalmist David is writing here and he says: 'Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God. But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice. Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before him. A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land. O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; Selah: The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel. Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance, when it was weary. Thy congregation hath dwelt therein: thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor. The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it. Kings of armies did flee apace: and she that tarried at home divided the spoil. Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold. When the Almighty scattered kings in it, it was white as snow in Salmon. The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan; an high hill as the hill of Bashan. Why leap ye, ye high hills? This is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever. The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place' - here's the verse: 'Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them'.

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Scholars take two interpretations of this Psalm. The first interpretation is found in the Aramaic Targum (sp?), which is like a commentary on the Old Testament holy Scriptures that the Jews used from time to time. It says that this Psalm speaks of Moses on Mount Sinai, when the law was delivered to Moses. They say, look at verse 7, that that depicts God marching in triumph before all Israel - from Egypt, right through the Red Sea, taking them right through in deliverance into the promised land - that this is God's exodus of His children, God marching before His children in triumph. Then He brings them through the Red Sea and to Sinai's mount, where He gives them His law and He reveals to them His great name through His righteous law. Verse 8 - you remember within Exodus chapter 20 you read that the mount shook, there was a great thundering and lightning, and fire and smoke, when the law was given - and you can read in verse 8 how the Psalmist depicts that the earth shakes at the voice of God. Look at verses 11 to 14, kings and armies flee while the people of God sleep beside their camp fire peacefully, in the safety of their Almighty God. Look at verses 16 to 17, it depicts God looking from the mount of the law, Mount Sinai, looking across to Mount Zion and Jerusalem, and moving - beginning to walk with all His people, the Psalmist says tens of thousands of chariots, and walk right up Mount Zion, up the slopes of Jerusalem in victory. Leading His captives in His train, and giving gifts unto His own men - verse 18.

That's the first interpretation of the Psalm, understood to be Moses and the God of Moses delivering Israel out of Egypt, and bringing them to Mount Sinai, and then to Mount Zion. The second interpretation, many believe, is simply David - that this Psalm speaks of David's triumph. It is a victory hymn, where David defeated his enemies in the conquest of the Jebusite city of Jerusalem - remember that Jerusalem was not always inhabited by the Jews. David in his triumph tramples through the Jebusites in Jerusalem, and then goes up to Mount Zion in triumph because of the victory of God. As he does so, he brings gifts to all those who have fought in the battle with him.

Those two interpretations are quite correct, and I wouldn't like to say which one is correct - but I know this much: that as Paul is writing to us in the book of Ephesians, if you want to turn back to it, what I believe Paul the apostle has in his mind is a scene that many of his readers would have known. It is a scene that you find within the Roman Empire, and it was a ceremony of the Roman Empire called a 'Triumph Parade' - often just simply named 'The Triumph'. What would happen was as the generals of the Roman Empire were having their conquests, and trying to spread their Empire across the whole world, each general that would have a victorious battle would eventually be brought back to the capital of Rome. If they were victorious they would be brought into a festive, ceremonial parade and atmosphere - and through the streets of Rome they would erupt with gladness and celebration. That particular general would be clad in garments of purple, he would be robed, he would be riding in a chariot to the capital of Rome.

As you would be a bystander there all you could smell, as you watched those generals riding towards the capital, would be an incense, a sweet smell from the censers that would be burning from the Triumph Parade. Along that route there was a fragrant smell, a pervasive scent, as men and women and boys and girls would lift clusters and handfuls of rose petals, and throw them along the road to praise that great general. That aroma would fill the whole city of Rome. At the end of that Parade there the Emperor would be sitting, in all of his supposed divine nature, and he would be witnessing all of this - seeing the victory of his great general, smelling the fragrance of the perfume of the flowers that are being thrown at his feet. He would be lifted in his spirit at the victorious efforts that his general presents to the foot of his throne. As the victor parades up the street, in his train and behind him you will find the captives - the rebels against the Empire, brought with him to pay in punishment.

Once that great general would arrive in the capital, and all the celebrations would be finished, he would then divide the spoil of battle with those who had fought with him, and with those at home. To those trailing behind in that procession, captives from battle, that sweet fragrance of rose petals would be a fragrance unto
I believe this is what Paul had in mind as we read these verses that he wrote. He talks about a great victory: 'Unto every one of us', verse 7, 'is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ' - and the whole point of what Paul is saying in verses 7 to 10 is this: Christ Jesus our Lord, our great Captain, our great General, the Captain of the Lord of hosts, has died, has risen from the dead, has ascended on high - and after His victorious work and battle of salvation, He now is in a position at the right hand of God to dispense and present gifts to His church. To that end we find in verse 7, if you look at your first title, the cry of this great battle. What Paul is trying to get to us tonight, is that the unity that he has been speaking about in verses 1 to 6, that unity is the prerequisite for usefulness within the church. There is no use having unity without gifts, for it will bring nothing. There is no use - like the Corinthians - having gifts without unity, because it will bring chaos and turmoil. The two must come together: unity and usefulness.

John Calvin put it like this: 'The mighty victories which God wrought for Israel were noble triumphs, but the noblest triumph which God ever gained was when Christ - after subduing sin, conquering death, and putting Satan to flight - rose majestically to heaven that He might exercise his glorious reign over the church'. The church of Jesus Christ has been given the goal and the destiny to forward the Empire of Christ. He has not left us armless, but He has given gifts unto men, given gifts to the church by which we may go forward on behalf of the head of the church, Jesus Christ. How do we know that? Because of the cry of battle. The cry of the battle in verse 7 is 'grace', look at it: 'unto every one of us is given grace'. This was a favourite expression of Paul, you find within his epistles that he uses it 90 times over. What this literally means 'unto every one of us', there is a change of emphasis - Paul is saying to each one of us: 'Despite what I have said before about the unity of the church, yes we are one body, but we are one body made up of individuals with individual gifts and works to do'. So there is unity, but there is also diversity.

If you were to look up the word 'grace' within the encyclopaedic dictionary you would find ten definitions. I want to give you four of them this evening. Within the word of God the statement and the term 'grace' means, first of all, 'unmerited, but freely given, love and favour' - isn't that lovely? Unmerited, unearned, free gift of salvation to all who will believe! We have believed and, praise God, we have received. The second definition is 'the grace, the work of the Holy Spirit', the divine influence that works within our hearts when we're convicted of our sins, and He regenerates us by the Spirit of God. Then, when we're saved, He begins to sanctify us day by day in the image of Christ - and when we go through trials He strengthens us. That is the grace of God, the work of the Spirit within the soul of the believer.

Thirdly, we read that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, Enoch found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Grace can also describe a state of God being pleased with you - not because of anything you do, but because you believe Him. The fourth definition of grace is the definition of the word 'grace' within our passage. If you turn to chapter 3 and verse 2 you find it here, Paul says: 'For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to ward'. That grace that Paul is speaking of there is a grace, not a saving grace of salvation, but it is an equipping grace whereby God gives us things that we need to live the Christian life. Someone has defined it like this: 'This grace is an outflow from the heart of God'. Isn't that beautiful?

If you think of the greatest gift of grace, you must think of the Lord Jesus. What was He but, as Hebrews says: 'The express image of the heart of God'? Where do our thoughts come from? Our thoughts come from our heart. Where do our words come from? They come from our thoughts. He is described as the Word of God, He is the linguistic, in flesh, description of what is in the very heart of God. He is the epitome of grace, He is the outflow and the overflow of the heart of God - and it is He who gives gift to the church, He overflows in grace to you and to me.

dead. But to those who had been emancipated by the forces, as far as they were concerned, of freedom, the forces of life, the forces of the Empire, that would be a savour unto life.
Now listen: spiritual gifts are not natural abilities. You may be good at mechanics, you may have an artistic flair, you may be athletic, you may be musical - all those things are very good and can be used for the Lord, but those are natural abilities and natural talents, and within that realm all men are not equal. Some can do it, some cannot. Some have no natural abilities, almost. Some are overflowing with natural abilities. Spiritual gifts are something quite different than that. You see, Paul describes these spiritual gifts as being given by grace according to the measure of Christ. That means that if Christ measures out your spiritual gift, you can't say that you're better than anyone else - because all of us have had our gift measured by Christ. All of us have had our gifts given to us by the Lord Jesus Himself, and no one gift is more important than another.

I think that expression is beautiful: that Christ measures out our gifts. That means, my friend, that when you go through difficulties, when you go through trials, when you face tribulation, and heartache, and heartbreak - that God is up there, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, He is measuring out the exact amount of grace that you need for that particular situation. He will not shortchange you! If anything, He will overflow - and as we've been learning in the book of Ephesians, He will abound more and more in grace toward you. Philippians 4: 'My God shall supply all your need' - do you not find it so? Daniel found it so in the den of lions, didn't he? Can you imagine? This isn't a fairytale or a Sunday School story, this is real! Lowered into a den of lions, the threat of being eaten alive - but the grace of God shut the mouth of the lions. Out on the sea the disciples are tossed to and fro: 'Master, carest Thou not that we perish?' - but the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ could say: 'Be still'. Paul and Silas lie in a jail - to all intents and purposes, perhaps, at the very end of their life's experience, yet the grace of God was measured out to them enough that they were able to sing the praises of God in the face of darkness!

That is how the grace of God is measured by the Lord Jesus. My friend, listen: if it's measured by the Lord Jesus, you need not worry. You need not worry about Him getting a little bit less, my friend He will give exactly what you need! Moment by moment Christ is measuring it out for your soul. He is be-gracing you, from the very moment you knelt down in submission and repentance to the Lord Jesus Christ He poured His grace, every moment of your life, into you. Day by day, as you mature and grow in the Lord Jesus, you will get more and more grace for every single need that you pass through. You will develop more into the body of Christ, and there's no exceptions to that! There will be no-one able to stand before the face of God on that day and say: 'I didn't get grace'.

Ivor Powell says this: 'God never gives December grace in June. He never supplies strength to climb a mountain when the children are walking on flat land'. But God says to us today: 'As thy days, so shall thy strength be...and when you pass through the waters I will be with you'. Not 'till you pass', but 'when you pass through the waters I will be with you'! Can you believe that? My friend, whether you believe it or not, you'll receive it because God has promised it. He has said: 'My grace is sufficient for thee' - isn't it nice that He said 'for thee'? He didn't leave that there, He said 'it's sufficient for thee' - that means it's sufficient for anybody. It is the cry of battle sounded by Christ, and isn't it wonderful to know that it's His cry? It's received by the Christian.

Now, as you look around the church of Jesus Christ you see some obvious gifts. You see the preacher, you see the elder, you see the deacon. People can get into their mind that those are the only gifts to the church of Jesus Christ. You might say: 'Well I don't believe that' - well, practically speaking, that is the way most of our churches are operating. 'The people who do an outward work are the only ones who are gifted' - that is a false perception. Paul uses the analogy in the book of Corinthians of the church of Jesus Christ, just like a physical body - and there are so many functions within the members of a physical body, and each function is different. I've often thought of this subject, and thought about the horror if I walked up to the pulpit with my windpipe over my shoulder, and my liver under my arm! There would be a few people sick, and a few people walk out, because it's not right - in fact you could nearly say it's disgusting! Because the organs are not in the
right places, and they are not having their right function. Organs that should be inward are outward, and it's
detestable, isn't it?

My friend, that's what the church of Jesus Christ is like when it's not operating right. When people want an
outward role, but God wants to give them an inward role - and some people want an inward role, and they
ought to have an outward role. Some people think they can do a certain gift and they can't do it! They don't
recognise the gift that God has given to them, because they don't feel it's a significant enough gift. My friend,
that's all fallacy! That is not within the word of God, in fact, if the truth be told, as we were seeing yesterday:
David was the one who inwardly had the zeal for the temple, and although Solomon built the temple, it
probably will be David who will be accredited for it. I think on the day of judgement I will be a long, long,
long way behind some people who you never ever see what they do for the Lord.

Have you ever wondered what your spiritual gift is? Have you? Is it preaching? Is it evangelism? Is it
administration? What is it? Is it pastoral work, and caring for folk, and looking after folk? Is it giving? Is it
helps? Is it the gift of encouragement that is so deeply needed within the church today? What is your gift?
Do you even know the gifts that God has given? How can you discover your gift, and how can you develop
it? Simple: in the body, in the body. The folk that aren't at the Bible Reading tonight will never develop their
gift if they're not coming where the body is to grow. My friend, if you exempt yourself from the life of the
body, you will not grow. If I sever my arm and leave it over there it will never grow, for it's apart from the
body. You need to be in the body!

You see, gifts are not toys to be played with, but they're tools to build the church of Jesus Christ with. That
one faith that you find in verses 1 to 6, that one body - within it every single individual is gifted through
Christ. Do not call God and Christ a liar! You have a gift, this is a talent, this is a spiritual gift - and when
you knelt at the cross of Christ to be saved, God's Spirit gave you at least one gift, at least! Do you know it?
It's not humility to say 'I don't have one', that is calling God a liar! That's not humility! My friend, God has
placed you within this assembly, or whatever assembly you attend, to activate and to carry out your gift
actively within the assembly. Are you doing it?

That is the cry of battle - grace, and gifts that are given to men. The second point is: the battlefield - where
were these gifts won? How were they won? Verse 8: 'Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he
led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men' - what is the field of battle? Christ has the grace to give these
gifts to men, but how can He give them? Why were they not given to the Old Testament saints? Why are
they only given now within the dispensation and the age in which we are in? Simply one answer, please
listen: the work of Christ. Oh, I thank God for the work of Christ. It is all of Christ, is that not the theme of
Ephesians? We are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ! Hallelujah!

But you know, my friend, it cost a great deal to give you your spiritual gift. Because the battlefield that you
see down here, it started off with the valley of incarnation. He first descended - and we read that Paul quotes
from Psalm 68 verses 18 and 19, that He led captivity captive, He ascended up on high, and gave gifts to
men. It doesn't presuppose that if you ascend, it means that you first had to descend from heaven. Some
scholars say that, but that's foolishness because Enoch went to heaven and he didn't come from heaven,
Elijah went to heaven and he didn't come from heaven - but in this context, where David the prophet is
prophesying in his Psalm about the Messiah of Israel, and we know that the Messiah of Israel is God the Son,
it does presuppose that if He ascended from the earth it is because He descended from heaven. Why?
Because He is the pre-existent one, John 1:1: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God', verse 14, 'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us' - never forget that.
Never forget that He is God of very God, young people, let no-one deny that to your mind or at your door.
He is God! Light of light, Lord of lords, Holiness of holiness - that holy thing that was born within the womb
of the virgin was God! As God He had no beginning, and He will have no ending - He descended from on
high.
One translation puts this verse, verse 8, like this: 'Now the word ascended implies that He also descended into the lowest level, down to the very earth'. A Jewish New Testament that I have at home, translated by David H. Stern, puts it like this: 'The lower part that is the earth'. Paul put it, in another place, like this: 'Though he was rich' - I could never expound that statement. The riches that He had, the glory that He had before He came to earth, before His incarnation - 'He was rich, yet for our sake He condescended and became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich'. He humbled Himself. The Greek says - and I cannot expound this either - 'He emptied himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross'. The valley of incarnation, because He was put in flesh for the fact that without the shedding of blood there is no remission - so the Christ of God had become flesh, had to walk as flesh, had to die as flesh, and bleed as flesh, so that He could go through that valley in order to give you and I a gift from Himself.

He went down the valley, the valley of incarnation, the valley of humiliation. During that descent into that valley there was the descent of proclamation. Paul says in verse 9: 'He descended into the lower parts of the earth' - now there are three interpretations of that statement. First of all: that it is the incarnation that we've already spoken about - that He descended into the lower parts of the earth, in regards to His humanity and His suffering within the cross. The second interpretation is: that He went into Hades, and Hades was the place where the dead went before the Lord Jesus shed His blood and died for sin. There were two compartments to Hades, one for the righteous dead, one for the unrighteous dead - and we find that in Luke chapter 16 in the story that the Lord Jesus told about the rich man and Lazarus. They believe that Jesus went down there, between the death on the cross and the rising at the resurrection, that He descended into the lower parts, as many say, of hell.

Thirdly there is an interpretation that He came by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and gave gifts to men there, by His Spirit. Which one do I believe? Well, if you go to 1 Peter, turn with me to 1 Peter chapter 3 verses 18 to 20, we read this: 'For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water'. Now, what is all that saying? Well, if you leave all out around that verse, you see in verse 18 and verse 19 that this verse says that Christ descended and preached. Now does that mean He descended into the gates of hell and preached there? Now it's not the falsehood that the cults preach, that the Lord Jesus had to be punished and tortured in hell for an atonement for our sins. The work of Calvary, the work of salvation, and the work of the atonement, is finished, is utterly done! Yet many of the ancient church fathers and early writers believed that, between His death and His resurrection, that He descended into Hades, He preached deliverance to the captives - those who trusted in God in the Old Testament, He opened the gates and brought them to heaven - and those demons that defied God in the Old Testament, those who were lost, He preached triumph to them.

I believe in this instance, in Ephesians chapter 4, that the lower parts of the earth that Paul is describing - it is a description, it is a word and a term of emphasis, to contrast the highest heights that He came from to the lowest depths that He went to. I personally, at this moment of time anyway, don't believe that it's speaking of a specific place. I believe it is speaking of a condescension that cannot be described - now that may well have included a descent into Hades as 1 Peter seems to indicate, but that is not what it literally is meaning. It is speaking, I believe, of every condescension that the Son of God had to make right from His incarnation, coming from glory, coming to earth, through His humiliation of living a life of poverty, living a life of blasphemy, going to the cross, bearing our humiliation, our chastisement - dying and being buried, all that! Surely that is the lower parts of the earth, the great poverty of His battle.

But my friends, isn't it wonderful that our story, our message, doesn't end there. Isn't it wonderful that there was the peak of ascension. Verse 8 says: 'he ascended up on high' - He endured the cross, even the death of
the cross. But it doesn't end there, it goes up in a great crescendo: 'Wherefore God hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father'.

The head that once was crowned with thorns,
Is crowned with glory now.
A royal diadem adorns
The mighty Victor's brow'.

We too - because He has ascended - one day will rise from the dead, one day will ascend in rapture to go to be with Him, and then we will come again to serve Him, and to rule with Him. Can you think of anything greater to praise God for than this? The beauty of it is this: we've learnt in Ephesians chapter 1, look at it, Ephesians chapter 1 and verses 19 and 20: 'That the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places'. Paul was saying in chapter 1: the power that was used by God's Spirit to raise Christ from the dead, to take Him to glory, is the power that the Spirit is using in your life at this moment! Oh, my friend, do you know that power? For we have it, and if we aren't using it or utilising it, if we don't even know it's there, it's because we are ignorant of it - it's not because it isn't there!

Oh, the peak of ascension was a glorious peak, but it didn't finish there either because there's the parade of jubilation. It says that He led captivity captive, and he's quoting again from Psalm 68 - and it's a Hebraism used in the Hebrew language, the AV margin says it means 'a multitude of captives' - but that's not what it does mean. It's used in Judges chapter 5, and in the song of Deborah, Deborah says this: 'Lord, you've led captive him who led us captive!'. That's the meaning - old Spurgeon said this: 'When our Saviour was expiring His last breath on the cross, when He gave up the ghost, His spirit descended down from that cross and put the devil himself in chains and pulled him up to glory to answer to God'. My friend, isn't that - I know it's metaphorical - but isn't it wonderful? To think that the one who made us captive in sin, in the world, making us slaves to the flesh and to the death that is within us - that there at Calvary's cross, and in the very ascension of Christ, He led captivity captive. Oh, I love to say that to the devil - for I've nothing to say to him of myself, but I can tell him that.

Turn with me quickly to 2 Corinthians and chapter 2 verses 14 to 16. Paul says, now he's alluding to the same situation: 'As also ye', verse 14, 'As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus. And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that ye might have a second benefit...' - I think I'm reading the wrong passage! That's chapter 1, chapter 2 - yes, we'll get it - verse 14: 'Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?'. Has the penny dropped? Do you remember our description at the beginning? That great victorious general, and all his hordes and followers throwing the petals - and as the horses hooves trample them underfoot, and the sweet fragrance goes up the whole cortege to the Emperor in his divinity (supposed) sitting on the Throne, smelling, filling his lungs with that savour that means joy and victory to him!

Can you see the Son of God ascending to heaven, and the corridors filled with angels singing His praise, and Father God - if He could - standing to His feet to welcome His Son in victory! Do you know that because Jesus Christ has led captivity captive, and because He has trailed along in His chariot in chains the devil himself - and sin, and hell, and all that we have to fear - because of it He gives us gifts! Now listen: because of the death of Christ we have pardon from sin, because of the resurrection of Christ we have eternal life
unto resurrection - but because of the ascension of Christ we have the Holy Spirit! I often think Christians today are like a gentleman that goes into a shop and buys two books. He walks out the door with one book, and he leaves the other one behind him - it's his book, for he's purchased it, but he hasn't taken it, he hasn't claimed it as his own. My friend, you're saved, you have the pardon of sins through the death of Christ, you have eternal life through the resurrection of Christ - but do you know the joy of the life in the Spirit of Christ? You have got Him, He's in you! He has been purchased by the blood of Christ to be in you - but have you taken Him?

My friend, if you let Him fill your whole life He will show you gifts that you could not have imagined - for there are spoils of battle, for Christ has come in glory, He has ascended to heaven, He has rewarded His followers with gifts - gifts unto men. Because of that God has highly exalted Him, God has honoured Him - and it says in verse 10 He has ascended far above, and He has filled all things. Think of this! There is a Man in the glory, there is a Man in heaven on the throne of God, there is a heart that is a human heart, that beats with a human heartbeat - because of that He is touched with the feelings of your infirmities. Because of that you have a High Priest that can be touched with those feelings, and that can succour and can help - my friend, have you realised the great Lord Jesus Christ that we have who makes intercession for us? The Jews believed in seven heavens - but Paul says He has been given a higher than the highest heaven, and one day all of creation will be under His feet, and His very presence will and does fill all things.

F.W. Grant said this: 'There is not a place between the depth of the cross and the height of glory which He has not occupied'. I close with this: we often say to the unrepentant sinner 'Christ has paid for your sin. Why ever would you not take the gift of salvation?'. I say to you today: Christian, Christ has paid for your gifts - why ever would you not use them?

Our Father, we thank Thee for the grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee that at this moment in time - because He has died, because He was buried and rose again, and ascended unto Thee, and sits at Thy right-hand - He dispenses to His church spiritual gifts. Lord, may we fill our lives with praise of Him, activating our gifts given through the blood of Christ and through His life in heaven. Lord, that we may unify and activate the church of Jesus Christ by Him filling us as He fills the universe around us. Hear us we pray in His lovely name, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - March 2001
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Ephesians chapter 4 again, Ephesians chapter 4, and we'll begin reading from verse 1 to get the context of the passage again. It's so important that we don't misinterpret any verses of the word of God, and as we go from week to week it's very easy to do that as you maybe forget a little bit about what you learnt the week before. It's interesting to know that, indeed, all the verses and words that we have been reading already in this portion - we've gone from verse 1 right through to verse 10 last week - all of this thus far, and all that we will read tonight through to verse 16, is one sentence, one rambling sentence in the original Greek language. So, although there's so much in it, and we break it up week by week because there are so many truths found within it, it's important to realise that this is a unit in itself, speaking of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ - and we mustn't lose that as we go from week to week.

So let's look at it, and read it as all one sentence, the punctuation that we have within the King James Version is not in the original Greek Scriptures - we learnt about that last night. These have been inserted by scholars, some of them inserted well, some of them inserted not so well. But let's think of this all running together as one Greek sentence - verse 1: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love".

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The title of our message this evening, as you can see from your study sheet, is: 'Body Building'. If you were to turn this evening to a well-known verse, 1 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 8, you would read - perhaps you've memorised it - 'Bodily exercise profits a little: but godliness is profitable for all things'. I think what that could mean is this: the physical body, to exercise it is an option; but to exercise the spiritual body, individually and corporately, is a requirement - it is necessary! We are thinking of the body of Christ, which is the church of Jesus Christ. Paul said the physical body, to exercise it is an option; but the spiritual body of Christ, to be exercised within it is a necessity.

The trouble is that we have a problem: we have a tendency within the church today to make requirements options, and to make options requirements. We turn things on their heads, the secondary issues and things that perhaps are not so important, we labour on them, we lean on them, we make them more important than they ought to be - sometimes for reasons of separation, reasons of legalism. But things that are requirements, things that are deeply important for the growth of the church of Jesus Christ, and for the growth of the spiritual believer individually, are ignored as optional.

What are the gifts that we learnt about last week? You remember we saw, two weeks ago from verses 1 to 6 if you look down at it, that the church of Jesus Christ is a unified body, an organism, created by God for good works to show forth the glory of Christ's Father and, yea, He Himself. It is a unified body, and the eye cannot say to the ear: 'I have no need of you'. We are made up of many members, but it is one body in unity - and because of that we have to guard that unity. The unity has already been created by the Lord Jesus Christ through His Spirit, we cannot create that unity, but what we ought to do is guard it day-by-day within the fellowship of this assembly and all assemblies. We are to guard that unity and make sure that we give no occasion for the devil to get a foothold in it.

Then we learnt from verse 7 to 10 that, although the church is a unity and one body, it is made up of individuals. Although there is uniformity in the body in a sense - because it is one body, it is Christ's body - there are individuals making it up. We are all different - and we learnt last week that Christ, in His grace and in His mercy, went to the cross, suffered for our sins, defeated our accuser and our adversary, was buried and our sins were buried, He rose from the dead, and then He walked among men for 40 days, and then He ascended to glory. When He sat down at the right hand of God He led captivity captive, and was able to dispense the Holy Spirit, and with the Holy Spirit He dispenses spiritual gifts. He dispenses different gifts to different believers. Although there is uniformity within the body, there is individuality with the gifts that are given.

We're looking this evening at the further parts of this passage that ask the question: what are the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives? What specifically are these gifts? When these gifts are given, and when we recognise them, how do we know if they are working well within the assembly? In other words, these gifts that are given to build the body, what are they and how do we know that they are building the body? How do we know that these gifts are being used to their full extent, and being used well? That's our two points tonight: what are, number one, the gifts to build the body? Secondly: what are the signs of the body being built?

It is the job of every preacher of the word of God to make these pages, that are 2000 or so years old, relevant to you and to me. As I've already said, as we've come to prayer this evening and asked God's help, that the Holy Spirit may apply His words to our hearts - that means that these pages have an individual application to your life and to mine. Now, we're coming to a Bible Reading tonight, and I hope that you're here that the word of God may be applied personally to your life. It's my job to make it relevant to your life, but that's all I can do. It is your job to open your heart to the Holy Spirit, to let Him show you its relevance and show you how it applies to you. Now, with that in mind, your question this evening, in the light of this portion of Scripture, is this: how can I be most effective for Christ? How can I utilise my spiritual gift to the full extent
of the edifying and the building up of the church of Jesus Christ? How can I be most effective? If you aren't asking that question, what are you doing here?

Now I mean that sincerely: if you're in membership within this assembly, or any assembly, or you frequent an assembly in particular, and you come week after week and you're not asking the question: 'How can I be most effective to Christ?' - why do you come? Christ has given spiritual gifts to build the church. He has given you and I a specific - perhaps one at the very least, many at the most - gifts to build up the muscles of His eternal church. So, in the light of that, how do we build the body? We looked at how Christ in His grace gave gifts to the church - after Paul depicts how the Lord, through the valley of humiliation, through the descent of proclamation - you remember all that we went through - in the parade of jubilation, how He went in triumph over all His enemies: sin, death, hell, and the grave. How He led captivity captive: the devil, the world, and the flesh that led us captive was made a captive by Christ through the cross, the resurrection, and the ascension.

Now, what gifts - you remember the Roman general coming back from triumph, from his wars, and dispensing gifts, all the spoils of the battle, to those who followed him, those who were loyal to him. So, what are the gifts that Paul is speaking of? Verse 11: 'And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers'. There are five lists within the New Testament, listing the gifts that are given by the Holy Spirit of God. If you want to jot them down, you find it in Ephesians 4 verse 11 here, 1 Corinthians 12 verses 8 to 10, 1 Corinthians 12 verse 28 to 30, Romans 12 verses 6 to 8, and finally 1 Peter 4 and verse 11. This is a list of the gifts that the Spirit of God gives, by no means is it an exhaustive list.

I want you to see the uniqueness of verse 11 of chapter 4 of Ephesians to all these other passages, and you can look them up when you go home. This verse is not so much speaking of gifts that are given to people, but it is speaking specifically of people who are given as gifts. Do you see the difference? It doesn't describe a particular ability given by the Spirit, but it describes individual people: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The Lord Jesus Christ, as He came from the triumph, as He paraded in jubilation, as He gave the spoils to His church through the blood of His cross, through His resurrection and His ascension - not only did He gave spiritual gifts to individuals, but He gave spiritual men as spiritual gifts.

To that end, that gives us a little peek into what these spiritual gifts are that Christ gives us. If you look at your study sheet, you see that the first two are: apostles and prophets. I've called these two gifts 'foundational gifts' within the New Testament Scriptures. Now what do I mean by that? If you turn to chapter 2 of Ephesians that we've studied already, and verse 20 of chapter 2, it tells us about Christ's glorious church, that it is: 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone'. We saw many weeks ago that there is Christ, the chief cornerstone, and Christ is the one in all His dimensions who dictates the measurements and the shape of the rest of that building - everything is built on Him, but there is the cornerstone and on top of the cornerstone is the foundation. Now, what is the foundation? The apostles and the prophets.

Those two gifts that Paul lists in verse 11 are foundational to the church of Jesus Christ. Look at chapter 3 and verse 5 for another example. God revealing this great mystery of the church, which is never revealed - we don't find the church in the Old Testament: 'Which in other ages was not made known', verse 5, 'unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit'. This was the mystery being revealed, this was an epoch, this was a changing in the ages of all ages, where the church of Jesus Christ - God's mysterious holy secret - was being revealed to men and women. It was revealed first in the apostles and the prophets, they were foundational members of the church.
The difference between numbers one and two on your sheet: apostles and prophets; and numbers three and four: evangelists, pastors and teachers - are that evangelists, pastors and teachers are continual gifts to the church. Now, we'll tease that out a little bit later, but let's look at the apostles first of all - number one. The word 'apostle' in the Greek language simply means 'sent one with a commission', one who is sent who is anointed to be an ambassador, a representative. Often we get confused in the New Testament, young people often do it - and older people - and we talk about the 12 disciples of the Lord Jesus, which is a generality, that is not exact. Because the 12 within the Scriptures - and you can read about them in Matthew 10 verses 1 to 4, an account of them all - the 12 are the apostles. The Lord Jesus had many disciples, but He had only 12 apostles - because 'a disciple' simply means 'a follower', or, 'a learner', 'a scholar in the school of Christ'. But an 'apostle' has a bigger meaning, the Greek means 'someone who is divinely appointed and anointed to be God's representative'.

So, you can see first all how the apostles are different than disciples, how the apostles can be said to be foundational members of the church of Jesus Christ. Now, let's see something more about these apostles. Turn to Acts chapter 1 for a moment, Acts chapter 1 and verse 22, and if memory serves me correctly - when I was looking up the website that I've been telling you all about - there are some strange people, and they're not all from the Iron Hall, that visit it! They sign this guest book, and I think - if I'm right in thinking this - there was one person who called themselves 'Apostle So-and-so', and it was a woman as well into the bargain! But we'll not say anything about that - chapter 1 and verse 22. Now, this alludes to the qualification of one of Christ's apostles: 'Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection'.

Now, what is the context of that passage? Judas has died, one of the twelve, they need another apostle - and we're not going to get into the debate tonight about whether Matthias should have been made an apostle, or whether Paul was the twelfth apostle or not, that's for another night. The thing that we want to see here is that the qualification that they laid down was that: this one who would be chosen of God must be ordained as a witness with us of His resurrection. An apostle had to be a man who had witnessed, in person, the Lord Jesus Christ rising from the dead. Turn again, if you don't believe me, to 1 Corinthians chapter 9 - there should be more pages rustling than that! First Corinthians chapter 9 verse 1, and Paul defending his apostleship - for he was an apostle - said: 'Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?'. He was converted, and he was made an apostle, after Christ's death - so to see the Lord Jesus necessitates that he saw the risen Lord Jesus, and we know from Acts 9 that he did in his conversion experience.

Turn to 2 Corinthians, this time, and chapter 12 - and we see another qualification of an apostle. Second Corinthians 12 and verse 12, Paul again says - knowing, as he is an apostle: 'Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds'. So, one of the marks of the apostles is not only that they saw Christ in His resurrected state, personally, not just saw Him in some vision or in their mind, but personally witnessed the bodily resurrection of Christ - but they also were gifted with special abilities to perform miracles. That means that there are none today. You don't need to be Einstein to work that out - they laid the foundation, and don't forget that although they are dead in the body, they are not dead in the spirit! All of the apostles that you read about in Matthew 10, at this moment are in glory, and they are still part of the church of Jesus Christ. That means that they are still the foundation of the church of Jesus Christ, and if they are still the foundation why do we need to lay another one in making more apostles? We don't need to do it.

Then we speak of prophets, but before we go on to that let's just say that the definition of an apostle - you might say: 'Well, are we not sent ones?'. That is true, we are sent ones, and in a sense we have been called to the apostleship of spreading the Gospel, and being sent as ambassadors for Christ preaching the message of reconciliation. But, although we have been sent, we cannot take the official title of the office of apostle - that's important. No-one can take those titles. Let's look at the prophets. Now most people think that prophets
are people who look into crystal balls and tell the future. Well, they don't look into crystal balls, but they have an ear with the Almighty. Yes, that is part of their work, they can have an ability at times to tell the future - but, primarily, that is not the meaning of what a prophet is within the word of God. Literally, in both Hebrew and Greek, the word 'prophet' means 'to speak forth', 'to foretell', 'to proclaim'.

What do they proclaim? Now, let us take a lesson from this: they proclaim nothing but the word of God. Don't minimise that. My friends, that is so important to realise: that these prophets, whether in Old Testament or New Testament, they had a direct revelation from God which we very seldom get, if ever get, in this lifetime. A direct revelation from the Almighty, the words of God - as the Scripture says - were put directly into their mouths, and they were faithful in proclaiming what God told them. We read in the word of God that these unique people, these prophets, assisted the apostles in the beginning of the church of Jesus Christ.

Now, we learnt some weeks ago that these are not Old Testament prophets that we're talking about. These are New Testament prophets - it would be a nonsense to say that before the church began, that the Old Testament prophets were the foundation of the church, when the mystery was not revealed. We've learnt that that cannot be possible, so what we're talking about here are New Testament prophets. Think of it: they did not have a New Testament, they could not go down verse by verse and expound the word of God as we have the privilege of doing this evening. Therefore, how where they guided? How did they know how to make decisions? How did they know how to worship and form an assembly? How did they know how to win the lost? Because God communicated with them directly through those who had the gift of prophecy.

A literal translation of 1 Corinthians 14 and verse 3 is this: 'This gift of prophecy was for edification, for encouragement, and for consolation'. You may have the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and I do not minimise anyone's experience of God the Holy Spirit - for I do not want to put the sovereign God into a box - but let me say this: generally God does not speak to us immediately today. God speaks to us 'mediately', through a medium. The Spirit of God who has inspired these pages for our benefit, when God wants to speak to you He will not bypass or contradict His own inspired word by His Holy Spirit. Now listen: there are no apostles today, there are no prophets today, but what we do have is the apostle's doctrine and the word of prophecy - we have the word of God.

In that light, we can proclaim it all we like - and that's what astounds me: we have a greater gift than the prophets had in their day! Yet many men want to call themselves prophets, and prophesy this, that and the other, and miss the mark many of the time - when we have the definite, absolute, authoritative word of God, and if we preach and proclaim it we'll never go wrong! That is New Testament prophecy today, for the way in which we prophesy is to take the word of God and to preach it! The old puritan got it right when he wrote the book: 'The Art Of Prophesying' - he was speaking about how to preach the word of God, how to prophesy: to proclaim the word of God abroad! We have a warning from the word of God in Revelation 22, that if we add to the prophecy of God's word, of God's prophecy, if we take away from it, we run the danger of losing our own souls!

Now, I want you to see this: these two individual gifts, these people given to the church, were unique. They were given as foundation stones at the birth of the church, but we have been given two other types of people that are to build upon their work, and to continue it in the day and age in which we live. Those are three and four: evangelists, and pastors and teachers. What is the evangelist? To put it literally, the translation literally from the Greek is 'bearers of good news', 'bearers of the evangel' - the 'evangel' is the good news, the good tidings of the Gospel. Those who bear that message are evangelists. It necessitates to be an evangelist, that you take that good message of the evangel from place to place. You don't lock it up in a church and close the door every Sunday night, that's not an evangelist. An evangelist goes out and about in the highways and the byways with the Gospel - and that, I feel, is our mistake today. We are holding it ourselves, we are not throwing it recklessly, as the seed of the sower, all over the place.
Someone has called the evangelist 'the obstetrician of the church'. He operates in new births. Sadly that name 'evangelist' has been brought shame upon it by tele-evangelists, and all sorts of strange creatures who bring shame upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must beware of losing the thought and the power of this title and this person that is an evangelist - a man who is gifted in making the Gospel of Jesus Christ simple, making it clear that men and women can understand it, making the Gospel relevant, bringing it down to parabolic language just like the Lord Jesus Himself - so that even the smallest, the youngest, simplest, immature child can understand. The evangelist is a man who can motivate fearful Christians, who can take them and show them how to share their faith, not feeling persecuted of themselves within themselves. He is one who can equip others to preach the Gospel, to spread the good news - and when he is one-to-one, in individual contact with an unconverted person, he is one who is able, gifted by God, to diagnose their spiritual state.

He is one who is able, by the Spirit of God, to probe the conscience. One who is able to encourage conversion and repentance within the heart of an unbeliever. He is one who can show them assurance of their salvation, and impart to them the fact that if they call upon the name of the Lord from the depths of their soul, God will save them. All pastors are not evangelists - they are to do the work of an evangelist, but they are not necessarily gifted evangelists. Often I hear people say - individual Christians - 'Well I'm not an evangelist, so I can't witness. I don't have the gift of sharing my faith with others'. Listen: you are to be a witness, you may not be an evangelist - not all Christians are called to be evangelists - but all Christians are called day-by-day to be a witness.

Fourthly: pastors and teachers. Some scholars looking at the Greek word believe that this is one word 'pastor-teacher'. The Greek structure seems to indicate that. Some would say that because Paul doesn't repeat the word 'some', he says: 'some, apostles; some, prophets; some, evangelists; some, pastors', and he doesn't repeat 'some teachers' - 'pastors and teachers'. But on the other hand, in the rest of Scripture, sometimes it appears that these are two separate gifts. So a person can have the gift of being a pastor, yet maybe not be particularly gifted as a teacher - or person can teach the word of God, and perhaps not have a pastor's heart. I happen to believe that the two ought to be together.

If the evangelist is the obstetrician of the church, this is the paediatrician. After the obstetrician, the evangelist, delivers the new babe in Christ; the paediatrician, the pastor-teacher, comes along and he tends and cares and nurtures that little child. He gives it a touch here, and a kind word there, and a gentle prod to encourage it to do the right things - yet when that little baby is going to fall, or when the child is affected with disease, he is a strong person that is able to hold them up, strengthen and protect them. The word 'pastor' in the Greek literally means 'shepherd' - and every pastor, and every elder, within the assembly of Jesus Christ is an under-shepherd to Him, their chief head is the Lord Jesus Christ. We could look up passages to prove that, but we don't have time this evening - but the pastor is to tend the flock, to care for the flock, to preach and teach the word of God, and to feed the flock.

Let me say this: that is the top priority of the pastor-teacher - to feed the flock! For the pastor is to protect, the teacher is to provide and preserve. The only way that he can do that is through the word of God, to feed by the word of God, to nourish his sheep by the word of God, to lead by the staff of the word of God, and to discipline them with the rod of the word of God. No amount of entertainment, good fellowship, or any other gimmicks, will substitute the word of God. Listen to what Christ said to Peter: 'Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my lambs' - three times! He is not a social worker, he is a preacher of the word of God. He does not need to be college trained - and I do not despise it, for I got a lot from it - but let me tell you this: that a college, or a university, or letters after your name, does not make you a pastor! Only the Holy Spirit can make one, for it is a spiritual gift!
I remember reading a book in my college days that was instrumental in God lighting a spark that should be brighter at this time, but at least He lit it way back then. It's out in the kitchen, you can buy it after the meeting tonight: 'Why Revival Tarries' by Leonard Ravenhill. As I read that book God literally broke into my heart and challenged me about what He was able to in my life, if I would only let Him. One of the quotes by Samuel Chadwick, that you find within that book, is this: 'The church that is man-managed, instead of God-governed, is doomed to failure. A ministry that is college-trained, but not Spirit-filled, works no miracles'. Perhaps in my novice-ness, I pinned it to the notice board in the college, for that's where it counts. Spirit-filled, anointed of God.

One writer had lunch one day with a College President in America. The president was mourning the fact that biblical exposition was going out the window in the pulpits of America. He said this: 'I would get on my knees and crawl across America to find someone who will teach my students to preach the text of the Bible!'. That same author goes on to say that he heard recently of a pastor who begins his preparation for Sunday morning and Sunday evening on a Saturday night in front of the television in his armchair. He goes on to describe how many pastors - and I doubt it's happening here also - have only two to three years worth of sermons, a whole barrel of messages from God - and they dip in and they recycle them, and usually they do it in succeeding churches. He goes on to say: 'Lame sermonettes produce Christianettes'.

Our duty here in the assembly is to feed you with the word of God. My friend, this is what Paul is getting at. This is how the church will grow: it will not grow through mechanisms, and systems of church growth that you will read in a book. We said it last week, that the mechanism for church growth in the New Testament is feeding people with the word of God. He emphasises that by showing: 'The men that I gave you were not strategists, they were not business minds. These men were what? Apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers, and evangelists'. The significance of what Paul is saying here is that teaching is essential to growth, leadership is essential. What you are to do as the word of God is preached in this place - what will change the Iron Hall, what will change East Belfast and the whole of Ulster, is if you receive the word of God, if you note what is being said, and if you put it into your life!

Secondly he shows us how we can see the signs of the body of Jesus Christ being built. Verse 12, look at it: 'For the perfecting of the saints' - these are given for what reason? How do we know that they are working? 'For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ'. Now, if you were to look at that verse you would nearly think that it was given for three reasons. But I want you to take out all those commas and full-stops, or whatever is there in that verse, and let it all run into one as it does in the Greek. For it's speaking of one thing: 'For the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ' - it's the one thing.

What is that one thing? Listen: when the body of Christ, with the gifts of Christ, work together with Christ, the church grows. There is a process: gifts are given, why? To equip. Then, when the saints take the gifts that Christ has equipped them with, and begin to serve with those gifts - thirdly, what will happen is that the body will be built up and growth will happen. Now, there is a myth - and I don't care what evangelical circles you go to, this myth exists, and even in the Iron Hall I'm sure it exists - and it's that the church is some kind of a pyramid structure, and at the top is the pastor or the elder, or the elders. There they are at the top, and they are the one who is to do the work of the ministry that you find in verse 12. They are the little 'popes' at the top of the scale. There is this mentality of the bus driver - maybe the pastor's driving the bus, and everybody's in the seats behind, and he's taking them wherever he wants them to go. That is false! That is not in the New Testament, that's not found in the word of God - and I believe, honestly from the depths of my heart, that this is one of the greatest hindrances to the gospel of Jesus Christ that there is at this moment in this place! The church cannot operate as a body if you're relying on one group of men.
Vance Havener said these powerful words: 'Christianity began as a company of lay-witnesses. It has become a professional pulpitism, financed by lay-spectators'. Yes, and I add this: the labourer is worthy of his hire, but he goes on to say, 'nowadays we hire a church staff to do the full-time Christian work, and we sit in the church on Sunday to watch them do it'. Every Christian is meant to be a full-time servant! There is, indeed, a special ministry for pastors, teachers, and evangelists - but for what? Verse 12: 'for the perfecting of the saints, and for your ministry!' That's what it means! Not for my ministry, not for the oversight's ministry, but for the ministry of the body of Christ working together as one. What is the bottom line? The bottom line is this: Christ has given you a gift, and Christ has given you a gift to be used within His church. There are many ministries within our land that need to be utilised that have never been tapped. There are ministries to prostitutes, there are ministries to unmarried mothers, there are ministries to poor people, disabled people - ministries that you couldn't even imagine, that we have not even thought about, that need to be thought about!

Some object and say: 'Well, there is the invisible church, and surely some other fellowship within the whole world is going to fulfil this ministry of the invisible church'. I'm reminded of a pastor who had a visitor one day, one of these freelance missionary types. He was asking for financial support, and the pastor says: 'Well, what group do you associate with?'. The man said: 'I associate with the invisible church'. The pastor says: 'Well, what church are you a member of?'. The man said: 'I'm a member of the invisible church'. The pastor began to get suspicious, and then he added: 'Well, when does the invisible church meet, and where does it meet?'. The missionary began to get a little bit annoyed, and he says: 'Well, your church isn't the one true church, I belong to the invisible church'. So the pastor said: 'Well, here's some invisible money to minister to the invisible church'. Now, you're laughing at that, but that's a lot of Christians - the way they behave. 'I belong to the invisible church, and all I see is an invisible gift'. My friend, you have a gift, where is it? Is it being used within the church of Jesus Christ? For if it is you will find that that there - one - will be Christ-likeness. Look at verse 12 and verse 13: '...edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ'. You don't call a pastor, you don't appoint elders, so that they do the work - I am not being paid to do the work, I'm being paid to teach you and edify you, and show you how to do the work! That is one of the signs as to how we are growing.

I have an overhead up here - I want Jonathan just to switch it on - a strange diagram (probably because I drew it), but what it depicts is simply this: here you have the pastor-teacher in the centre, and by the ministry of the word of God week after week he - hopefully - is affecting a small amount of people. I don't expect to affect everybody, but those small amount of people are to go on to affect other folk, and those other folk are to go on - and you see this mechanism that God has invented, that Paul has revealed to us as a mystery, is self-propagating. It is self-producing, and as we produce the word of God up here and teach you, you're meant to go away, put it into your lives, produce it in your lives, affect other people, teach it to other people, influence other people - and before you know it the New Testament has exploded!

What is happening is the next overhead - that's what's happening, isn't it? Now, maybe that spot isn't me on my own, but maybe it is a group of people - and I think, and some folk have done it, if you list down the people that are involved within the service here in the Iron Hall, you will get all the same people doing all the jobs. Now, my friend, that is not the way the New Testament operates. That is not what we are taught, we are told this: that we're not to be sponges soaking things up, but we're to let the Lord Jesus Christ grab our full sponges and squeeze them out!

One of the signs of that happening will be maturity - verse 14: 'That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men'. We will be stable, we will be mature, we'll be steady, we'll be focused, we'll know what we want within the church of Jesus Christ.
That will guard against three dangers - if we are mature in Christ we can be sure that we're not immature. Now listen: a person that is in fellowship and is not serving Christ within the assembly, is an immature Christian. They are still a babe in Christ - imagine a baby that never grew, imagine a baby that never exercised! Scientists and doctors have shown us now that if the child doesn't get exercise, the child will stay approximately the same size - it will suffer, it will be susceptible to diseases, and not only will there be the danger of immaturity, but there will be the danger of instability. You know what that is: every fad, every new thing under the sun that comes along, they believe it. Every new teacher and every new book, every new craze that comes along your path, you fall for it - you're blown to and fro like something in the wind.

It's like the wee fellow in the toy shop, isn't it? His Mummy brings him in and he sees this thing, and then all of a sudden this colour catches his eye, and this noise - he doesn't know what he wants! Eventually his Mummy says: 'Will you pick something till we get out!'. So he picks something, and as soon as she buys it he wants something else - or as soon as he sees another child with another toy that's what he wants! John MacArthur calls many Christians today 'Baby Christians' - you know why, I've said this before, because they crawl along the ground and the first thing they find, they put it in their mouth. Isn't that right? My friend, if you're matured, if you're using your gift, you will be built up in Christ and you will not be immature, you will not be unstable, and you will not be deceived by the quacks and the cults that are about to deceive.

Thirdly: there will be an evidence of truth with love. This is a participle, and it literally reads like this: 'truthing-love' - truthing-love! That's right! To truthing-love! It's joined together, it's not speaking of truth on its own, it's talking about doing truth - and if you want to maximise growth in the local church it will be practising and living out truth, where the Spirit of God is free to work in us, that our lives are transparent, they are honest, and everything we do and say lives up to it. A preacher was once asked: 'What do you think is the best translation of the New Testament?' - and like that, he replied: 'My mother, for she lives it out'. Are you living it out?

Finally: co-operation. Verse 16: 'From whom the whole body fitly joined together', you see that, 'fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth' - all of you are important! That's what I want you to see! Every single one of you has a gift! You've been ordained of it by God for a reason: that you use it within the assembly of Jesus Christ. My friend, are you using it? I want you all to make a decision tonight. I don't know what it would be like to stand before the judgement seat of the Lord Jesus Christ, and not be asked by Him: 'Did you use your gift?', but be asked: 'Do you know what your gift is?'. Imagine being given a spiritual gift, through the death and resurrection and ascension of the Lord, and not know what it is to use it for the building up of the church. Let us all say as Solomon: 'And behold, I purpose to build a house unto the name of the Lord'.

Let us bow our heads, and let's consider - each of us individually - are we utilising the gift that God has given us? He has promised that He has given us at least one. My friend, the word of God indicates that on that day when we stand at the Throne many of us, more than we could ever imagine, will suffer loss. If you're not using your gift, you can be sure that you'll lose your reward. Ask God to reveal to you how and where you can use it. May you use it from this night forth.

Our Father, we thank Thee for what it cost Christ to give us the gifts that He did. What a tragedy it would be if He paid His very life, and we didn't use the prizes that He gives us. Lord, help us and give us grace, in Jesus' name, Amen.
Ephesians 4:17-24

1. **Take Off Your Grave Clothes (verses 17-19)**
   a. Vanity Of Mind
   b. Darkness Of Understanding
   c. Alienation Of God
   d. Blindness Of Ignorance
   e. Numbness Of Sensuality
   f. Impurity Of Lust

2. **Put On Your Living Clothes (verses 20-24)**
   a. Renewed Mind
   b. Created Righteousness
   c. True Holiness

The book of Ephesians and chapter 4, Ephesians and chapter 4, and we're beginning to read from verse 17. We have already been studying through verses 1 and we finished at verse 16 last week. You'll remember that this is one rolling sentence in the Greek - the original language of the New Testament Scriptures. Paul has been discoursing about the church of the living God, and what it means to be among a company of people which make up one body. Then we saw, two weeks ago, that in that one body of many people there are individuals who have been given individual gifts - not all people are given the same gifts, and so on. We looked last week as Paul specified a list of four, not so much gifts given to people, but gifted men that are given to the church of Jesus Christ. We looked at the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastor-teachers last week, and we saw the challenge of the word of God that all of us have a gift. The way that the body of Christ will be edified is if we all use our gift in the body.

Now we look from verse 17 through to verse 24. Paul again, almost repeating his phrase in verse 1, says: "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness".

I've entitled my message this evening: 'Change Your Clothes!'. We live in a fashion conscious society. In fact it's got carried away with, I believe, in the society that we live in. People are so fashion conscious. Indeed, day by day, through the television and through magazines and newspapers, we're bombarded by two photographs in particular: one is 'before', and the other is 'after'. There is this comparison that is always made in relation to fashion, and various things in society, that we look at a person before society has got to them, before fashion has added something to them, and then we see a photograph of a new person, a new man or woman, after fashion has dealt with them. The whole point of this fashion is that you can have a 'new you' - you can be a new person. You can have, as they say, a 'makeover', and you can be changed and begin to feel different inside, and people around you - your husband, or wife, or your family, or your work colleagues - can begin to look on you in a different perspective and light because it's a new you!
Of course, people have fallen for that lie - but you know, there's little bit of truth within that idea of fashion. We are looking at 'clothes' this evening in the word of God, in a spiritual sense. If I can borrow the poet William Blake's statement: 'This', that we read of in this passage of Scripture, 'is a mantle for the divine soul'. We are not reading about clothes that we put on our physical body, but we're reading in this passage - whether we are saved or unsaved - about clothes that cover, that mantle, the divine soul. This is, if you like, the divine wardrobe of God. It is what God sees on the unbeliever and, indeed, what God wants to see upon his regenerate child. The difference between these garments and the garments that we see around us this evening, is that this is not fashion. This is not a style that passes away, it is eternal, it never ever changes. Just as our physical garments, with age and with time, wear old and go out of fashion - the difference with these garments is that the longer we have them and the longer we wear them, the greater they become and the better worth they are.

What are our clothes as children of God? I believe there's a lot of confusion about this today within the church. What marks you and I out as being the children of God? In the eyes of others how can they tell that we are the children of God, that we have been changed, that we have been regenerated, that we have dwelling within us the life of Almighty God? What is it? Is it our appearance? Is it the way we dress? Is it the length of our hair? Is it anything to do with the outward appearance? Well, God's word would tell us that may have some bearing on the way that people look at us, but that is not the way God judges whether a man or woman walks with Him. 'Man', He says, 'looks on the outward appearance, but God looks upon the heart' - now that doesn't mean that the outward appearance is unimportant, but in the divine wardrobe it is not what God goes by to discern a child of His.

What else could it be? Is it tradition? Tradition is a good thing when it is a good thing, but tradition as we see it in the word of God - and specifically within the gospel records in relation to the Pharisees - is seen is something that does not add or help the word of God, but it is seen as something that smothers the word of God. Tradition, generally speaking, if it is not the tradition of the apostles and the prophets that we have within the word of God, is man made. Tradition can be a good thing, but tradition - I say it - a lot of the time is a bad thing if we are shackled with it. So tradition is not necessarily the way that we are known as the children of God.

Is it our words? Is it the cliches that we use? The statements and the phrases, the language that we speak? A lot of people think that. They stand in the prayer meeting and pray certain phrases, pray certain formulas of prayer, and they talk or witness in a certain way. I'm not decrying all of that, but some people fall into the trap of believing that by using the language of the Christian you will be seen to be a Christian. It reminds me of the little story of a wee boy who lived on farm. One day the Pastor visited the farm, and the wee fellow didn't realise that the Pastor was sitting in the living-room. He was sitting in a seat that couldn't be seen by the little fellow as he ran into the living-room. He ran into the living-room, and he had a rat in his hand, and he was holding it up by the tail. He said: 'Daddy, Daddy, look what I caught! I saw it crawling around the corner of the barn, and I got a plank and I hit it over the head with the plank! Then I grabbed it and I threw it against the barn wall, and then I took it and I kicked it as hard as I could...'. Just as he said that he saw, out of the corner of his eye, the Pastor sitting in the living-room. He was sitting in a seat that couldn't be seen by the little fellow as he ran into the living-room. He ran into the living-room, and he had a rat in his hand, and he was holding it up by the tail. He said: 'Daddy, Daddy, look what I caught! I saw it crawling around the corner of the barn, and I got a plank and I hit it over the head with the plank! Then I grabbed it and I threw it against the barn wall, and then I took it and I kicked it is hard as I could...'. Just as he said that he saw, out of the corner of his eye, the Pastor sitting on the seat. Then he said: 'And Preacher Sir, after that the Lord called him home'.

Now, isn't that what we behave like at times? It depends who's listening, it depends who's looking. That little child has great wisdom for us tonight, because we believe that by standing in the prayer meeting, or standing in the pulpit, or standing on a street corner, or giving out a tract, that we are making ourselves in the tradition of Christianity - that that is the divine wardrobe, that that is how we judge whether we're living rightly before God in all righteousness and in all holiness. Look: that may have some bearing, but that is not what we find in God's divine wardrobe as we look at these words tonight.
We do well to note the Pharisees, the Scribes, the Libertines in the New Testament, and the Christians. The Pharisees and the Scribes looked at the outward appearance, and deep down - whether they would admit it or not - believed that the outward appearance, legally speaking, would affect the inward heart. They believed by doing things outwardly, that it would affect their inside. The Libertines, that you find Paul writing against in the book of Romans and in the book of Galatians some of them, believed that you could do as you liked - 'Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?'. They believed it didn't matter the way you behaved, or the way you lived, as long as you were alright inside, as long as God had dealt with you in your soul. Those two are errors! In many things in the New Testament we look for the balance, and the balance of Christianity is not the outward appearance of the legalist affecting the inward, or not the Libertines - inward and no outward - but it is this: the heart being dealt with by Almighty God, by His Spirit, being regenerate. The fruit of the Spirit, and the gifts of the Spirit, being placed into his heart at conversion, and therefore the inward soul affecting the outward man - that must be the order! If we fall into any other trap, we fall into the pharisaical camp. Many are falling into that camp today.

Now what does Paul want us to realise in this passage of scripture? Well, he wants you to realise, as he's been saying throughout this whole little book, your position in Christ - the things that you have. The key verse of the whole book is how we are blessed in heavenly places, heavenly realms, with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. The fact that we are now in Christ, we have salvation, we have been blessed in so many ways that we can never utter or understand, and he wants us now - and we've looked at this - he's told us about the blessings in chapters 1 to 3, and now he wants us to live out, to walk in, that blessing.

What does he want us to walk into this week? Well, he wants us to put off something, and he wants us to get on something. Paul is telling you and telling me, to get rid of the garments that characterise our old life of sin - get rid of them! He wants us now to put on the new garments that speak of life - in other words, as he says in the book of Philippians, you've to forget those things that are behind and press on for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. He's echoing the words of the Lord Jesus when He said that if a man puts his hand to the plough and looks back, he's not fit for the kingdom of God. He is telling us to leave the past behind, to go forward - and effectively what he is saying is: you need to change your clothes!

The first thing he says is to take off the grave clothes - verses 17 to 19. He starts off with this phrase that we've seen already at the first verse of chapter 4 that we're reading, he says again in verse 17: 'This I say therefore'. 'Therefore', and I hope that you get the message that when you see 'therefore', you ask 'Wherefore?' - ask why he is saying that. It shows what has come before, the verses and the doctrine and everything that he has been laying down in chapters 1 to 3, and now right throughout verses 1 to 16 in chapter 4 - that is what he is pointing back to: 'Therefore, in light of what I have been telling you, I want you to do this'.

What has he been saying throughout the previous statements? Let's turn to chapter 1, chapter 1 and verse 4, and we spent a week early last year, just after Christmas last year, looking at this little verse - verse 4. Talking of predestination and election: 'According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love'. Why has He chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world? He has chosen us that we might be a holy and peculiar people before Him - that is what he has been saying. Then in chapter 2 we saw how he showed us how we were dead in our trespasses and sins, and he lifts us up to the pinnacle, the mount, and looks down at where we've come from and tells us where he has brought us to. Then chapter 3, we look about the message of reconciliation, how there's no Jews or Greeks any more in the ethnic sense, but we've all been joined together in Christ. The barriers of separation have fallen down, and there is one new man - one new people, one new society and race.

Now, chapter 4, he goes into more detail about the body of Christ. How the body is to behave with one another. How the body is to behave with regards to the gifts that God's Holy Spirit has given to them. Now
he comes here to emphasise to these people that, if you're in the body of Christ, you are to be a holy people. The word 'ecclesia' is the word for 'church' in the New Testament, and it literally means 'called out ones'. A group of called out people, an assembly of humanity that has been called from something to something. What have they been called from? The world, isn't that right? They have been called out of the world, and called to the holiness in the salvation of God that we read of in the New Testament.

There's a statement that's often bandied about from pulpits, and in conversation, and it's this: that some people are too heavenly-minded for any earthly use - you know that one. Well I have never met anybody that's too heavenly-minded for any earthly use. All I meet within the church of Jesus Christ, and at times when I look into my own heart, is someone that is too earthly-minded for any heavenly use. My friend, that is the problem today, that is the problem that we face: God's people are no longer peculiar people, they are no longer a holy sanctified band of believers.

Now we looked, in our first week in this new session, at how Paul in the second half of Ephesians, from chapters 3 to 6, is mirroring practically what he has laid down doctrinally in chapters 1 to 3. So, looking at verses 17 to 24 that we're looking at tonight, what is he mirroring in the first half of the book? Let's look at it, chapter 2, this is what Paul is mirroring, verse 1: 'And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins: Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience'. Now look at chapter 4 and verse 17: 'This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind' - do you see the connection? Chapter 2: 'You were dead in trespasses and sins' - now the practical aspect, chapter 4: 'I want you to walk now worthy of the life that you have been quickened with in the Lord Jesus Christ'.

You see that the second half of Ephesians has all to do with this little word 'walk', and we learnt that the word 'walk' typifies and is a metaphor to describe our conduct day-by-day, as we live out our life here on earth for Christ. It is our practice, it is the way we think, the motives we have, the emotions that we exercise - how we exercise our will day-by-day in the choices that we make. Everything that is to do with life, this word 'walk' typifies it. Now, what is Paul saying? 'You're now in the body of Christ. You have now been gifted by the Spirit of God with either one, or many, gifts. You are to edify, and should be being edified by, those believers within the body and their spiritual gifts. Now that you are in this holy body of Christ, you've got to stop living ungodly'.

In 1 John chapter 2 and verse 6 we read these sobering words, that we as New Testament Christians are to 'walk as he walked'. The Lord Jesus Himself, in John 13:17, says: 'If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them'. You see, that's like a commentary on the whole book of Ephesians, chapters 1 to 3: 'If ye know these things' - and we do know them, in fact we know them too well, we could recite them off pat. But Jesus Christ, the Son of God, says to us tonight: 'If ye know them, happy are ye if ye do them'.

We are not to imitate the dead. We looked in great depth at what it means to be dead in trespasses and in sins, and it's something that we are born into. It is something from original sin that we are inactive, unable to help ourselves in all our sinfulness - and we make that worse, we put it in concrete, by the very fact that we begin to live, by choice, in our trespasses and in our sins. Paul is saying: 'That is not the way you or I are to walk in Christ'. You're not to walk - look at verse 17 - 'as other Gentiles'. The word 'Gentiles' in scripture always means something that is ungodly, a people who are unregenerate, a pagan nation. Paul says: 'You are no longer to live with the old wardrobe'.

The old wardrobe is still in fashion here, isn't it? It's always in fashion, in fact it's getting more and more in fashion - and we are having a revival today, in Ulster, of sin. A revival of sin! Sins that were forgotten about, sins that we had said could never be committed again in humanity, are being committed at the very moment.
that we speak and sit here. In Ulster, in East Belfast, we have a revival of sin! We are to have nothing to do with it. You only have to look at the tabloids, and they testify that the world is hard, the world is dark and dead, and absolutely reckless with regards to other human beings, and even in their own lives. Paul's clarion cry to the church of his day, and to the church of Jesus Christ today, is this: 'Forsake it! Leave the world!' - why? Because it has vanity of mind, verse 17, the second half: '...the Gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind'. That word 'vanity' in the Authorised Version would be better translated 'a mirage', 'an illusion'.

These people are deluded, the folk in the world, those without Christ, those who have never been regenerated in their hearts, are unbelievers who are intellectually unproductive. You say: 'Well, you go to university, and you look at some of the cleverest men in all of society, and you couldn't apply that to them - that they're intellectual unproductive!'. Could I not? One of the greatest passages, and indeed commentaries, on this passage of scripture is Romans 1 - I want you to turn with me to it tonight. You can see great parallels in this passage to the passage that we're studying. Romans chapter 1 and look at verse 22, the sinner - the classic example of the sinner: 'Professes themselves to be wise, but they became fools'. Paul put it to Timothy in his letter, 2 Timothy 3:7: '[They are] ever learning, but never ever able to come to the knowledge of the truth'. That is the society in which we live, we have more learning than ever, more universities, more further education, yet man today has more questions than he has ever had! The more he learns, the further away the truth becomes to him. I believe, and I categorically say, that man is intellectually unproductive when it comes to the things of God. When it comes to spiritual things, when it comes to moral things, his rational processes of mind fail him every time - he can't produce morality, he can't produce spirituality by his thoughts, by intellect. The more he studies these things, the irony is there is a vicious circle, that things are reversed - and the more he tries to be holy, the more he tries to be moral, it backfires upon him. He can't produce spirituality or morality.

Young people, I pray that God will teach you that lesson. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 2, for as you sit in the lecture theatre and you listen to a man with more letters behind his name, than there are letters in his name, and it's almost as if he speaks the words of God. He is infallible, no-one - and certainly not you - would argue with him. I want you to understand that that man, if he is un-Christian, if he is a Gentile pagan, if he's never been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, that man has no spiritual insight whatsoever. That man may tell you there's no God, he may tell you your Jesus Christ is an imposter and a magician, he can tell you all he likes - but he has no spiritual knowledge whatsoever. Look at this passage of scripture, verse 14: 'But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned'.

I happen to agree with A.W. Tozer when he said that he abhorred those in the church that put a scientist in the pulpit, and a lawyer in the pulpit, because they are clever - to prove that Christianity is right. Now, don't get me wrong, there is a place for apologetics, there is a place for intellectualism - but what I want to get across to us that will be, I believe, for our spiritual good, is to realise what Paul is teaching throughout the whole book of Ephesians and the whole book of Romans. It is this: salvation is a spiritual revelation! As such, you will never rationalise a man into the kingdom of God, you will never argue him in - but a work of the Spirit of the living God must be done in his heart - why? Because he is in the vanity, the futility of mind, that Paul describes in this verse. His life is empty, it is purposeless, it is fruitless. He has much intellectual activity, but no progress whatsoever. It's as if he's chasing bubbles all of his intellectual life, punching shadows, but he neglects the thing that is most important: the spiritual. But why does he neglect it? Because he cannot do anything else!

That vanity of mind that misses everything spiritual, leads to the second point: darkness. The vanity of thought leads to darkness of understanding. The commentary of Paul again, in Romans 1 and verse 21, if you look at it (keep your finger in Romans 1 by the way) is this, as one translation puts it: 'Thinking, they become futile, and their foolish hearts are darkened'. They think, their thinking is futile - it is vanity, as Paul
says - but the more they think about spiritual things, the darker they become, because their thinking is futile and their foolish hearts become darkened. Och, there is a lie that goes about in Christian theology, and has done for many centuries so far, that there is a divine spark in the soul of every human being - and that all you need is the Gospel or the grace of God to blow wind on the innocent soul of a little child, or the soul of a human being who has spent many years in sin, but that sin is trodden underfoot by that little divine seed and spark. Nonsense! You'll not find that in the word of God, in fact you find the opposite in 1 John 5 and verse 12: 'He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life'! That shows the awful situation of the human depravity of all mankind, for his futility of mind leads to the darkness of his understanding.

Inevitably it leads, thirdly, to his alienation from God Himself - for darkness in scripture indicates separation. You will know the verse that 'darkness has no fellowship with light', the light cannot have fellowship with darkness, and therefore God - as Paul says - has no fellowship with Belial. Therefore, to be in the dark because of the futility of your mind means to be separated from God, and that is because of the ignorance of truth in your life that has been made concrete by a wilful ignorance! Men look around them at creation and they will give every A to Z explanation of it but God! The heavens declare the glory of God, the earth and everything in it shows forth His handiwork - and creation tells the little Pygmy in the jungle that there is a God, but modern intellectual man in Ulster can't believe it! He has wilfully made himself ignorant to creation.

Then there is the voice of conscience - and every time his conscience shouts at him that something is wrong, he goes to every intellectual length to prove that this thing is permissible, this thing is right. And what happens is: the futility of his mind brings the darkness of understanding, and eventually it brings his alienation and his separation from God. The further and further away from God he goes, the more separated he is. You see when man rejects the light of God, he becomes alienated. That is the reason - I'm giving you the reason tonight, from the word of God, why we live in a society, even in our little land, where evil is called good and good is called evil, where dark is given for light and light is given for darkness - that is why it is possible: because men and women outside of Christ are blind!

That's Paul's next point, that the futility of mind brings darkness of understanding, and then alienation from God, and it is precipitated in a rain of blindness, ignorance! J. B. Phillips translates this beautifully, he says: 'They live blindfolded in a world of illusion'. Men and women are wilfully blind. Romans 1, Paul's commentary, verse 21 says that - they think themselves into futility, and their foolish hearts are darkened. They wilfully walk into sin, and more and more they are cemented into their intellectual and spiritual darkness. But that was not always so, for their forefathers knew the truth, but they decided to go their own way. They decided to reject the light and because of that, over years and years and years of rejecting God's light, they have become blind in their ignorance, and eventually they become hard within their hearts!

It's an interesting study to take a concordance of the word of God, and go through and look at the references to the hardened heart, or the hardening of the heart. The Greek word for 'hardening' is the word 'porosis' (sp?), it is the word that you get 'porous' from, which means 'a stone harder than marble itself'. That's where we get the expression 'a heart of stone', and men and women have hearts of stone because they think they know everything in the vanity of their mind, and therefore their understanding is darkened, they are separated from God, and in their ignorance of wilfully rejecting God's light and truth they become blind!

If you look at Romans chapter 1, we see how this all begins. I encourage you to beware if you are an unbeliever outside of Christ, rejecting the Gospel, if you're a backslider living in your sin, or a Christian trifling with sin, please note verse 18 of chapter 1: 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness'. Now what does that mean - 'To hold the truth in unrighteousness'? It's like the wee boy who wanted to smuggle his little puppy into his
bedroom for the night. When he was just getting the puppy into bed he heard his Mum and Dad coming up the stairs. Quickly he grabbed the little pup, threw it into the toy box and sat on the little, and began to talk to his Mum and Dad as if nothing was happening - ignoring every moment the 'thump, thump' of the little puppy's head on the lid.

That's what man is like, the 'Thump! Thump!' of conscience, the 'Thump! Thump!' of creation, the 'Thump! Thump!' of God's law, they ignore to their own peril - until what happens is: the mechanics of unbelief kick in! That wilful rejection of God's light becomes a hardening of the heart. So much so that in John chapter 12 verse 39, we read this of the Pharisees who wilfully blasphemed against the Holy Ghost, who was revealing to them their Messiah - that at that point in time: 'They could not believe!' Now don't change it to 'would not' - you're not allowed to change it! They could not believe! He goes on to say, John, that it is a fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy: that God blinded their eyes and closed their ears - why? Because they wilfully rejected the light of God. What a peril to be in!

What does it lead to? It leads fifthly to the numbness of sensuality, when you no longer can believe, why? Because you are insensitive to God's call, and also because you have become insensitive to your sin. W.C. Wright puts it well when he says this, concerning being insensitive, listen: 'When conscience is at first denied there is a twinge of pain, there is a protest that can be heard - but if the voice is silenced, presently the voice becomes less clear and clamant. The protest is smothered, the twinge is less acute, until at last it is possible to get over the pain'. Indeed, that's how Bishop Mole translated this little verse: 'having got over the pain' - I call it the anaesthesia of sin, how sin numbs us. The vicious circle that the more you become entrenched in your sinful attitudes, the less you feel your sin and your conscience is pricked by the sin - so much so that eventually you become apathetic to your sin, and it leads eventually to your deeper sin!

So much so that, if you look at chapter 4, in verse 19 it says they are 'past feeling'. They are no longer able to feel the pain, and they have given themselves over to lasciviousness. They get to such a stage that they don't feel their sin any more, that they just willingly throw themselves unreservedly at their lust. That's how you explain the vileness that men and women are dabbling in today - it's because they've closed off all thought and voice of God from them. They've given themselves, as McDonald says, it is as if they are carrying on a trade or business in lewdness and sinfulness. That's what that statement means: giving themselves, wholeheartedly living for the business of sin! The word 'lasciviousness' literally means 'sensuality'. Vice that throws all caution and restraints to the wind and flaunts itself. That's what we're living in today, sin that flaunts itself, sin that will cry from the highest rooftops the most immoral things that a man should never even utter of his lips, never mind commit! But they are proud of it!

It betrays the total depravity of mankind, for there we have the impurity of their lust, sixthly, because men are behaviourally depraved. Romans 1:28 says that, they are proving by their works and denying God, they are giving themselves - and the more they give themselves to sin, increasingly they lose all moral restraints especially in the area of sexual morality. What we see around us today is that greed is linked with lust, as Paul does in this passage: 'All uncleanness', all lust, verse 19, 'with greediness'. Why is greediness and lust linked in the Scripture? You can see it in chapter 5 and verse 5 he links lust and greediness as well - do you know why? Because lust is insatiable! I'm sure most of you will know that, the evil cravings which are pleasant and promising in anticipation of a great pleasure, but when they bite in they are hideous, disappointing in all retrospect as we look back at them!

I have written at the back of my Bible, because I'm a terrible sinner: 'David, remember that your sin always leaves you dissatisfied'. It's amazing how the devil can blind you before you sin, into how pleasurable this is going to be, how great it's going to be - and then after you sin you're left, and I can say this honestly from experience, you are left feeling absolutely filthy! Isn't that right? You might say: 'Well, I've never reached the extremes that we read of here' - do you know why you haven't? One: the grace of God, and secondly: the
restraining influence of the Holy Spirit. Do you know why the man on the street can say: 'I've never delved into those particular sins'? Do you know why he can say it? Because of the common grace of God, and because of the influence of the Holy Spirit that resides within the church of Jesus Christ. If it wasn't for those two factors the whole world would be in more chaos than it is now! If that is possible.

What does Paul say? He says this, look at it: 'In the name of the Lord', verse 17, 'I implore you' - it literally means 'I insist' - 'that you take off your grave clothes, that you no longer live in this light and this kind of life. Because if you do so, the cross and the blood of Christ is lessened, it's not needed - you must learn to walk in Christ'. Look at verse 20: 'Ye have not so learned Christ'. It's interesting in verses 20 and 21, look: 'ye have not so learned Christ...ye have heard him...ye have been taught of him'. You've heard Him, you've learned Him, and you've been taught of Him - and all those three expressions are to do with teaching, to do with a scholar learning from a teacher. That tells you and I that salvation - listen - is not a profession, that is the beginning of salvation but salvation is a learning process. [You can] take and deduce from this here tonight, that if you're not learning as a Christian there is a question mark over whether you are a Christian!

It is a growing process, it is a growing process where the subject, the teacher, the atmosphere, is the Lord Jesus Christ. As Patrick in the fifth century put it: 'It is Christ with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort, Christ to restore me' - and as he goes on it's the atmosphere of learning, being taught, and hearing the word of Christ, that's what it's about! It's not about learning doctrine. Doctrine is important, but if you learn doctrine regardless of the person of Christ you're wasting your time. Everything is in relation to a Christ-centred personal Gospel in the Lord Jesus - everything! The preacher that is preaching Christ the way he ought to be will have an invisible Christ in the pulpit, there will be an invisible Christ in the aisles and in the pews as the word of God is preached in the power and glorifying Christ - if it is done in that way.

Put off those old clothes, and begin to walk - look at verse 21: 'as the truth is in Jesus'. You notice he says 'Jesus', and Paul - in fact I even slipped up as I was reading it at the beginning of the meeting - because Paul so often says 'Christ Jesus', but here he says 'Jesus'. Because 'Jesus' was His name of incarnation, and what Paul is saying here is: 'You have looked at the Gentiles, their way of life with all their vanity of mind and darkness of understanding, separated from God, blind in their ignorance, numb in their sensuality, impure in their lust - but if you look to Jesus, that man who was born upon the earth in the likeness of sinful flesh, that man who was tested in all points like as we are yet without sin, in Him was no sin. If you look to Him, don't look at Adam like some of the cults do - 'Adam' in Hebrew means 'man', and they are looking to man - but look to the God-man, look to Jesus the truth is in Him'. Christian, throw all your doubts out, throw them all out. Anthropologists look for the origin of man, but they'd find it in Jesus if they would only look. Cosmologists look for the origin of heaven and the universe, astrologists look for the stars, but everything is to be found in Jesus. All the truth of heaven, hell, salvation, life, death, everything is to be found in Jesus - for He is the one who said: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life'. As 1 John says: 'He is the true one', He is the truth personified.

So therefore, verse 22: 'Put off', strip away, repent. Oh, we don't have time to deal with all this tonight, but I fear at times when I preach about repentance to believers, there are people sitting in the pew saying: 'Well, I repented when I was saved'. I would ask the question whether you're saved if you're asking that question - for I don't read about this modern day evangelical profession of faith in the New Testament. Do you know what I read about? I read about a man with a cross who said this: 'Day-by-day you take up your cross and follow me' - day-by-day. That means daily you repent, daily you get before Him, daily afresh you commit your life to Him - and if you cannot bring yourself to repent because you repented at some time in your past, you cannot be following Christ and you certainly cannot be living a holy life!
We need to get back to the Lord Jesus. Paul said: 'I die daily'. The church of Jesus Christ today doesn't need more doctrine, there's doctrine coming out of their ears. I'll tell you what it does need: it needs to put off those old grave clothes, and put on the new clothes of life. What are the new clothes of life? One: a renewed mind. What is the renewed mind? You read about in Romans 12 and verse 2, being renewed by your mind - and salvation is not just something that renovates, it's not a reformation of morals, this is something that takes control and changes the person. A new creature in Christ Jesus - as 2 Corinthians 10:5 says: '[We are to bring] into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ' - every thought! This is meant to change your mind! Is that not what repentance is? A change of mind, a change of mind about sin, a change of mind about your home, a change of mind about your wife, about women in general. A change of mind about the business, a change of mind about the way you're going to spend everything that you have - all the money, all the energy, all the time - is it not a change of mind?

God knows the church needs a change of mind. The Lord Jesus prayed to His Father in John chapter 17 and verse 17, and He said these words: 'Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth'. Do you want to renew your mind? You know there's times, and I'm opening my heart to you tonight - and there's a danger when you do this that somebody will just stick something in it - but there have been times when I have sinned, and I have almost been physically sick at the thought of it. That means a renewing of the mind is needed, and we need a renewing in our mind so that we can see sin more, that we aren't deluded about it in our lives. I was thinking about this today in the study, and as I was sitting on the chair I even looked at the library and I thought: 'There's sin in that library!'. There's sin in the library! There's sin in my sermon somewhere, there's something wrong I'm sure. There's sin in almost everything, and God knows we need a renewing of our mind!

There is a revival of sin at large, and the more God shows us our sin, the more we need a renewing of our mind, and to come before Him by the word of God and prayer - 'Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth'. We need to get into the word of God, we need to get to prayer in order that we put on the new man, and put the old self to death! Oh, positionally, you look at Romans 6, he is dead. He died when Christ died and was buried and rose again, you got your new life - that's positionally, but practically you've to reckon him dead every day or he'll raise his head.

Secondly, it is a created righteousness. One author says: 'It's a task not to weave but to wear'. You don't make this righteousness up you know, you just wear it. You just take it as a gift from God. What Paul is saying here, you notice when he says about this righteousness, look at verse 24: '[the new man, which] after God is created in righteousness' - he is speaking of our responsibility to other men and women. He's talking about the second table of the law in Exodus 20 - those things that are responsible to other people. Then he talks about true holiness, the last words of this verse, he speaks of the first table of the law, the first five commandments, verses 3 to 11 of Exodus chapter 20. In one he's talking about a responsibility to other men, in the other he's talking about our responsibility to God. He's crying to us to show the righteousness of God toward one another, and to show true holiness before God in our lives.

I know and I'm sure that when I'm preaching on these things, someone says: 'You're setting the standard too high'. Listen: I'm not setting the standard, God's setting it. He tells you to walk worthily in true holiness. You remember Lazarus, lying in the grave four days rotting - do you remember? The Lord of life comes, and with one word: 'Lazarus, come forth!' - he came forth! What did He tell them? 'Loose him, and let him go'. Do you know what we need in the Iron Hall? Do you know what I need in my personal walk? I need to cry to the Holy Spirit to give me the strength and the grace to put off those old grave clothes, and to put on Christ. Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh.

Let us pray, and let's look into our hearts and analyse what is there, and ask God that He'll take us into His school - the school of Christ - and that He'll begin to take those things out of our hearts, and renew our mind,
and enable us to live lives of righteousness and true holiness in His sight. For He can do it, for it is God that worketh in you to do and to will of His purpose.

Lord, we pray like old M’Cheyne prayed: God, make us as holy as sinners can be. Not for our glory, but for Thy glory and for the extension of Thy kingdom. In Jesus name, Amen.
Ephesians - Chapter 20
"The Wardrobe Of The Spirit"

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Ephesians 4:25-32
1. Take Off Lying – Put On Truth (verse 25)
2. Take Off Sinful Wrath – Put On Righteous Anger (verses 26-27)
3. Take Off Stealing – Put On Sharing (verse 28)
4. Take Of Doubtful Conversation – Put On Holy Edification (verse 29)
5. Take Off Hot Heads – Put On Warm Hearts (verses 30-32)

We're turning to Ephesians chapter 4, and we're finishing - God willing, if time permits - this whole chapter, and hopefully by next Monday evening we'll be into chapter 5. We're going from verse 25 this evening, chapter 4 and verse 25 - and remember, please, the context that Paul brings to us already, we're not going to take time to read up to verse 25. So, remember that the context - and this is very important - of these verses that we're about to read is within the idea that Paul is bringing to us of the body of Christ, which is the church of Christ, being edified by the gifts and the abilities that the Spirit of God has given to that body. A body that is one body, not divided into different schisms and sections, but yet within that body it is made up of individual believers given individual gifts by God. We all have at least one gift - and therefore those gifts, we saw in the final verse, verse 24, of last week, that all these gifts are put together to edify the body in one new man, and to walk in true righteousness that has been given from God, and true holiness.

So, in that context we begin to read verse 25: "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister", or serve, "grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you".

Last week we looked at those verses that were telling us to walk as Christians within the church - taking off the clothes, the old clothes of the old nature, and discarding them, leaving them for good, and putting on the clothes of the new man, the new creatures in Christ Jesus that we are meant to be. To start to live the life that God wants us to live in Christ Jesus. The message last week was to 'Change Your Clothes', but Paul always, like every good preacher of the word of God ought to do, takes doctrinal truth and applies it, practically speaking, to everyday life experience. So Paul is moving from his doctrinal thesis that we all are to take and discard our old clothes, put on our new clothes, and now he tells us what those new clothes are - as I've entitled it, what the wardrobe of the Spirit of God is, the clothes that He wants us to wear.

Now, the key verse of this passage - I believe - is verse 30, look down at it: 'And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption'. So that is the foundation of verses 25 to 32, everything is built upon that premise. 'What I'm going to tell you', Paul is saying, 'is that everything you do here, if you do what I tell you to do, you will not grieve the Holy Spirit of God. But if you fail to do what I'm telling you to do, the Holy Spirit of the living God will be grieved with you'. I think, perhaps, in practice
much of the church today believes in a duality of a Godhead. What I mean by that is: two in the Godhead - Father and Son. Oh, they adhere to the Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - but in practice, in everyday church life, all you hear mentioned, perhaps, is the Father and the Son - and that is a defective theology. Now mark that! It is a defective theology, and when you have a defective theology you get a defective life!

That's what this book is all about, the first three chapters: doctrine, the last three chapters: behaviour. Yet it's all mingled together, but the point that Paul is getting across is: it's not just what you believe, but it's what you behave - the way you behave from your beliefs, it must be affected by it. I feel, I really do feel, that many born-again believers are missing out on the ministry that the Holy Spirit of the living God has for them. Arguably speaking, now think about this, I believe that the Scriptures testify that the Holy Spirit of God, the third Person of the blessed Trinity, is the one part of the Godhead that we are to have the most to do with in this dispensation! That's what the Scriptures teach, but the fact of the matter is: He's the least mentioned within the age of grace.

A few Lord's Day mornings ago we looked at John chapter 14, the departing words of the Lord Jesus Christ: 'Let not your heart be troubled'. They were troubled because He was going, but He told them: 'I will come to you' - and He meant within that statement, not just the fact that He would come in the second coming, but He told them: 'I will send another comforter, another advocate'. That word 'another' we learnt, in Greek, means 'another of the same kind'. 'I'm leaving you. I your strength, I your encouragement, I your comforter am going away - but I will send another one unto you, and the works that I did He will enable you to do greater works'. But the fact remains that many would say, and I would happen to agree, that the Spirit of God remains a stranger within His own church. He indwells the believer, He baptizes the believer, He fills the believer, He anoints the believer, He seals the believer, He teaches the believer - Jesus Christ said: 'He shall lead you, guide you, into all truth' - and He even teaches us how to pray in times that we cannot pray (in the book of Romans we have already read that last week, Romans 8), He teaches us to pray and at times He even prays through us. Yet - if I can say it without being irreverent - He is the 'Cinderella' of the church.

Evangelicalism, especially in our little land, is a knee-jerk faith. It's knee-jerk in its reactions - for instance: because the church of Rome worships and idolises the Virgin Mary, we throw her out and forget all about her. Because the charismatic movement idolises in a sense - to the expense of the other two Persons of the Trinity - the Holy Spirit of God, and because they are attributing to the third Person things that I believe are from the devil himself, we decide: 'We'll not mention the Holy Spirit at all, and we will ignore His works within the life of the believer'. Isn't that right? You know sometimes, and let me say this categorically: I love the Holy Spirit of God, I love Him! - and I'm not ashamed to say that. I know there are times that I preach about the Holy Spirit of God, and I know that some of you think I'm going charismatic or something, I'm going Pentecostal. When the Holy Spirit is mentioned as if He is a living reality in the life of a believer, as if He really exists, as if we have a personal relationship from day-to-day with Him - you look, and you think: 'He's getting like Benny Hinn! The next thing he'll be rolling around in the pulpit, barking like a dog!'. My friend, listen: the Holy Spirit is real! We ought to be cultivating day-by-day a personal, literal, experiential knowledge of the Holy Spirit of the living God!

Yet I feel the reality is this, just as Paul came to the Ephesian disciples and said to them: 'Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?'. Their answer back to him was: 'We have not so much as heard whether there be a Holy Spirit'. Is that the way we feel, or is that the way we behave? 'The Holy Spirit in my life?' - think about it, the Holy Spirit in your life. How could you pinpoint the things that the Holy Spirit, at this moment of time, is doing actively in your life? Can you think of anything specifically? Is the emptiness in your Christian life the emptiness of the ministry of the Holy Spirit? It could all be encapsulated in this question: are you grieving the Spirit, or are you pleasing the Spirit?

To that end, Paul gives us the ways that we grieve the Spirit, and the ways that we please the Spirit. He's giving us the ways that we can know that He is not grieved in our life, that He is within our life - and if we
cultivate that relationship with Him, He will come into our life in the fullest sense of that phrase. Therefore let's look at this, what is Paul's formula - as it were - for knowing the presence and fullness of the Holy Spirit in our life? The first thing he says is this, look down at your sheet: take off lying, and put on truth. Verse 25: 'Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members of another' - put away lying. What is a lie? A lie is something contrary to the truth, but we could go further and say that a lie is something contrary to the truth with the intent to deceive. There's intent in it.

What I mean is: if you ask me the time at this moment, and I said: 'Well, it's half past six', because my watch had stopped - I'm not telling you a lie, I just haven't realised my watch has stopped. But if I tell you it's half past six because I don't want you going to the Bible Reading, and I know it's half past eight almost, that is a lie. Usually it is a lie because there is an interest of mine by telling you that untruth. In Exodus chapter 20 and verse 16 we have the holy law of God, and we are told there: 'Thou shalt not bear false witness' - I love that rendering. 'Thou shalt not bear false witness' - it doesn't say 'Thou shalt not lie', because that narrows it down in our minds to telling 'black lies' or 'white lies', and to saying something that is blatantly untruthful. That is not the commandment of God, it is 'not bearing false witness'.

As we look through the word of God, especially in the persons of the Pharisees and the Scribes, we find that this was a commandment that was remembered in the temple and forgotten in the street. This is the whole point of Paul's little book: the things that you remember in the temple of God, don't forget in the street! He wants to make us realise, this evening, that when truth is spoken the Spirit of God works, but when lies are spoken the devil himself works. The word of God tells us that no lie is of the truth, but at this moment of time in the church, and even in the world (and that's where we're getting it from), there is an epidemic of falsehood abroad. Even in advertising, think about it, you look at the television screen, and ladies you're told that if you wear 'Impulse' that you'll be walking down Royal Avenue and all these men will be running after you with a bouquet of flowers, isn't that right? Now, don't all be going tonight and buying 'Impulse', but you know what I mean. That's what we're led to believe, we're led to believe that anything, from a new toothbrush to taking out a certain insurance plan, will really improve our lives in some way. That is falsehood, that is not the case, and in reality we all know that - but falsehood has become the norm within society, it is ingrained and we don't even realise it now because we are so used to falsehood! We've become desensitised to it!

It reminds me of the story of the baker who suspected that the farmer who was supplying his butter was short-changing him with regards to the butter, and wasn't giving him the amount that he needed. It was confirmed week after week as he weighed that big lump of butter, and he found that it was lower than the weight that it ought to have been. So he went to the police and he reported him and got him arrested! They brought him to the magistrate, and the judge for some reason just threw the whole thing out of court. It came to light why that happened: the wee farmer said, 'Well, I don't have scales at home. So what I do is I take a one pound loaf of bread that I buy from the baker, I put it on the other side of the scales, and it weighs it out right for me!' Now, that's the world that we live in, isn't it? Everybody's doing everybody else, isn't that right? We can become so used to falsehood within the church of Jesus Christ, that when it happens we don't know how to deal with it, we maybe don't even recognise it!

What is lying? It's not just saying untruths, not just blatant black and white truth or lie - do you know what it is? One: it's being doubled-tongued. It's saying one thing and doing another. You might want to call it hypocrisy, the word 'hypocrisy' comes from the Greek which means an actor that used to stand on the stage with a mask, and he used to put it up and down and pretend he was something that he was not. That is a lie - you are a liar if you're pretending to be something that you are not. What else is it? It's putting your personal preference on a particular fact - we all do this, don't we? We put our particular embellishment upon the facts, and sometimes we withhold facts that we don't want other people to know, to create a better light and aura around us of what we are and what we can do. Personal preference with regards to facts. There's an emotional interpretation, as well, on facts that we can give. Someone tells you a story, don't they? And then
you tell it to someone else, and you add a little bit onto it, a little appendix: 'Now that's what I heard, but this is what I think...' - that's lying. That's lying, because you don't know whether that's a fact or not - and if you're not dealing in facts, my friends, you're dealing in lies! That's it.

Exaggeration, that's lying. When a preacher says that he had 600 at a meeting, and the hall only holds 400, that's lying. Exaggerating the facts to make someone look better in the light of those exaggerated facts. It's not just blatant lies, it's all these subtle things that the devil will get into our lives, and get into the church of Jesus Christ, and he will smother God's Spirit - that grieves God's Spirit! Putting your embellishment, 'Chinese whispers', until the story has changed - that grieves God's Spirit! I want to say this, very seriously: hell is prepared for whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. That's what the word of God teaches! Now, I don't mean if you've ever told a lie you'll end up in hell - we've all told lies. But what that verse means is this: that if your life, at this moment, is continually controlled by lies - hell is for you! For the Christian life is to be controlled with truth - and I warn all of us tonight, and I warn myself, that the first sin that was judged publicly by God Almighty in the early Christian church was the sin of Ananias and Saphira: lying!

Therefore, Paul says, take off lying and put on truth. The Christian is not to lie, the Christian is not to be involved in being economic with the truth, or half truth, or colouring, or embellishing, or exaggerating the truth. The Christian is to deal with fact - his 'yes' is to be 'yes', his 'no' is to be 'no' - his word must be absolutely trustworthy. Truth is the debt the Christian owes to all men - all men! The reason - and I want you to note that in all these things that Paul gives us this evening, he tells us a thing to put off, and he tells us a thing to put on, and then thirdly in the verse he gives us a motivation for doing so. In verse 25 the motivation is: 'for we are members of one body' - put off lies, put on truth, why? Because we are members of one body, we are neighbours of one another, and it's unthinkable that the members of a body should lie to one another, brothers and sisters should lie to one another, or exaggerate, or embellish, or be found in gossip - it's unthinkable! It's as unthinkable for one Christian to lie to another, as for the nerve in the body to deliberately send a false message to the brain, or for the eye to deceive when there's danger coming to the body - it doesn't make sense, sure it doesn't? Why? Because the body is to be working together for the edification of the one body.

John McKay said it well: 'A lie is a stab into the very vitals of the body of Christ, this is so because a lie is a stable shaft from the kingdom of darkness'. My friend, do you want to stick, like the centurion, a spear into the side of the Lord Jesus Christ? Well, live like a liar, for it will cause pain to the body of Christ. That is what grieves the Spirit, but we - listen! - are meant to be free from falsehood!

Secondly, he says: take off sinful wrath, and put on righteous anger. Now this is a difficult verse to understand, verse 26: 'Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath', verse 27, 'Neither give place to the devil'. Now, 'angry' - when is anger right, and when is anger wrong? Well, anger is sin when that anger is motivated by an emotion of malice, jealousy, rebellion, resentment, vindictiveness, hatred. Because of personal pride a person decides, with all or one of these emotions within them, to be angry with another person - and the seed is pride within their breast, that is when it is a sin. Paul says: 'That anger, let not the sun go down upon that species of wrath'. What did the Lord Jesus say? He said in Matthew 5: 'Agree with thine adversary, while thou art in the way' - why? That very day, don't let the sun go down on your wrath, get this thing dealt with as quickly as you can - the reason being that the all-seeing eyes of the Saviour could see in the hearts of men and women when they continually put off reconciliation with their brothers and sisters in Christ. It festers, and festers, and festers, and gets worse! That is why He said in Matthew chapter 18: 'Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone'.

Jesus said that when we have sinful anger with another we are to do two things: confess it to God, and confess it to our brother. Sadly that is another New Testament practice that has gone down the tubes, and this is very serious, because Jesus Christ the Son of God - and I want you to note that He is saying this - says that
 unholy anger is the first step of murder. He said it now! It is murder within the heart, Jesus Himself said that Satan was a liar from the beginning - that's where you get the lies from - and also that he was a murderer from the beginning, why? Because he hates God, and he hates the people of God, and when he finds a so-called believer where there is a spark of bitter anger he adds full fuel to the fire! Why? Because he wants to burn down the building of God.

It's easy to put out a match when it's first struck, isn't it? But once the whole building is burning down it's very very difficult. Unconfessed sin of temper is the devil's breeding ground. In verse 27 you can see that, and I want you to note that every single thing I am saying is from the word of God: 'Neither give place to the devil'. Lies, and false anger and hatred, are the foothold for the devil's operations. Now let me ask you a question: does the devil need the help of the church of Jesus Christ? Does he? I think he's doing a good enough job of opposing God as it is, without our help! The devil here, the Greek word for the devil, is the word 'diabolus' - it's a double-meaning word, in other words it can mean the devil, but it can also mean one who is prone to slander. One who is prone to slander - the devil is prone to slander, and it literally does mean the devil here, but it can also have this meaning of one who is prone to slander. If you think of the devil, go through the mentions of the devil within scripture, if you go to the book of Revelation he is described as 'the accuser of the brethren', the slanderer of the brethren, the one who throws things, accusations, at the children of God about their sins. Paul is saying, the Holy Ghost through Paul: 'Give no place to the slanderer!' - meaning the devil. Everyone that is slanderous is fond of him.

Crimes of passion are to be forbidden within the church of Jesus Christ, and they must stop. There is no excuse for it - do you know why? Because lies and false sinful anger discredits the testimony of Jesus Christ, it stumbles the unsaved coming to Christ, it sows discord among the brethren, it harms the person and individual, and eventually it may harm them physically. One paraphrase puts it like this: 'If you are angry don't sin by nursing your grudge', why? Because that sin will poison your whole spirit, and it will enter into your body which is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and He will be grieved.

What is righteous anger? Put off false wrath, sinful wrath, put on righteous anger. The Bible says God is angry, in fact Psalm 7 says God is angry with the wicked every day. Psalm 2 verse 12 says: 'Kiss the Son, lest he be angry with thee'. The Father is angry, the Son is angry, and there are times when the Holy Spirit is angry - but all of that is righteous anger, and we are commanded - listen! - commanded to be angry in the anger that God has! When God's name is at stake, when God's name is not vindicated within His church and within His creation, we are to be angry - we are to be like the Christ of God when He goes into the temple and turns over the tables of the money-changers. We are to have the zeal of His house eating us up!

Now, don't ask me if it's easy, because it's not. It's a problem for a sinner saved by grace to know when their anger is sin and when their anger is righteous. What can start off as being anger that is righteous can end up as anger that is sin. Aristotle, who was not a believer, said this: 'Anyone can become angry, but to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way - this is not easy'. Thomas Boston, the puritan, said: 'What may start as proper anger becomes pride, and then evil in itself, and can become dishonourable to God being a vomit of a proud heart unmeekened in spirit'. Another puritan concluded the whole matter by saying: 'I am determined so to be angry as not to sin' - I am determined to be angry and sin not - 'Therefore the way I will do it is to be angry at nothing but sin'! There's the key: if you want to be angry and sin not, be angry with everything that is sin.

He tells us 'put it away' - do you know what we need today in the church? We need a baptism of holy anger, we need to be angry again for the Lord - like the Psalmist, to love the Lord and hate evil. We need to be like Wesley, and like Wilberforce, who looked at personal experiences of individuals - Wilberforce looking at the slaves, and being angry at the things that were going on in humanity. We need to be angry at it, that's what the Lord was angry at when He went into the temple! The Pharisees were ripping the ordinary people off, and He was angry at it! You need to be like Luther and Calvin, angry at the church of Rome and any other
false church - not just the church of Rome, many Protestant churches that are leading perishable souls into hell! We need to be angry, angry and sin not.

Now look, if we don't put off sinful wrath, and put on righteous anger, we will grieve the Spirit of God. D.L. Moody tells the story of how he went with Mr Sankey to take a mission, and they were there a week, and they preached the gospel night after night - which is not unheard of for us - and there wasn't a soul saved. Of course Moody, the soul winner that he was, began to ask questions. He said: 'I feel I am beating the air', and one night he stood up in that and meeting and he said: 'Perhaps in this building someone is cultivating an unforgiving spirit'. All of a sudden, in the view of the whole congregation, the chairman of the committee left the platform and walked out of that building - his words had hit the mark. He had had trouble with a man for six months, and before that meeting ended he came back to Moody with tears in his eyes, and he said: 'Mr Moody, I'm glad you came tonight, and I'm glad you said what you did'. That night the enquiry room was full.

Lying and sinful wrath grieves the Holy Spirit. Thirdly: take off stealing, and put on sharing. Verse 28: 'Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth'. Now it's interesting, you might think: 'Why does Paul need to tell Christians not to steal?'. Well, most of the prisoners - in the day of Paul's day anyway - were in prison for stealing, because they couldn't beg for food they had to steal. That's why you find, in the book of Titus chapter 2 and verse 10, that Paul told Titus to encourage slaves not to purloin their masters, but to live honourably before them. It was a great temptation for people in their poverty to steal, and that tells me that believers can still, and do, sin! Paul wouldn't be saying all of this unless that was the case.

What he is encouraging us to do is, daily, if the problem is stealing, to reckon ourselves dead daily to sin. Isn't it funny that Satan was a liar from the beginning, Satan was a murderer from the beginning, and Satan - the Lord said in John 10:10 - was a thief from the beginning! He turned Judas into a thief. He turned Eve, the first woman, into a thief - taking the fruit of the tree - and in turn, Eve turned her husband, because of him, into a thief! He's still doing it, yet the law of God says in Exodus 20 and verse 15: 'Thou shalt not steal'. It can come the form of grand larceny, to non-payment of debts, to not working the hours that your employer wants you. It can be plagiarism, copying something pretending it's your own. It can be false measurements, it can be falsifying expense accounts. It can come very subtly in padding out claims, in inadequate income tax, borrowing and forgetting to give back, using your employees time for other things.

Many of us say: 'Why are you talking to me about stealing?'. There was a meeting on one occasion when a man stood up and he began to tell the rest of the gathering: 'I want to tell you all here tonight that I am standing on redemption ground. I'm high on redemption ground!'. As he rambled on another wee man stood up and he says: 'Well I want to tell that man to get down from the redemption ground, because he's not standing in redemption ground, he's standing in a pair of shoes that he bought off me and he still hasn't paid for them'. Now friends, that's practical, isn't it? That's where the leather hits the road, when we are living what we are saying, when we are doing what we are reading, when we are not stealing. This blew my mind, this statistic that I read this week, that in America 16 million dollars a day go down the drain because of shortages in department stores caused by employee theft - 16 million dollars a day! You don't think that's a sin? Well, maybe if God moved in your life it would be a sin, and it might be a sin in mine too - for when God moved in Ulster, and in Belfast, they had to build a new barn in the shipyard for all the men that were getting saved through Nicholson, who had to bring everything back that they had stolen! When God works in your life there's no sin that's too small.

It's interesting that this is one of the sins that grieves the Holy Spirit. What do you do? Put off the stealing and put on the sharing. Now this is remarkable, because the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer doesn't just enable you to keep the negative of the commandment, 'Do not steal', but it enables you to keep a positive. Not only are you working for a living, but you're working for a living and somebody else's
living, you're working to help those that are in need, it is a positive thing. William McDonald says: 'Only the positive power of grace can turn a thief into a philanthropist' - isn't that right? Turning a man who steals for a living into a man that shares with others who need, a man who works for other people, to give to the church of Jesus Christ. Not a lazy man - God never called a lazy slob, never! For laziness and stealing grieves the Spirit.

Fourthly, take off doubtful conversation and put on holy edification. Verse 29: 'Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers'. Now in Greek that phrase 'corrupt communication' often means filthy communication, suggested stories, off-colour jokes, profanity, obscenity, vile language - but here it has a wider meaning than that. It means some conversation and language that is worthless, talking about frivolous things, empty things, idle chatter, profitless talk. The Lord said: 'Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh'. It's interesting, the parallel in Romans between the mouth of the unbeliever and the mouth of the believer. You have in Romans 3 that the mouth of the unbeliever is full of cursing and bitterness, yet in chapter 10 the mouth of the Christian confesses Christ Jesus as Lord.

You have a description of Saul walking down the Damascus Road, in Acts chapter 9, and where is he going? He's going to kill Christians, breathing out cursings, and threatenings, and murderings. Yet the next time you find Saul, who is now Paul, the disciple cries: 'Behold he prays!' - huh, powerful! From cursings and threatenings to praying, because that is what the power of the Holy Spirit can do in the life of a man! He can change the mouth from spewing forth decaying talk and conversation, to edifying the church of Jesus Christ. There was once a fable told of a woman who took poison in little drops. She didn't take a big lot of it, but day-by-day she took into her system a spoonful by a spoonful, little by little, until that poison filled her whole body so full of poison that her very breath would wither the flowers. There are so-called Christians like that, aren't there? They open their mouths, and it is a sepulchre of death.

That is not to mark the child of God, we are not to talk about other people - no - if we have nothing good to say we ought not to say it at all. Do you know something: people think that because something's a fact they can relay it. If some brother falls into sin, and they're telling another brother about it, they think that's legitimate because it's truthful. It's not legitimate, even if it is truthful! St. Augustine, a great man of God, hung a motto over his dinner table on his dining-room wall, do you know what it said? 'He who speaks evil of an absent man or woman is not welcome at this table'. I wonder how many friends he had?

Edifying, that's what we're to do. Put away doubtful conversation and edify - we find that word three times in the chapter: verse 12, verse 16, verse 29. The Greek word means 'the act of building up', you're to converse, to cultivate, and to contribute growth within the church of Jesus Christ. You're to build up, this is how you won't grieve the Holy Spirit - and indeed verse 30, our key verse: 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit', is in connection with false talking and empty talking. I remember a wise man years ago, when I was starting the Lord's work, gave me this and I wrote it in my Bible: 'Any fool can wreck a church, but it takes godliness to build one up'. Isn't that right? Any fool can wreck a place, but my friend it takes godliness to edify the building of the church of Jesus Christ.

In verse 30, this is the way we won't grieve the Holy Spirit: by putting away lies and taking on truth, by taking off sinful wrath and putting on righteous anger, by putting off stealing and putting on sharing, by taking off doubtful conversation and putting on holy edification. You know that word 'grieve' the Holy Spirit, do you know what it literally means? To 'pain' the Holy Spirit! To cause sorrow to the Holy Spirit of God! It's ironic that it's the exact antithesis of offensive talk. It is a sensitiveness that is pictured in the image of a dove: one move and it's gone. The Holy Spirit is sensitive, and He is a person, not an influence. He is a person that can be grieved by your behaviour - why? He is grieved like any person is grieved when they love you, when they see someone whom they love not walking in the way that is pleasing to them, they're hurting themselves! They are grieved, and He is grieved! The ministry that He longs to do in edifying and building
up the body of Christ, He can't get doing it because He's doing a ministry of discipline in our lives trying to restore us to what we ought to be. That's the fact, because we're grieving the Holy Spirit.

Fifthly and finally: take off hot heads, and put on warm hearts. Verse 30 to 32 - grieve not the Spirit, verse 31: 'Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you'. He's collectively putting together a whole gamut of sins of temper and tongue, and he's telling us to put them away! That word 'put away' has the sense of a word picture, some commentators believe, of a landlord putting out an undesirable tenant. What does he speak of? Bitterness - look at it, verse 31 - what is bitterness? It is smouldering resentment, unwillingness to forgive, a harsh feeling. Wrath, what is it? Bursts of rage, violent passion, temper tantrums. Anger: grouchiness, animosity, hostility. Clamour, what is it? Loud outcries of anger, brawling, angry bickering, shouting down opponents. Railing, what is that? Insulting language, slander, abusive speech. Then he says malice: wishing evil on others, spite and meanness.

Do you know what Ivor Powell says about that verse? Listen: 'When carnal people send fires of dissension through the assemblies of Christ, the work of years can be destroyed in moments, and the cause of Christ immeasurably hindered. To be content, Paul urges the Christians to expel the troublemakers.' - now this is what he says - 'A fence on the top of a cliff is better than an ambulance at the bottom'. We are to put on holy, warm hearts. In verse 32 he says kindness: unselfish concern for others, a desire to be helpful at personal sacrifice. Tenderheartedness: sympathetic affection for others, compassion for others, an interest in others and a willingness to bear their burdens. Thirdly, forgiveness: to pardon the offences of others, to overlook personal wrongs against oneself, not to harbour a desire for retaliation. And therefore, with all these things, putting them out and putting on godliness to build up the body!

Let me ask you a question: are you, or am I, personally in my life, or corporately in the life of this assembly, grieving the ministry of the Holy Spirit of God? If you are, put a stop to it! For then our members will be edified, then Satan will not have a foothold in this place, then this place will be built up, and the Spirit of God will not be grieved and He will smile upon this place. Adoniram Judson was the pioneer missionary to Burma. He was sitting one day in his home, and his wife was reading out the paper to him - there was a report in it about him. He was a man of God in humility and in godliness of every kind. She said: 'Adoniram they say in this paper that you're just like one of the Apostles'. He didn't like that, and he turned his wife and he said: 'I don't want to be like one of them, I want to be like Christ'. We will be like Christ when we put on the wardrobe of the Spirit of God.

Now, let us pray and bow our heads, and analyse our hearts in the light of the mirror of the word of God - and ask ourselves: 'Am I, don't apply it to anybody else, 'Am I grieving the Holy Spirit in my life and in life of this assembly?'. You know, the presence of God, as I said yesterday, above the tabernacle was seen in the smoke and in the fire - and when it was gone it meant that the children of Israel were being disobedient.

Oh Lord, give us again that fire. Give us again that witness from on high that God is with us, that His name will be glorified, and His arm will be bare in salvation. That His cause, and His heart, will be primary in our hearts and our lives, and that we will seek after God. Holy Spirit of God forgive us, and grant that we may grieve Thee no longer. Come, for we are the temple of the Holy Spirit now, and come and make us Thine abode again. Amen.
We're entering into the fifth chapter of Ephesians now, Ephesians chapter 5, and we'll begin reading from verse 1. The passage that we'll be looking at this evening is verse 1 through to verse 7, and we've entitled our message: 'The Christian: The Divine Impersonator'.

Verse 1: "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them".

In our very first message in chapter 1 and verse 1 of this book, many months ago, we looked in much detail at the city of Ephesus and what it meant to live in Paul's day in the city of Ephesus. If you were to go to Ephesus today, you could walk through that little town as it has been excavated, and parts of that old ancient city have been found. I'm told that you can walk down a street of marble, you can look around you at buildings that people once lived in, and businesses that they once worked from. Bit by bit archaeologists are restoring the city of Ephesus.

As they uncover that great city, they are finding that the grandeur of it is something that surpasses, perhaps, any city that is alive today. It was a metropolis, a great place of significance in the ancient Roman world. But as they are uncovering these great things about this ancient city, they are also finding that there was great vileness, great sin, and great iniquity that took place within it. In fact, I'm told that as you walk down that marble street in the middle of that city, that they have uncovered signs that Soho and London, or any other red-light district in the world, has nothing to touch. Indeed, if you were a sailor coming into Ephesus and you walked right into the city, there were signs inviting you to partake of absolutely freely - of the temple prostitutes in that city. Free prostitution to any travellers!

Within the temple of Artemis, the virgin goddess, there were ritualistic prostitutes. They were there, and they were paid money by men and women within that civilisation, to have ritualistic sexual intercourse to worship their deity. If that's not enough to speak of the vileness of it, the thing that perhaps comes home to us the most about how iniquitous this place is, is the fact that there was nothing seen to be wrong with all of that civilisation and the practices of it. The donations that were given by the men paying for the ritualistic prostitutes, they didn't keep them, but they donated them to the temple - and the temple was looked after, and the maintenance of it, by the money that was taken in from this ritualistic religious prostitution.
Some might say that prostitution is the oldest profession in the world, and the 'do-gooders' - as many would say - are shouting about how it represents the worst in all of modern decay in society, but the fact remains that here in the city of Ephesus to be a prostitute of this kind was a great honour in society. It was extremely honourable for you to be in a profession bringing money - and indeed serving the community in the town, and even your religion - to build up the temple and to build up worship to the goddess Diana. Nothing seemed to be wrong with it, in fact - as far as they were concerned - in a philosophical sense they had united the lust of the flesh with religion, so that the desires and appetites of a man could be swallowed up in a religious ritual and it didn't seem to be as sinful. As far as they were concerned Diana, and her religion, was able to meet the need of body, soul, and spirit.

Now, as you look at this backdrop and this context, you can understand why the passage that we're reading tonight was so revolutionary to these Ephesians. They thought there was nothing wrong with this ritualistic prostitution, with the worship of their fertility god in this manner within the temple - it was normal. Therefore when Jesus Christ, by His Spirit and in Paul, in this little epistle comes and tells them the sexual ethics of the Christian church, it rocks them! What to them seemed necessary, seemed commendable, seemed acceptable, to God was sin. You can see the demarcation line, and it's not between religion and non-religion, but the demarcation line is between pagan religion and God's faith. This is where Christianity, Bible-believing Christianity, stands above all the rest - at least one of the ways it stands above - in its Christian sexual ethics. It is the only faith that dictates and commands chastity outside of the marriage bond and relationship - the only faith that lays it down.

Why then do Christians fall into sexual sin? One writer says that it's the 'cookie jar' syndrome - a little boy whose Mummy has just made some cookies, and they're lovely and warm smelling. She puts them into the cookie jar and sets them up on the kitchen bench. She goes away to do a few messages, and comes in and she finds the little boy with his hand dug deep into the cookie jar. Red-faced and embarrassed he turns round to his mother and he says: 'My hand is in the cookie jar resisting temptation'. Isn't that where we are at times? We are in the world, trying to resist temptation.

The disciples said to the Lord: 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples'. One of the statements within that prayer of the disciples was: 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil'. I say it again, that we pray that God may not lead us into temptation, but we lead ourselves in - we find ourselves with the hand in the cookie jar, and then we fall into sin, whatever type of sin it is - and we ask the question: 'Why did that happen?'. We are living in the society of the cookie jar - through media, through newspapers, magazines, television, advertising, even in the workplace, in family life now, and even in the church of Jesus Christ - we are bombarded by an environment of sinfulness, idolatry, adultery, fornication, all sorts of sins are treated as the norm. Even when, in the church, we stand and tell what God's ethics and rules are concerning the sexual realm, we are 'fuddy-duddies', we are 'a puritan', we are 'Victorian'.

Do you know what we need? We need a revival in holiness. There is a revival of sin, but we need a revival of holiness! This book I continually recommend to you, and I'm going to recommend it until you all read it! At the beginning of one of the chapters in 'Power through Prayer', E.M. Bounds quotes John Wesley - and I've quoted this before, but I'm quoting it again because it never ceases to thrill me. Listen, he said: 'Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth. God does nothing but in answer to prayer'. Is that what you want to be? Can you pray like M'Cheyne: 'Oh God, make me as holy as a saved sinner can be'? Listen: that is the secret, that will bring an awesome revival to the church of Jesus Christ, because the Gospel itself - now listen to what I'm saying - the Gospel itself has no inherent power of itself, but it moves as men filled with the Holy Ghost, and men of holiness, move with it. I don't need to tell you that the effectiveness of the Gospel message has more to do with the holiness of the one who is preaching it than the words that he is saying. I believe that with all my heart. That is why Bounds could say within his book: 'It takes 20 years to make a sermon, because it takes 20 years to make the man'.

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'How can we be holy?', you might say, 'In a sin sick world, in a world that is intoxicated and saturated with all types and kinds of filthiness?'. Well, here is the answer within our passage this evening, first of all: the way to be holy is to imitate the divine being. Look at verse 1: 'Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children'. Again we see Paul using this little word 'therefore', 'Be ye therefore', and we've learnt week after week to look back when Paul says that, and look back to what he is pointing back to. He's been talking, in chapter 4 the last two verses: 'Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you'. We looked last week at how we are to put off the old clothes, and this is the wardrobe of the Spirit of God that we are to adorn ourselves with. We're to put away lying, we're to put away stealing, we're to put away all sinfulness of the old nature that has died with Christ, and we're now to put on the love of God in Christ Jesus. 'Therefore', Paul says, 'to do that you must be a follower of God as dear children'.

The word 'follower' in the Authorised Version would be better translated, it literally means: 'imitator' - 'Be therefore imitators of God'. The Greek word for 'imitator' is the word that we get our English word 'mimic' from, to mimic or to copy something. What it denotes is an actor, an actor who spends time, spends all his energies and efforts in studying a character with the view to reproducing it. Have you got it? 'Be imitators of God'. In the Old Testament Scriptures God told the children of Israel these words, they're familiar to many of you: 'Ye shall put away out of the camp of Israel every leper' - put away out of the camp of Israel every leper. He went on to say: 'Any kind of vile, infectious disease, put it out!' - and He was saying that, not just for the safety of those who hadn't been infected by it yet, but the reason - the primary reason why God told them to put out from among them all uncleanness - is found as the very foundation of the whole Old Testament law of God. Listen, God had said to His people: 'Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy'.

That was the legal dispensation, and that spoke of physical defilement, leprosy, all kinds of diseases outwardly or inwardly within the body. But now we are in the dispensation of grace, and what it speaks to us of is the uncleanness of the flesh, of the soul, and of the spirit - we, as those who are to imitate God, are to put away from us all uncleanness! This is a part of the law that has been repeated for us in the New Testament, for Peter repeats it - 1 Peter 1:16: 'Be ye holy; even as the Lord your God is holy'. Do we imitate God in our holiness?

What is the motive for this imitation? It's given in verse 1: 'as dear children'. Any of you that have children, or have been among children for a while, will note the way they imitate adults - don't they? They watch Daddy driving the car, and all of a sudden you turn round and you see him moving the steering wheel, changing the gears, and pulling up the brakes - imitating. You hear them imitating many things, bad words, they have a pencil sticking out of their mouth [pretending] they're smoking, they pretend to drink, they're doing all sorts of things - and psychologists tell us that the things that they learn through life many of them, most of them, are learnt as they are children. Do you see the connection? Paul says you are the children of God, here is your heavenly holy Father, you imitate Him as you imitated your earthly father.

The three admonitions that Paul gives in this passage, which lasts right down to verse 17, he says first of all: God is love - we know that, don't we? Because God is love, he asks us in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 5: 'Walk in love'. Your heavenly Father is a God of love, you are His children, therefore you walk in love as your heavenly Father. Then he says God is light and, in verses 3 to 14, he says: 'Because your heavenly Father is light, you're His children, you walk as children of light'. Then he says God is truth and, in verse 15 to 17, he says: 'Therefore, because God is truth, you're His children, walk in the wisdom of the truth of the word of God'. All of those walks are an outcome of chapter 4 and verse 1, which is the walk that they are to walk worthy of in the calling with which they are called.
There are folk in this meeting tonight, and they have children that are wayward. They have no thought of God, they have no thought of Christ, they have no thought of holiness - and at this moment of time they are deep, saturated, drowning in the world - and what is it doing to your heart? It's breaking it! We learnt last week that when the child of God walks in sinful ways, it grieves the Holy Spirit. Is your heart grieved for a loved one? Can you imagine how God's heart is grieved for us when we walk and we do not imitate Him, or we imitate the world around us? How are we to live holy in this evil and wicked and adulterous generation? God says: 'Imitate Me, and you shall be holy!'.

The second thing he tells us to do is in verse 2, he says: emulate the love of Christ. 'Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour'. Verse 31 and 32 of the previous chapter, you see, is a great contrast to what he's just said in verse 2. In verse 31 he's talking about bitterness, unholy wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking - he tells them: 'Put it away from you!'. What are you to put into the place of all that unseemly sinfulness? It is to walk in love, the antithesis, the opposite of all those sins that he has talked about. The Greek word for 'love' here is the word 'agape'. It is the word depicting the love of God - not 'filio' (sp?) which is a love between brothers and friends, not 'eros' which is that sexual attraction between a man and a woman, but 'agape'. We are to walk in the love of God, shedding the love of God from our hearts to other believers and unbelievers around us. This is what marked the early church of Jesus Christ - Behold! They love one another! Indeed everything was surrounded by love, they lived together, everything they owned was with one another, they shared it with everyone. Indeed the Breaking of Bread was called, in those early days, 'the love feast'.

Love characterised the church in early times, and the reason for that is: that Christ is and always shall be our perfect example, the example that we are to follow. God says: 'Be followers, imitators, of God' - and here you have proof of the Trinity, for in verse 2 - one minute, verse 1, he's telling us: 'Imitate God', and verse 2 he tells us to 'walk as Christ has walked'. What more proof do you need? How did Christ walk? He tells us: 'He gave himself [as] an offering, a sacrifice for sin'. The greatest proof of the love of Christ is that Christ laid down His life for us at Calvary's cross, that He gave Himself for us - and we love Him because He first loved us and gave Himself for us! God, our heavenly Father, showed His love for us in that, while we were yet sinners, He demonstrated His love for us in that Christ died for us! Paul is saying: 'This is how you imitate God. You imitate God by a walk of holiness, and that walk of holiness will be exemplified in a walk of love for other people, just as Jesus Christ the Son of God loved you and gave Himself for you'.

God's love is always displayed by the action of giving. In John 3 and 16, that very famous gospel text, it says: 'For God so loved the world, that he gave'. In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, we find God giving - God gives life to all mankind. In the second book, the book of Exodus, we find God gives His law to mankind. In the book of Joshua we find that God gives land to His own people to live in, and to have shelter and protection and joy in. In the book of Psalms we that God gives His people strength and comfort through these prayers and songs of Zion. In the Gospels we find that the Father sends the Son to be the Saviour of the world - He gives His only begotten Son. Then in the book of Acts He sends, at Pentecost, His Spirit - He gives another Comforter. Finally, in the book of Revelation, He gives hope - for we are not as others who sorrow without hope, but we have a blessed hope whereby we comfort one another with these words: that the Lord shall burst through the clouds, and we shall go to be with Him forever! What a hope!

Do you see how our Lord and our God is a giving God? He loves to give, and we are to walk in His example, we are to give as He gave Christ, and as Christ gave His life at the place called Calvary. First John 3:16: 'We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren'. Again in chapter 2 and verse 6 we are told: 'Walk as he walked'. I wonder do we realise the impact of what a life of love has upon the life of an unbeliever? Do you know the story of the Auca Indians and their conversion in South America? You've maybe read the book of Jim Elliot. In January 1956 five young American missionaries were killed, martyred for their faith, trying to reach these Auca Indians with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Today, at this moment of time, their five killers are Christians,
their five killers are pillars within the church of Jesus Christ in that particular part of the country. Indeed the house of prayer, where they called it 'The Place Where God Speaks', was built by those five killers right on the spot where they martyred those missionaries. How did that happen? How was there such a revolutionary change, from being ones who martyred men of God, to becoming men of God themselves? Do you know what happened? Rachel Saint, the sister of the martyred missionary Nate Saint; Betty Elliot, the wife of Jim Elliot; went back to those who had killed their loved ones and demonstrated the love of Christ to them.

Does that not blow your mind? That is the love of Christ, they were laying their lives down so that they might win others. The gift here, that's talked about in verse 2, is the gift of Christ. It's spoken of, look at it, as an offering, as a sacrifice to God. This is the amazing thing, it doesn't say that Christ was a gift to the world - there are other Scriptures we could turn to tonight to show that He was a gift to the world for salvation, but that's not what this verse says. It says that Christ gave 'himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God'. An offering is anything given to God, sacrifice involves death. This gift of an offering to God, and the gift of a sacrifice to God, by Jesus Christ is eulogised in this statement that it was: 'an offering and a sacrifice to God', look, 'for a sweetsmelling savour'.

The Lord Jesus Christ, as He hung at Calvary's cross, was the true burnt offering. He was the total, complete, obedient sacrifice for sin to God - and that sacrifice there at Calvary ascended unto God as a sweet smelling savour. Do you know what the High Priest used to do on the Day of Atonement? As he was about to enter into the Holy Place, he would take in one hand a bundle of sweet smelling incense off the golden table of incense, and in his other hand he would lift the censer filled with fire. He would walk beyond the veil, and as he went through into the presence of God he would take that incense and pour it upon that torch, the fire was lit from the burnt offering altar, and as he sprinkled it upon that fire there would arise in that place such a smoke of a savour of a fragrance - it would cover the Ark of the Covenant, it would cover the mercy seat. The reason was to present to God a sweet smell from the sin offering of propitiation.

In Leviticus and chapters 1 to 3 we have the offerings in the word of God. We find there the offerings of a sweet savour unto God, and there are only three kinds. First of all there is the burnt offering. Secondly there is the meal offering, and thirdly there is the peace offering. The burnt offering was a sweet smelling savour that pictured complete and utter devotion, the whole of that animal was burned unto God as a sweet smelling savour. It wasn't an offering for any particular sin, or any laws that were particularly broken or transgressed, but all that was was a scent to go to God, to please God at the fact that blood had been shed and had made sin the victim, and Christ the victor - and what a savour of joy that was to God!

Then there was the meal offering, which spoke of the perfection of God in His Son, His image, His stamp, His express person of purity that could not be defiled. What an offering to God that was. Then there was the peace offering, it spoke of reconciliation between God and the sinner, that rose as a sweet smelling savour to God. All of these brought joy to the heart of God - why? Because the Lord Jesus Christ offered Himself to God, this is purely a part of the crucifixion that was to God! The sweetness of it was that He offered Himself without reservation, that's what was sweet to God. Don't believe any nonsense that He almost withdrew in the garden of Gethsemane. Don't believe any nonsense, that is taught from pulpits and books in this day and age in which we live, that the Lord Jesus Christ was troubled with sin all through His life. God forgive them! He was an offering of a sweet smelling savour.

Adam couldn't do it, and he failed - and every man since Adam failed, but the last Adam was victorious! He is the only man that could be said to bring a sweet smelling savour to God in His obedience, in His purity, and - this is the point that Paul is bringing to us - in His forgiveness. The forgiveness that He purchased at the cross through that sweet smelling savour, we are to walk in that way of forgiveness with our brothers and sisters in Christ. As F. B. Meyer put it: 'In love so measureless, so reckless of cost, for those who were naturally so unworthy of it, there was a spectacle which filled heaven with the fragrance and God's heart with
joy, and it is this: that God could now be reconciled to the sinner’ - and because of that, my friend, you ought to be reconciled to them as well. We ought to walk as He walked, and He said through His Spirit: 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lays down his life for his friends'. Do you want to be holy? Imitate God in His love, and lay down your life for your brothers and sisters in Christ. The poet put it well when he said:

'Others Lord, yes, others,
Let this my motto be.
Help me to live for others,
That I may live like Thee.

Lord, let my life be given
And every moment spent
For God, for souls, for heaven,
And all earth's ties be rent.

Thou gavest Thyself for me,
Now I give all for Thee'.

How to be holy? Thirdly: separate from sexual sin. I'm glad to say that the doctrine of separation from the world is still part of the church of Jesus Christ, because it's still part of the word of God - but whether it is being practised is another issue. Certainly we find, within the New Testament, that there is to be a separation from the world in sexual immorality and their ethics system. Verse 8 of this passage, that we'll start to look at next week, says that we are to walk as children of light. In verse 3 Paul gives us the reason why we are to shun sexual immorality, the last word: 'as becometh saints'. The word 'saint' simply means someone who is set apart, someone who has been brought from the darkness and deadness of sin, into the life and the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It primarily means someone who has been chosen, someone who has been separated to live a holy life! If you don't want to live a holy life you may forget about Christianity! For that's what it is: a holy life before God.

Paul warns us to shun the world, and he gives us the various types of sin that we are to avoid. First of all he says: 'But fornication', look at that word fornication. It literally means illicit sex among unmarried in the community, but here it means more than that - not simply that act of sexual intercourse outside the marriage bond, but it means here in this context any form of sexual immorality. The Greek word is 'porneia', it's the word that we get our English word 'pornography' from - any illicit sexual activity at all. He shows us that by a second description: 'fornication and all uncleanness', and that broadens the sense. It means immoral acts, impure thoughts and pictures, art depicting impurity and sin, obscene books and other suggestive material, anything indecent - and effectively anything that feeds that old beastly desire and passion within us. Alright, let's name them: tabloids, slick magazines that make the reader grovel in the dirt of the lives of the stars, soap operas taking pleasure in iniquity - my friend, we can practise in these things only if we ignore the word of God.

Thirdly, he says: 'covetousness'. Generally speaking when we talk of coveting we think of the lust of money, but literally 'covetous' means - the Greek word literally means 'over-reaching'. It means to have a sensual, or any desire or lust, for anything. It speaks of an appetite, an insatiable lust and greed to satisfy the appetites of the body and of the soul. That can be seen right back in the Ten Commandments - Exodus chapter 20 and verse 17 God said: 'Thou shalt not covet' - and one of the things He said not to covet was 'Thy neighbour's wife'. It is all sorts of lust. Fornication, uncleanness, covetousness - Paul says: 'Let it not once be named among you, as becometh saints' - not once! You could say: 'Well, you've just named it tonight!' - that's not what Paul is meaning. Paul means never let it be named, having been committed - it should never be
mentioned as happening within the church of Jesus Christ. I would go further, I believe Paul is actually saying here: 'Nor should these things be discussed in a way that might lessen their sinful shameful character, and make you, or tempt you, to fall from holiness'.

I believe the devil's strategy within the church is to get believers to talk and speak of sin in a light manner. Then, what they are doing today is, they are beginning to excuse sin in their lives and in the church - and the next step of that familiarity with sin will be to commit the sin itself! Paul is saying: 'Don't even dwell too long, or look too intricately into sin, or eventually you may fall yourself'. The old English poet, Alexander Pope, put it well when he said this:

'Vice is a monster of such frightful mien,  
As to be hated needs but to be seen'.

In other words, if you're going to hate vice it's got to be seen for what it is. But listen to what he says in his next verse:

'Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,  
We first endure, then pity, then embrace'.

That is the awfulness of sin, and we are not to name it among us as being committed, we are not even to dwell or talk about these things - why? Because, as Paul says, it doesn't become saints of God's holiness. He moves from actions in verse 3 to speech and thoughts in verse 4, look at it: 'Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks'. Warren Wiersbe says: 'There are two indications of a person's character: what makes him laugh, and what makes him weep'. Here we have it: filthiness, foolish talking, jesting, which are not convenient. What is filthiness? Listen: it's dirty stories, it's suggestive jokes, anything with sexual colouring, or forms of obscenity, or indecency - we ought not, as the saints of God, to have them on our lips or in our minds!

Then he says: 'foolish talking' - the Greek word is 'morologia' (sp?). 'Logia' comes from 'logos' which means 'word', and 'moron' - we use that word moron, don't we? 'Moron-talking', foolish talking, talking about empty things, moronic talk, empty conversation, vain questions and debating, talking without thinking, opening your mouth without putting your brain in gear, saying something you don't really mean, speaking without wisdom, speaking and not considering the results of what you say - that is all foolish talking! Then, thirdly, he speaks of jesting - now I want to say this: he's not talking about all types of humour and jokes, for the Bible says and the book of Proverbs tells us that laughter is like a good medicine. Indeed, it's said that a good laugh is like a jog now, an inner jog! So I'm going to try and laugh as much as I can from now on! There's nothing wrong with laughing, but it is what we are laughing at. Here we have Paul telling us, the Holy Spirit, that all course jokes, unsavoury talk with hidden meanings - this literally is translated as this: 'able to turn easily'. Now what does that mean? You know what it's like to be in the conversation of a man or a woman, and you make a quite innocent remark and can't see any harm in it, but they are able to turn it on its head and make it something else. Double talk, innuendo - my friend, as the children of God we're to have nothing to do with this, nothing with insinuation.

But, you know, I wonder has Paul got a further meaning in this, for he talks about people who can turn around in their conversation easily. It is the man in the office, or the man fiddling with a spanner underneath a car, or the man or the woman in the factory, who is able to talk their talk by day, and come into the church of Jesus Christ and talk the church talk at the weekend. My friend, the word of God is teaching us that these are not children of God if this is the way people live. A famous preacher on one occasion was coming from a conference, and he was invited to a big grand house for his lunch. He was sitting in the drawing-room with a great company of mixed people. All of a sudden one of the ladies said: 'Let's go, ladies, and help the hostess
with the lunch', and they all got up and went out and it was only the men left. One of the men walked in and said: 'Men, I've got to tell you this story I heard today while the ladies are gone'. This preacher's friend piped up and he said: 'Hold on a minute brother! There may be no more ladies in this room, but the Holy Spirit of God is in this room and He can be offended greater than the most sensitive woman that you have ever met'.

Is that how we talk? Not to grieve the Holy Spirit? Do you know what we're to use our tongue for? Look at the verse - for thanksgiving: 'rather giving of thanks'. Now this is the pinnacle, and I want you to hear this please, and I know that this must be for us tonight. Verse 5: 'For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God' - there's the Trinity again, 'the kingdom of Christ and of God', one kingdom, one God. Now listen: if you habitually live a life of unholiness, God has reserved hell for you. That's what this is saying, this isn't talking about the judgement seat, about losing a reward or anything, or getting second place - if you live a life of sin, it is hell! That's the Bible! My friend, if it is without Christ, or [with] any form of idolatry - and the reason why Paul uses the term 'idolatry', describing these three things that he's already described in verse 3, he's just repeating them - he calls covetousness idolatry, why? Because it is worshipping the creature rather than the Creator, it is living a life as if there is no God! Now listen: if you're here this evening and you're not saved, you mightn't think it, but you're living life as if there's no God, because you've rejected His gift of love, His Son. You need Him, He is the only one who will get you to glory, it is His blood, it is His sacrifice that was a sweet smelling savour to God, that is the only thing that will get you to glory - and if you don't have Him, you don't have heaven, you have hell!

The world is lenient on sin, the world today has a tolerant attitude toward sin, and: 'If you don't gratify your desires you'll become some kind of repressive, inhibited, warped individual. It's cultural, therefore let's make it legal'. Everybody accepts it, and even in the church of Jesus Christ, men - so-called - of the cloth are condoning it and practising it, and God says to us in our generation today: 'Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience'. God judged the world in a flood, He judged Israel for adultery when they lay - 24,000! - 24,000 wiped off the face of the earth because they lay in adultery with Moab. God judged Sodom and Gomorrah because of their sin of sodomy, homosexuality - and, my friend, there's a day coming when God will judge this world for its sin, and it is ripe unto judgement. He says: 'Marriage is honourable, and the bed undefiled - but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge'!

Are you saved? Are you saved? For if you're not, God's going to judge you! Believer, are you holy? Because God's going to judge you too. But what a note that Paul could say: 'And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God'. Now, let's go away tonight, let us walk as saints, let us walk in a holy life, let us walk as the children of light and of life. And, as he finishes in verse 7, let us therefore be no partakers with them in anything! Let us shine forth the glory of our heavenly Father in the way that we live our lives.

Our Father, we remember how the High Priest of God had written upon his forehead: 'Holiness to the Lord'. Lord, we know that we're accepted in the well-beloved, and in His righteousness, and in His holiness - but yet, Lord, it is only His life flowing through us that will be acceptable and pleasing in Thy sight. Therefore we pray that we will put to death daily that old man, and that we will let the new man in Christ Jesus shine through us, that men and women around us may see our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven. Lord, make us a holy people, and conform us unto the image of Thy dear Son. To be like Jesus, to be like Jesus, all we ask is to be like Him. Amen.
Ephesians 5:8-14

1. A Dark Past (verse 8a)
2. A Bright Present (verse 8b)
3. A Shining Proof (verses 9-13)
   a. In Production Of The Spirit's Fruit (verses 9-10)
   b. In Abstention Of Sin's Fruit (verses 11-13)
4. An Awakening Promise (verse 14)

A men. Now let me welcome you to our Bible Reading tonight here in the Iron Hall, it's great to see you all out with us. Ephesians and chapter 5, and as you can see on your study sheet we're looking from verses 8 through to verse 14, and our subject is: 'The Children of Light'. We'll begin reading at verse 8 - verse 7 leads us on, it was our last verse last week: "Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit", or the fruit of light, "is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light".

I want you to turn with me to another passage of Scripture that Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. The second epistle of the Corinthians and chapter 6, which is - in biblical terms, in the gamut and the panorama of the whole of the word of God - is a parallel passage to the passage that we have been reading about. We've been studying in chapter 5 of Ephesians and verses 1 through to 14, and indeed the whole of this passage is speaking of how we walk worthy, and walk as children of light - that's the crux of it, that's the theme: how to walk as children of the light. Tonight in the passage that we are looking at, verse 8 through 14, it is the key passage to the whole of that chapter 5. But here, in 2 Corinthians 6, we have a parallel to it - very familiar verses.

Verse 14: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God".

The historical context of the verses that we're looking at tonight, verse 8 through to 14, as many of these corrective epistles have as a backdrop, is a false doctrine that has arisen within the early Church. You will know that as a background to many of these epistles there were either one or more false doctrines that had arisen within the church of Jesus Christ, and Paul the apostle, or perhaps another apostle, is writing to correct these false doctrines. A challenge had arisen within the church here at Ephesus - and Paul, as the great
apostle to the Gentiles, had to oppose that great error. It was the teaching of compromising men, men who were compromising with the world, the culture, the custom, around them in the city of Ephesus. Now, we get a glimpse of this in the book of Romans - if you want to turn to Romans chapter 6. It's not the city of Ephesus, but it's the same ancient world and we get a bit of an idea as to what Paul was writing to there and what he is writing to here.

Romans chapter 6 and verses 1 to 2, very familiar verses also. He asks the rhetorical question: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?". Now it's important to notice that, in many of these corrective epistles, Paul the apostle defends his apostleship. The reason for him doing such is because those false teachers who, most of the time, came after Paul contradicting what he had been teaching, disputed whether or not Paul was an apostle sent from God. So you can see what was happening, first of all these false teachers were undermining Paul's credibility - and once they had pulled that rug from under these believers, they had lost faith in Paul the apostle as the great teacher of God - then they could begin to unwind the teaching that Paul painstakingly had watered, and planted, and watched grow within the lives of these new believers.

I often wonder how Paul would have felt when he was on, perhaps another journey preaching the Gospel, and to get word that all the good work that he had put in in the Gospel and in teaching was now being tried to be unravelled by false teachers. Paul's opponents denied his apostleship and contradicted his teaching. At the crux of it, here in Ephesians, they felt that Paul was being too rigid in his interpretation of Scripture. They felt he was being too hard line, and to put it bluntly: they believed that his doctrine was contrary to their culture, to their custom, and perhaps to common sense. What they believed in could be termed as antinomianism - you can explain that word from the book of Deuteronomy, by the name Deuteronomy. You have that little phrase 'onomy' within it which means law, it's Latin for 'law'. Antinomianism is anti-lawism - in other words, that there are no rules. It is gone from the liberty that we have in Christ, to squander and submerge itself in absolute licence whereby everything goes. You can understand why Paul said: 'Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?' - he's addressing that heresy, antinomianism. They felt that because God had forgiven them, God had wiped the slate clean, therefore they could go out and do what they wanted and be forgiven for it.

In fact it was deeper than that. If you were here last night at the Gospel meeting we were looking at Psalm 25, and we saw how it is not a shame for God to forgive sin. In fact, God takes great delight in forgiving great sinners - and, indeed, God can take great glory when He forgives and pardons the sins of a great sinner. But, as with all false doctrine, these false teachers took that truthful doctrine a little bit too far - always beware of taking a true doctrine a little bit too far. They went on to say: 'Because God delights in forgiving sinners, and because God is glorified in forgiving sinners, then we must go out and sin as much as we can - and by doing that, when we get forgiven, we'll be bringing all the more glory to God'. Now, that's logic, but that is warped logic.

Here we find concreted within these false teachers, who were frequenting the church at Ephesus, this false idea of the forgiveness of God - but what underlined it all was the fact that what Paul the apostle was teaching, and what the Holy Ghost was bringing, to these newborn believers was contrary to their way of life. It contradicted their culture, their custom, and what was seen in that society as pure common sense and acceptable behaviour, was being undermined by the word of God. Therefore they had to bring a doctrine to fit it in. Now this is what is happening today in our society. Because there are certain things that are out of the norm within the Christian church, and we begin to be seen as fanatical and strange and peculiar, the Christian Church - whether they realise it or not, consciously or unconsciously - begins to dream up new types of doctrines to be acceptable.
We can see this in historical documents. In Procalio (sp?) Cicero writes these words, and I read them verbatim to you - and it'll give you a bit of an idea about the mentality of the people Paul was writing to. He pleads: 'If there is anyone who thinks that young men should be absolutely forbidden to love courtesans', and that's a polite word for prostitutes, 'he is extremely severe. I am not able to deny the principal that he states, but he is at variance not only with the licence of what our own age allows, but also with the customs and concessions of our ancestors. When, indeed, was this not done? When did anyone ever find fault with it? When was such permission denied? When was it when this was not lawful that is now lawful?'. He goes on: 'The Greeks said that Sawlon (sp?) was the first person to allow the introduction of prostitutes into Athens, and then the building of brothels. With the profits of the new trade a new temple was built to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Nothing could show the Greek point of view better than the fact that they saw nothing wrong in building a temple to the gods with the proceeds of prostitution' - Cicero, an unbeliever, a pagan.

Now let's analyse, for a moment, what he said. First of all he says 'it is extremely severe'. To say that a young man can't go with a prostitute, he says - this great philosopher, intelligent man - 'it is too severe'. That is what the false teachers were saying about Paul: 'His doctrine is too severe'. Now notice, Cicero goes on to say: 'I am not able to deny' - in other words, like our society today, they cannot prove our faith wrong. In fact, they may even admit that, if we live a life that is godly and holy in this present world, we may have a more pure, satisfying, healthy life - they can't deny that, that's the proof. But they say, as he says: 'it is at variance not only with the licence of what our own age allows, but also with the customs and the concessions of our ancestors' - everybody's doing it.

The world hasn't changed much, has it? Therefore you can see what Paul was writing to, and you now understand this doctrine of antinomianism that Paul is grappling with within this passage of scripture. Now these false teachers were very very persuasive. In other words, they're saying: 'Look, God made you, son, with all these desires within your bosom. God made you that way - so therefore if God made you that way, why would He prevent you fulfilling your desires?'. Paul saw these men as Satan's servants, and the main thrust of this passage is found in the verse we ended with last week: 'Be not', verse 7, 'ye therefore partakers with them'. 'You see these boys', Paul says, 'these false teachers who are encouraging you to sin so that God might forgive you, so that God could be brought greater glory - you be no partakers with them.' Paul says: have nothing to do with them!' - and so he goes into the discourse, that we're studying tonight, on light and darkness.

He says to them first of all: 'You had a dark past' - that's the first point, verse 8a: 'For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light'. Now, I want you to notice that it doesn't say 'You were sometimes in darkness' - look at the verse, it says: 'You were sometimes darkness'! Now there's a difference, because what Paul is doing here is he is personifying darkness. He is saying: 'It's not just something that you follow, it's not just something you imbibed, or a practice of a lifestyle that you made yours - but you actually yourself were darkness'. We learnt that the book of Ephesians, the second half mirrors, in explanation, the first-half - and this passage is mirroring again chapter 2 and verses 1 to 10, where Paul describes how we were dead in our trespasses and in our sins - we were dead! Absolute darkness! We didn't have darkness, we were darkness!

Darkness is where disease flourishes, total darkness brings death to the earth's flora and fauna and all life - if we haven't the sun we have not life. That is what it brings: death. Spiritually speaking Paul is saying here, as one writer put it: 'The leaven of sin silently swells in the darkness until the whole life is infected'. What a past we had! I believe, sincerely, that some of the greatest difficulties we have in the Christian life with regards to holiness are because we do not fully understand our own depravity before we were saved. We think of ourselves more highly than we ought. Paul is reminding them: 'You have a dark past, this was your past, you were darkness'. Then he goes on in verse 8, the second half: 'But now are ye light in the Lord' - you have a bright present. Those old things are gone away, those old dark things, and now you are in union with the Lord, and the Lord is the Lord of light - He is light, we are in Him, therefore we now are light in the
Lord. Do you see his thought pattern? You've come from being darkness, and you can't come to be near the light, you can't come to partake of the blessings of the light - you were darkness and you must become light. The only way that you can come from being darkness, to come to being light, is being in the One who is light.

Therefore, Paul says, our state should now correspond to our standing. Isn't that what this wee book is all about? Because you are blessed, do this. Because you have this, live like this. Now Paul is saying, because you have gone from darkness into God's glorious light, now this is your state, being illumined, shining forth the glory of God and being in Christ, your standing must correspond to it. This is what he says: 'You must walk as children of light'. How do we do that? Well, in verses 9 to 14 we get what I have entitled: the shining proof that we are the children of light. In verse 9 we find these words: 'For the fruit of the Spirit' - now he's going into parentheses, and he is now describing what this is to be a child of the light - 'The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth; Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord'. He's telling us: 'Look, if your past is darkness, and if your present is light, and you are now the children of light, you are to walk as the children of light - and if you are walking as the children of light, you will show forth the fruit of light'.

Indeed, that's the way that phrase should be translated, I believe: 'The fruit of the light', rather than, 'The fruit of the Spirit'. The first thing that Paul tells us to do, positively speaking, is to shine forth the proof of God's light in our life in the production of the Spirit's fruit. The fruit of the light and the fruit of the Spirit correspond in this passage of Scripture. Indeed, if you were to look at Galatians chapter 5 and verse 22, you would find mentioned here the first fruit of the light: goodness. Goodness is one of the fruits of the Spirit, and what Paul is asking us to do is to look into our own lives and see if there is the fruit of goodness, the fruit of righteousness, the fruit of truth. He's asking us: 'If you are the children of light, you will reflect the life of Christ'.

You know what a prism is, don't you? It's that little crystal-like piece of glass. When the sun's rays shine in from the window, it breaks up all the particles of that light into a spectrum of a rainbow of colour. God is saying: 'Look, if the light of God is in you, you will be the prism of Jesus Christ - and you will radiate His light in these three things: goodness, righteousness, and in truth'. Now let's look at them, look at the first one: goodness. Within the word of God this is an inclusive term, it means all moral excellence. It means what it says: goodness. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit, and to put it in a defining term: it is love in action, charity, loving in action by what you do, say, and think of others around you - that is what goodness is. If you're walking as a child of the light you will have goodness with you.

Secondly, he says we need to have righteousness. Now, righteousness here means integrity. Integrity in our dealings with God, and in our dealings with other human beings, with men. We have integrity with men in our actions, what we do and what we say. We have integrity with God by our character, who we are and the way we live, who we are inside. This righteousness is a fruit of the light: before God our conscience doesn't condemn us, and before man we are blameless.

Then thirdly, he mentions truth. What that word there means is: honesty, equity, and reality. Indeed, it's like a summary of the last two things: goodness and righteousness - you can only have goodness and righteousness if you have truth, it all must be based on the truth. What is the truth? Jesus said: 'Thy word is truth' - therefore if you want to have the truth, and if you want to be sure that one of the rays that's shining out of your life because you're a child of the light is truth, you will walk in the truth. John said: 'I have no greater joy than my children walk in the truth'. It is walking in the word of God, and to walk in the word of God is to walk in the will of God. All these things together: goodness, righteousness, truth - all of them speak of a life that is filled with the light of Christ, shining out of the darkness of our past, changed into His glorious light!
Now, let's go back to our context. This is the difference between God's faith and pagan religion. It doesn't change, it didn't change in Paul's day, it hasn't changed in our day - for pagan religion in the life of our custom, our community, our times, and even common sense through consciences that are seared with hot irons because of hardening themselves in sin: all of them encourage immorality! But God encourages morality, God is able to plant into the bosom of an unbelieving child, a dead sinner that should be dead and buried, He's able to put His own life into their soul, and He's able to make them live unto holiness and unto godliness. That's amazing! Isn't it? That to come from the life that these pagans lived, with all the ritualistic prostitution, and false god worship, and all the extortion that was in society of the day - to come from that great darkness into God's glorious light, to be holy! That's the power our God!

You see, in Paul's day, and in this place Ephesus, it was permissible not only to use prostitution, but to swindle, to cheat people out of money in your own business, in order to contribute to the temple. They didn't care how the money came to the temple, as long as they got money to it to build it. Hence when Paul, remember when he went into Philippi in the book of Acts chapter 16, he condemned those men who were making the idols, making money to build this temple - and when he condemned them it aroused anger. They had him whipped, and they had him thrown into prison - why? If you look at Acts 16:20 and 21, listen, this is the reason why - they pointed the finger at Paul and said: 'These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and', listen, 'teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans'. Teach customs!

Our Lord Jesus Christ - and we go on a slight digression now - shed a great deal of light on the subject of the light. If you were to go back to Matthew's gospel and chapter 5 and verse 16, He gives this instruction to His followers, listen: 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven'. In John chapter 3 and verse 20 and 21 He says: 'For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God'. What He is saying is this: we can hide many things from our friends and from our loved ones and from those around us, but we can't hide anything from God. He is the God of light, and if we are to walk as children of light - do you know what it means? It means that we are to walk, living before the eyes of God and not hiding anything! That's hard.

In Hebrews 4:13 we read of God: 'Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do'. It's the old scenario, isn't it, when you go through the airport and your baggage goes through the x-ray machine - you're only worried if you've something to hide, isn't that right? If you something wrapped up in an old towel or rug that you don't want them to see, that's when you're worried - but when you know there's nothing there to be afraid of, it doesn't matter! Old Spurgeon on one occasion was asked permission by an author to write his life story, do you know what he replied? He said: 'You can write my life on the skies, I have nothing to hide!'. Can we say that?

He goes on in verse 10 to say that another fruit of the light is to prove what is acceptable unto the Lord, to prove what is well-pleasing unto the Lord. That means to put every thought, word, and action, to the test - in other words, in everything in our lives asking the question: 'What does the Lord think of this?'. Do you do that? What does He think of this? This decision, how does it appear in His presence? It means to, in every area of your life, spread it all before God, let it come under the searchlight of God - whether it be your conversation, your standard of living, your clothing, your books, your business, pleasures, friends, holidays, cars, hobbies, sports, it doesn't matter - it means to put everything under God's great light. Do you do that?

That is the positive thing that, Paul says, whereby we can know that we are the children of light, and that we are walking as the children of light. It is to show forth the fruit of the light in all goodness, in all
righteousness, in all truth - proving what is acceptable with the Lord, living in God's will. Then negatively, in verses 11 to 13, he speaks that we have a shining proof of being the children of the light, by the fact that we abstain from sin's fruit. It's not just showing forth these things - goodness, righteousness, truth, and proving the will of God - but there is a negative aspect to it, which is: not partaking, abstaining from the sin and its fruit. Verse 11 says: 'Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them' - and what that means is simply this: no fellowship, either by participation or by attitude. What he's indicating there is an attitude of toleration, an attitude of leniency, towards sin - and that abounds today! It abounds in the world and in the church: 'Say nothing, turn a blind eye to it all!' - but Paul says, listen: 'Don't you have fellowship with it'. To put it literally, it means this: 'Don't become a sharer, don't join oneself as an associate to sin'.

Now, I want you to look at that verse 11, for there are some who are exclusive and will not fellowship with unbelievers. In other words, they won't drink with them, or eat with them, or go anywhere with them, won't even live in a house beside them - but notice Paul says: 'Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness'. He is speaking of the fruit of sin, sins themselves not sinners! Never forget, the Lord whom you serve and worship was the friend of publicans and of sinners. Now the question that would have arisen in the minds of these Ephesian believers is this: 'Does that mean I can't go on selling my idols?'. Now think of it: 'Does that mean my business is going to fall because, although I'm not being a partaker of it, I'm associating with it? What does it mean for my life? Does that mean I'm no longer to give racketeering to the temple?'. You see, it affected their lives - and it was what Paul was saying about having no communion, no fellowship, with darkness.

Second Corinthians 6: 'What fellowship hath God with Belial?' - these men that had become Christians, now making these little gods with their own hands, could they continue doing it? No! Of course they couldn't! Unfruitful - that's why they couldn't - this is deadly, this is poisonous. Look at the verse, these are unfruitful works of darkness, they will bring into your life and the life of every believer that dabbles in them utter barrenness and deadness. That's why Paul asked in Romans 6, the passage we already read about antinomianism, verse 21 he asked the question: 'What fruit had ye in those works whereof ye are now ashamed?' - what fruit had you in those? He concludes that statement by saying: 'For the end of those things is death' - the wages of sin is death! Leave them, leave them behind! Turn away and walk as children of light - Paul is saying: 'Have nothing to do with them at all! Touch not the unclean thing, come out from among them, and be ye separate, and I will receive you'.

They had come from the world of darkness, the world of dim lights, the world of locked doors and back street rooms. In that old depraved life they reflected the natural appetite for darkness, and they hated the light. As the Lord said: 'Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil'. Now Paul was not just telling them: 'Listen, you abstain, negatively, from prostitution, from making idols, and from doing all these things, and giving money to the temple, and contributing to your custom and community which is sinful' - but he goes further than that. He says: 'No fellowship', verse 11, 'with unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them!' It's not enough that you pull back from these things and have nothing to do with them, but you must positively reprove and expose these things.

There are two ways in which you can do that. One: by the life of holiness - as the Amplified Version of the Bible translates this verse: 'But instead let your lives be so in contrast to expose and reprove and convict them'. If you're walking in the light, and you step out from among the darkness, and you walk in a holy manner before men and women in this ungodly and adulterous generation: you will stand out and convict them of their own sin. Two: you reprove and expose by the words of correction that you use, guided - mark now - guided by the Holy Spirit. It's true, isn't it, that God's glorious light reveals all true character. I believe that's why a lot of men don't like listening to the word of God, coming in - unbelievers - to hear the Gospel, because it should and it does make them feel uncomfortable. It tells them the truth, it is the light, and the
Modern man’s motto today, in our world, is: ‘The one thing I will not tolerate is intolerance’. You can tolerate everything, but don’t be intolerant of another for you will not be tolerated! That’s why the evangelical Christian fundamental church is rejected in the world - there's no place for them within this world of toleration of all things. The darlings of the world are those church leaders who will baptize every sin to be seen as open-minded and tolerant, isn't that right? To bring everything under the wing of Christ and God, to be seen as loving, open-minded and tolerant! Verse 12, Paul goes on, you can't be tolerant of these things. You have left them in your past life, you are now children of the light, you've to show forth other fruit, you've to expose and reprove and reject these things - why? It's even a shame to speak of these things which are done of them in secret! You're not even to mention these things, these unfruitful works of darkness. It's a shame to speak of them! Never mind committing them, you're not even to have the words upon your lips!

It's a fact - and all of us know it too well - that there are certain sinful perversions of men and women that are so bad, that to describe them would defile the mind of the listener. Therefore the Christian should refrain even from mentioning these depraved, deplorable, things - and listen, we need to be careful because I sense in our Christian age today that in some circles there is a need, a feeling of necessity, to go into great detail in describing sins of all vileness! It could be said that you could learn more about certain perversions by going into a Christian bookshop than anywhere else! We are the children of the light, we are to walk in the light, we are to expose sin - but how are we to expose it? Not by going into intricate detail of what they believe, or what these people do in dark back rooms, but we expose these things by shining in the light! That's how!

Jesus, the Lord Christ, said this in John 8:12: 'I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life'. Now this amazed me, the previous night that the Lord Jesus said this was a ceremony called the 'Illumination of the Temple'. It was the grand finale of the Feast of the Tabernacle, and what they would do was take a great candelabra - it was said that it would reach up to the highest walls in the temple, that's how high they were. There were these big massive bowls at the top of the candelabra, filled with oil, and an agile priest would climb up the candelabra and would light it. The blaze of that great light, it was said, lit up the whole of that court - and, indeed, lit up Jerusalem. The next day that happened, standing in the same court of the temple our Lord Jesus Christ - perhaps standing right beside the great candelabra in all its darkness, the light had gone out - shouted: 'I am light of the world'!

Their light had gone out, but He would be that eternal light, and He shone - and the problem that He had (and I say that), His problem in humanity, as He came as God's Son into the world, [was that] because He shone the light of God, He illumined all darkness around and men's sins were to be seen. That's what He left us to do, for He said to His disciples: 'Ye are the light of the world'. Just as the sun rises at dawn, and then it sets at evening, the moon rises to take the place of the sun - and you know the moon has no light of itself, but the moon reflects the light of the sun. He said: 'I am the light of the world', and then when He went, we are light of the world. The problem with being the light of the world is: we show those things around us up. Indeed we could argue, humanly speaking, that this was the reason - one of the reasons - why the Lord Jesus Christ was put to death and crucified. Because the religious leaders of His day, in all their sinfulness and unholiness, when they saw Christ they shrieked within themselves because of their inward sinfulness before God. Christ Jesus, the light of the world, was exposing their sin, their darkness - no-one was exempt, no one could hide! Did He not say it Himself in John 15? 'If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin'.

Verse 13b: 'But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light'. Now that should read like this: 'For everything that is made manifest is light' - everything that is made manifest, uncovered, is light. Or to put it another way: 'Everything that is illumined becomes
light' - everything that the light shines upon becomes light. Meaning this: that when Christians walk as the children of light, as Christ walked, light will be brought to other people. We are to show forth God's light, and it's not just preaching the Gospel, but it's preaching the Gospel with a life filled with the light of God - that's what makes the difference! When men can see: 'That is for real! That really works!'. Would you buy detergent off a man that was standing in rags at your door, filthy? Would you? But the Gospel changes a man's life - we are epistles written unto the world, we ought to be! Showing forth, as children of light, the light of God. The sad thing is, whenever you begin to show signs of wanting to walk in the light, and wanting to be more holy, and wanting to be more godly, even in the church - and in fact, mostly in the church - you begin to upset the folk around you, because your light shows up their darkness. Your light shows up the way they are spiritually, and they don't want that to happen - and it disrupts the light of the world, Christ of God disrupted this world. He brought enmity in the home: 'I came not to bring peace, but to bring war' - because the light shows up the dirt.

We are to radiate the light of Christ. Have you ever been in the company of those that really radiate the light of Christ? You know who I'm talking about, you know that person that you know that when you have a bit of time with them, you're in their company and they go - they make you want to be more holy! There's something about them, they're like Moses coming down from the Mount - they maybe don't even know it, but their face shines with God! I read of a missionary who desperately needed to learn one of India's hardest languages, and he sought the services of a great teacher and he was refused - he didn't want to teach him. He offered him a great amount of money to pay for whatever expenses were required - and the man replied, listen: 'I don't want to become a Christian!'. The missionary says: 'Look, if you just teach me I'll not mention Christianity, it'll not be mentioned if you teach me this Indian language'. The wee man replied calmly: 'Look, to teach you my language I would have to spend many hours of every day in your presence, and no man could live with you and not become a Christian'. Oh, that I would die and men would say that about me, eh? To walk as a child of the light, to show forth God's light!

Then he comes to this great climax about an awakening promise, he has built up his argument all along right down to verse 13, about how we are to be children of the light. Verse 14: 'Wherefore he saith', God, 'Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light'. The light is associated with the dawn, isn't it? When the sun rises, and the birds begin to sing, and those great rays go like a sea across all of creation and waken it all up. It reminds us of the Son of God's righteousness that rose from the dead. Remember that Easter morn, Paul says in Romans 1 that He was declared to be the Son of God of power - He was literally 'horizedon', 'horidzami' (sp?) brought up just like the sun from the horizon - seen! He has awakened from the dead, but what Paul is saying here: there are many of you Ephesian Christians that are still sleeping. You were dead in your trespasses and in your sins, but God has quickened you with Christ, He has put you in heavenly places - but the tragedy is this: that is your state, but that is not the way you're living. Paul says: 'Waken up!'.

The church at Ephesus, the church today, needs to waken up. We need to start walking in the light that we are in. We need to waken out of our lethargy - as one writer has said: 'The soldier that sleeps on a battlefield might never ever waken'. There are those within our day, as within Paul's, that are slumbering. The tragedy of slumbering is this - and you beware, my friend: that those who slumber don't even realise it. Kent Hughes put it like this, listen, I think this is powerful: 'It is possible to be slumbering light' - slumbering light! - 'and even to be well regarded by others in the church, especially by others who are in the same state. It is possible to be asleep and appear awake. It is possible to pray while asleep, mouthing phrases others have used before. It is possible to sing a hymn without being awake to the words. It is possible to walk while asleep and end up in harm's way. It is possible to live a dreamy life of unreality in the netherland of inaction!'

Are any of us living a dreamy life of unreality in the netherland of inaction? I leave you with these words from Romans chapter 13, the same theme as our passage tonight. Listen, Paul says: 'And that, knowing the
time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. I end with this, listen: the light calls us tonight to a life of illumination in Jesus Christ. Will we walk as children of light?

Our Father, we pray that we would be as our Lord instructed us to be: a light set on a hill. Lord, that we would not put the candle underneath the bed, but that we would put aside all filthiness and all the old clothes of darkness and death, and let our light shine before men - that they may see our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven. Oh, Lord, help us to more holier be, that Thou should be seen in me. In Jesus name, Amen.

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Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - March 2001

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Ephesians and chapter 5, and this is our twenty-third study in this book. Slowly but surely we’re getting near the end of the six chapters, but we're trying not to skip over anything that is of importance that the Lord would have us know. Now let me say, as we begin the study tonight, that it is impossible for me in one night to go into every single detail, and expound every theological truth, that we meet within these verses this evening. I would love to do it, but I'm conscience also that we have to get to the end of the book eventually! So, I want to deal with these subjects, and they're to whet your appetite and hopefully you will go home to your own quiet place before the Lord with the word of God, and look further to see if these things be so.

Chapter 5 and verse 15, and remember that this is a discourse concerning - we're entering into the middle of it - concerning what it is to be children of light, to walk in the light, not to walk in the darkness that we were born into, dead in our trespasses and in our sins. But now we are quickened, we are made alive by the Spirit of God, and we are now to walk as children of light in the light that God shines upon us. In verse 15 Paul says: "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God".

Our study this evening is entitled: 'The Fullness Of The Spirit' - and that indeed is the central verse of the passage that we have before us. Verse 18: ‘Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit’ - and all the verses, from verse 15 to 21, surround that one point - the main verse is verse 18. All these other thoughts, all these spiritual precepts and principles that we find around this verse, all add to what it is to walk in the fullness of the Spirit. Before it we get a little indication of ways in which we can begin to know that we are walking in the fullness of the Spirit: by redeeming the time, by knowing the will of God - verse 17 - understanding what it is. Then verse 19, verse 20, and verse 21, we find the results - perhaps not the evidences, but the results of what is to walk in the fullness of the Spirit. We will speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs - verse 19: 'singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord'. Verse 20: 'Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ'. Verse 21: 'Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God'.

So, therefore, you see how verse 18 is the crux of this passage this evening. Everything revolves around this great theme of the fullness of the Spirit of God. The first verse that we read asks us to make sure that we
walk circumspectly. Dr G. Campbell Morgan, the great British expositor of the word of God, was known to often give an illustration of this verse - what it is to walk circumspectly - and what he used to do was: describe a beautiful flower garden that was surrounded by a high wall. Then he asks the congregation to envisage a little cat walking carefully among the many pieces of broken glass that were embedded in the cement on the top of that wall. He would say, as he depicted this wonderful story, that that cat was surrounded by many dangers and many pieces of glass, but it never cut itself. It walked circumspectly.

That is simply what Paul is bringing to our minds this evening: to walk circumspectly, to be careful as we walk, as children of light, that we make sure that we do not cut ourselves - walk circumspectly. How do we do that? Well Paul tells us - verses 15 to 17, your first point on your sheet - that to walk circumspectly is to walk in wisdom: 'Make sure that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise' - verse 15. So to walk circumspectly, to walk so as not to be cut, is to walk in wisdom. Now, you will remember that from this wonderful epistle that we have been studying, that this phrase 'walking' is very common throughout the whole book. We don't have time to go through all of the passages where we read that word, but we find that seven times it's written within this book. It's written within the book of Ephesians to give us, and convey, the concept of an all-round activity that sums up this abundant life in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a phrase, a metaphor, to depict the life that we have now begun in the Lord Jesus - we are now walking in the light, walking in the Spirit of God, walking in His ways, His precepts. It's just simply a phrase to describe the great activities of this life, the life of God.

We are to walk circumspectly. The word 'circumspect' in our English language comes from two Latin words which mean 'looking all around'. Observing as one walks - you've got the picture of that little cat looking all around, he's looking down at the glass embedded in the cement, he's looking over the wall at the flowers that he may fall into if he's not careful, he's looking before him to see where he's going, and behind him to see if anything is coming. It's all encompassing that idea of looking all around - to walk circumspectly - that's what the English word derived from the Latin means. The Greek word within the New Testament used here, it carries further than that the idea of precision. There's a concept of accuracy, of absolute carefulness, in the way that we walk. It means literally this: 'See that you walk carefully with exactness'. It's a wonderful word, isn't it? 'Circumspectly', to encompass all of these ideas and precepts.

We further understand what it means when Paul puts down for us the backdrop of the opposite, the antithesis to what it is to walk circumspectly. He tells us: 'Walk in wisdom' - verse 15: 'Not as fools, but as wise'. So the opposite of walking circumspectly in wisdom is to walk as a fool. Paul is contrasting foolish footsteps with careful conduct. On the one hand there is walking foolishly, on the other there is walking circumspectly. As we read this passage we realise that it's not a passage of itself, as we know that none of these verses are of themselves, they're in the context of the line of thought that Paul has brought us to. We find if we go back to verse 8, if you look at it, that it's all derived from that little verse: 'For ye were sometimes darkness' - remember not 'in darkness', but you were the personification of darkness itself - 'but now are ye light in the Lord: therefore walk as children of light'. Walk as light.

To walk as fools is to walk on the lower plain of humanity of this world. We could go further to say that it is to walk in carnal Christianity, that most live by. All of this walking is related to verse 14 as well as verse 8, for if you look at that you remember we left off in our last study with: 'Wherefore he saith', in light of the fact that we are to walk as children of light - we are in darkness! That is what Paul is inferring, of course it is - he's saying: 'You've been delivered from the darkness, but what a tragedy to be delivered from the darkness, to be quickened by the Spirit, for the light of God's Son to shine upon your heart, but for you to still walk in the ways of darkness! That's the point he's making, why else would he say in verse 14: 'Therefore, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light' - why would Christ need to give you light if you were walking in the light? Therefore, from that Paul is telling us: 'Don't walk in your sleep! Walk circumspectly, don't be people who just aimlessly drift through their Christian life -
fools!'. Those who are in a trance, like spiritual zombies, out of consciousness - spiritually speaking. Oh, they know where the human, and worldly, direction of their life is going - but spiritually speaking they feel and they are conscious that they are nowhere, they are in spiritual slumber. Paul says: 'Don't be like that! Don't walk in your sleep!'.

We know for a fact that only a fool begins a journey and does not have a recognised destination. Imagine going off on your holidays, and packing your bags and going to the airport, and someone asks you: 'What's your destination, Sir?', and you say: 'Well, I don't know'. It's crazy! The Lord said it Himself, didn't He? A General doesn't go to battle without first looking at the armies that he has - isn't true? Yet so many of us can meander into spiritual conversion, and then from then on wander in a sleep walk, not going to any spiritual goal or destination. We are not walking, perhaps, circumspectly - and in fact, if we are not, the Bible calls us fools. Someone has said, and rightly, that when the pilot does not know what port he is heading for, no wind is the right wind. That means that if you're not consciously realising that you're going towards God's destination, it doesn't matter even if the right thing comes along, it cannot be the right thing for you. You might think that's 'Irish', or a contradiction in terms, but what that writer is simply saying is this: the only way to know that it's the right wind that is directing you in your life, is to walk circumspectly. If you're walking with your spiritual eyes closed, if you're just drifting along from meeting to meeting, from spiritual little experience in a meeting to another experience, you are walking in the dark - and it doesn't matter what happens to you, it's not right if you're walking in the dark!

Do you plan your days for God? Do you plan your life for God? If I was to ask any of you what your goal for your life is for God, what would it be? Have you got a goal, a direction of what you want to be for God, or what you want to do for God, or what you would long to see God create within your life for His glory? Have you a direction? If you don't that means you're walking in the dark, and you're walking as a fool!

How can we walk in wisdom? How can we walk in this wisdom circumspectly? Well, Paul tells us very clearly - it's your first point: by redeeming the time. Verse 16: 'See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise' - one - 'Redeeming the time, because the days are evil'. How can I walk circumspectly? - and that could be asking the question: 'How can I begin to ask God, and to be in a position where He can fill me with the fullness of God?', well, you're going to have to redeem the time. To walk in wisdom requires is, as one translation says, to 'buy up the opportunities'. Buy up the opportunities! Redeem the time! The English word for 'opportunities' comes from the Latin which means 'towards the port' - isn't that a lovely picture? A destination! As you go along life's road, or the spiritual pathway and pilgrimage like Christian in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, you're not just going along aimlessly drifting by every wind that comes to and fro, but you're going towards a destination - and all the opportunities along that way to bring you nearer and nearer, you're buying up, buying them all up!

It suggests a ship taking advantage of the wind and the tide to arrive safely in the harbour. It suggests the pilot and the sailor using his skill to make sure that his sails are set, so that he can use the wind in a way that will bring him to his destination. In the light of that word, are we redeeming the time? Have we set our sails in the direction so that we are buying up the opportunities that God brings along to us? If we can work out, and begin to know, where our spiritual goal is that God would have us go to, are we using every opportunity and redeeming them so that we can get there all the quicker? The word 'redeem' or 'buy up', linguistically, is in the middle voice - and that simply means this: Paul is saying this: 'To redeem the time is to buy up for oneself, to buy up for your own advantage'.

Now think of that. I would've thought it was to buy up for God's advantage, wouldn't you? Maybe that sounds a bit selfish, to buy up and redeem the time for your own advantage - but do you know something? I believe that Paul, here, had in view in his spiritual sight the judgement seat of Christ. What he is telling us is that, in contrast to using the time for your own advantage down here, Christians ought to be buying the time,
redeeming the time, for your advantage up there when you stand before Christ. Paul is saying we ought to redeem the time in light of the judgement seat. Oh, if we could live in light of the judgement seat! If we could use our opportunities in light of not tomorrow, or not in the light of what other people think, or what I will feel like, or what it will do to my reputation - but in regard to the judgement seat of Christ, and what my Saviour will say there!

He says: 'Redeem the time', and the word for 'time' there is not the word 'chronos' (sp?) in Greek, which is the usual word with simply means 'time as it passes by' - in other words, the time on the clock. But the Greek word that Paul uses here is the word 'charos' (sp?), which refers to a special time, a chosen time, a strategic time of opportunity - do you see what he's saying? He's not simply saying: 'Redeem the minutes, redeem the hours', he is saying: 'The time that you're in, this dispensation, this period within the earth's history, is going by. It will soon be over, suddenly, in a moment, Christ will return, the church will disappear, this old earth will go up in a ball of fire and smoke, and eventually the time will be done - and in the light of that, will you not redeem that time?'. It is a strategic opportunity, it only lasts now.

I believe the idea that Paul has here is, he is saying: 'You've got to be bargain-hunting for time. Get as much time for God as you can'. There's not 'all the time in the world' - that's a lie from Satan - the word of God says there's a specific time period that we are on the earth as the church of Jesus Christ, and we must use all that time bargain-hunting for God! I hope you know that you can't save time, you've got to make it, you've got to buy it. It's expensive to make time for God, but you've got to make every effort to buy up the opportunities, to spend time in relation to the judgement seat, and in view of it, and in light of it - you've got to come before God and no matter what it costs, no matter what the price-tag is, we have to redeem the time!

The motivation for that is found in verse 16, at the end he says we've got to do it because the days are evil. It's the urgency about it, that's the motivation to act in this way, to buy it all up - why? Because of the evil character of the days in which we live. Now, some people believe, scholars believe, that Paul had in his mind 1 Peter 4:12 to 19 - the persecution from the nation of Rome. That might well be what he had in mind - he was telling these Christians: 'There's going to come a day when you'll maybe be locked up, you'll not have the freedom to go out and preach the Gospel, you'll not have the freedom to live for Christ in the way that you can - that period of time, that strategic opportunity, for you may be at the beginning of the end'. I don't know whether we have persecution up ahead, sometimes I believe we will - but one thing is for sure, God says in Genesis chapter 6 and verse 3: 'My spirit shall not always strive with man'. God said that in relation to the flood, and indeed in relation to the fact that the spirit within man - that's your personal spirit that makes you relate to God - will not always be in your body, that's what that verse means.

The Psalmist said in Psalm 90, threescore and ten; and if by [reason] perhaps eighty years of age you might get to, you might even get more - but the fact is this: that we not only have this time period of the strategic opportunity of the specific period of time between the resurrection of the second coming, but we have only individually the time that God has allocated to me! I might be classed as young by many here tonight, but you know I despair at times of how little time I have left, and how little I have done - and that's not false humility. What if God should only give me half of it? Or more than all that, what if my Lord should come tomorrow? You see the impact of what Paul is saying here? That's what it means to redeem the time, to use every moment in the light of the judgement seat, in the light of the fact that the Lord is returning, in the light of the fact we may have only 70 years, 80 years at the most, and that is so short - but not even knowing what today or tomorrow may bring! Your life is a vapour, it appeareth for a little time and then vanishes away - we don't know!

We can't boast about tomorrow - therefore it's imploring upon us, for there will come a day when we will no longer be able to lead a soul to Christ. There will come a day when we will not be able to pray in the same capacity as we can pray today. There will come a time when we will not be able to be helped in the situations
that we are in today by the word of God, by inwardly digesting it, meditating on it, and studying upon it. You know, John Wesley every day, at the end of the day, sat with a piece of paper and a pen and checked how he spent each hour of his day. F.B. Meyer took up that idea and did it himself - two great men of God. They redeemed the time, they made sure that five-minute by five-minute - you might think it's bondage, I tend to think it's holiness - they redeemed the time. They wanted to make sure that they were buying or using every opportunity, not in a legalistic way, but they were so desirous to praise, to love, to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, to be filled with the Spirit of God, that they wanted to make sure - make sure - they were redeeming the time!

Harry Ironside in his commentary on Ephesians tells a story about how he used to ask, in a congregation like this, how many people had read the Bible through in a year. He used to ask them to put their hand up! Would you put your hand up if you have ever read the Bible through completely, ever? Put your hand up - completely, all the way through? Well, in a company of 500 people there was only two for him - so I'm doing better than Harry Ironside, that's great! He said on that day that he would never ask that question again, and his reason for it was this: he was ashamed to let the devil see it! Are we redeeming the time in prayer? Are we redeeming the time through the word of God?

You know, I believe that the church is choked today with a five-minute 'wink and nod' to God! People say to me: 'It's not quantity that matters, it's quality' - I know that, but if you have the quality you can be sure that you'll have quantity! It's not how long you pray that's important, but you can be reassured that if there's any quality in your prayer life it will be increasing! I'm not going to tell you how long you ought to pray - that's between you and the Lord - but you need to know that if you're growing with God it's got to get more and more, until it's 'prayer without ceasing', until it's 'continuing in prayer', because it takes time to be holy. It takes time.

The problem is, as the problem was in Ephesus, that we don't live in a world that lends itself to holiness. That's the whole point, that's why this kind of talk grates with our flesh! It grates with your everyday scheme and schedule for business, it doesn't fit in! 'I don't have time to do all of that!' - Paul said to these people, who didn't have time to do it either: 'You've got to make the time!'. If it costs you 100 pounds a month, make it! If it costs you your reputation, if it costs you a friendship, if it costs you an hour in bed in the morning, if it costs you a cup of coffee in the evening - whatever it costs you: redeem that time! Buy it back! Sell that old thing for the word of God!

Now in relation to verse 18 - be ye filled with the Holy Spirit - you've got to redeem the time with the word of God, redeem the time in prayer, if you're going to be filled with the Holy Spirit. If there's no Bible in your life, if there's no prayer in your life, forget about the fullness of the Spirit. Secondly: to walk in wisdom, and to be filled with the Spirit, is understanding God's will. Verse 17: 'Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is'. Now that's another step - as well as redeeming the time, in order to redeem the time you need to understand what God wants you to do. By the very nature of the briefness of time and the temptations that we face, as verse 16 says 'Because the days are evil', we've got to know what God wants us to do so that we can do it in the time that we have redeemed for Him.

We've got to know God's will so that we don't fritter away our time on empty activity, whether it be the activity of the world, or our own choice, by leaning on our own understanding. I believe that you could parallel this with what the Lord Jesus said in Mark chapter 4 and verse 19, where He talked about the sower going out to sow - and you know that some of the seed fell on certain ground. The third type of ground is described as thorny ground - and the thorns and thistles came up, and it says it choked the word of God. The explanation in the commentary that the Son of God gives upon that spiritual truth is this: those thorns are the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, the lusts or desire of other things entering in choke the word of God and it becomes unfruitful.
There are several words that haunt me in that verse: cares of this world, deceitfulness of riches, lusts of other things - 'I'll do anything but pray, I'll do anything but read the word of God, I'll do anything but go to the meeting'. They enter in, Jesus says, and they choke! Then there's that little word 'unfruitfulness'. If we're unfruitful we have to look, we have to assess ourselves and examine, and the only way to safeguard against becoming choked by these desires for other things, is to discern what the will of God is - and once discerned to act upon it. Imagine the tragedy of a Christian life lived on their own energy, and spent in their own will. Imagine the waste. In fact, I would go as far as to say that, humanly speaking in this life, it is the waste of a redeemed life. I would go stronger and say: many can foolishly waste Christ's redemptive work in this life. You can't waste it ultimately, because He will bring you conformed to Himself eventually - but you could be wasting the grace of God that is given for you now to live this life of circumspect walking in wisdom and full of the Holy Ghost.

The fullness of the Spirit: walk in wisdom by redeeming the time and by understanding what God's will is - don't waste the time doing your will or someone else's. Be filled with the Holy Spirit is our second point - and here we get to the real theme, the real crux of the matter: 'Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God'. Be ye filled with the Holy Spirit!

It's a command, it's in the imperative mood. That tells me many things, first of all it tells me this: that not all Christians are filled with the Spirit. I read commentaries today that told me that Christians are filled with the Spirit when they're born-again - that's nonsense! You are commanded, Christians in Ephesus were commanded: 'Be ye filled with the Holy Spirit'. It is a command, which also tells me this: that although not everybody has this, it's not an option. It's not for the preacher in the pulpit, it's not for the missionary on the field, it's for the Christian in the world - that's what it's for. It's for every believer, every single child of God, this is for them! It's a verb that's in the present tense, and literally means this: 'keep on being filled'. This isn't a once-for-all experience - although it may come at a particular point, it may even come in a crises experience - but it is an experience that means day-by-day to be tended, you need to be continually on a daily basis being filled, keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit. As D.L. Moody says: 'Our bucket is full of holes'.

The verb is in the passive. That simply means this: that you don't fill yourself with the Holy Spirit, it is something that is done to you. I've heard some say that because it's a command and it's in the imperative 'Be ye filled with the Holy Spirit', that means, if it's a command, you can do it - you can fill yourself with the word of God, you can pray so much that this will happen to you - that is not it. It's in the passive tense, you can put yourself in the position to be filled, but it must be the sovereign Lord, the Spirit, that does the filling. Indeed one translation of Scripture translates it like this: 'Let the Spirit fill you' - that's the command.

I'm sure many of us would agree here tonight that it's never the Lord's will for a Christian to be drunk. There's a debate goes about Christendom, especially now here in Northern Ireland, whether it's right for a Christian to drink or not. But we would agree on this: it's never right for a Christian to be drunk. In Ephesus it was the countryside of wine, we have looked in other weeks at the fact that there was over indulgence in a sexual realm, but there was also over indulgence in the realm of alcohol - and it was normal to be drunk all of the time on many occasions. Therefore Paul takes this illustration of alcohol intoxication, and it's a strange thing because Paul takes it to contrast - and it's rather shocking that he would use an illustration like drunkenness to illustrate to us what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Although he compares the two, there are some similarities with it. With the drunk man he is under the power of a spirit, and the power of that spirit is outside of his own personality. Indeed the power of the Holy Spirit
is another personality apart from himself - but that is where the comparison ends, that is where it ends. There is no other relation between drunkenness and the fullness of the Spirit, because drunkenness brings riot, as the word of God says it brings excess, debauchery - the Spirit of God does not bring those things. Although the Spirit of God controls the person, just as alcohol controls the person and the self, one of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control, Galatians 5:23. That's absent when we're intoxicated with wine or any other intoxicating influence - so the only comparison between drunkenness and the fullness of the Spirit is this: that as a drunk is controlled by the alcohol, the child of God is controlled by the Holy Spirit, but not at the expense of his self-control.

Therefore Paul's chief reason for bringing to us this illustration of drunkenness is not simply to compare, but rather to contrast. He wants to show us the difference, he wants to show us the great superiority of the fullness of the Holy Spirit to alcohol. Indeed, further than that, he wants to show us the great superiority of the fullness of the Spirit to any influence in the life apart from God! That's the point - in other words: if there's anything else controlling our lives apart from the Holy Spirit, we are walking in foolishness. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a Harley Street specialist, medically, before he became the Pastor of Westminster Chapel. He wrote with regards to alcohol - and this is the reason why I don't just believe that it is drunkenness that is spoken of, but it is the influence of alcohol totally - he said this in relation to alcohol, and he knew what he was talking about: 'Drink is not a stimulant, it is a depressant. It depresses, first and foremost, the highest centres of all in the brain - they are very first to be influenced and affected by drink. They control everything that gives a man self-control, wisdom, understanding, discrimination, judgement, balance, the power to assess everything. In other words: everything that makes a man behave at his very best and highest, it affects! The better a man's control, the better the man he is - but drink is something which immediately gets rid of control, that indeed is the first thing that it does'.

Without detouring into that subject: stay clear of drink! If you want to be filled with the Spirit, don't open your life to any influence that will control any of your actions, or any of your mental processes, other than the Spirit of God. Now, here's the point that we're getting to, here is the climax of this whole passage: is there emptiness in your life? That's the point Paul's making. Is there a sense of direction? Is there a void within your soul? Is there an emptiness within the church of Jesus Christ wherever you belong? If there is, Paul is saying it's just like ancient Israel, because they have forsaken the fountain of living waters and have hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. If there is a spiritual emptiness in your saved life, you need to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

If you are, and we may take time at some other occasion - it's such a large subject - to deal with that. If you are, Paul gives us three ways that we can know, and the results of that. The first is: rejoicing - verse 19: 'Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord'. Several results of being filled, one of them is rejoicing. When the divine in-filling opens your heart, and fills you with all the fullness of God, your mouth will open and you'll begin to praise God, and you'll begin to testify of the Lord - you have a passion to speak of Him.

Old W.P. Nicholson lived in Bangor and he got saved, and he felt that emptiness within his soul. He observed from time to time - especially on a Saturday evening - that his local Salvation Army Corps consisted of two scrawny little girls and the town idiot that he called 'Daft Jimmy'. He said in his own way that: 'Daft Jimmy hadn't enough brains to give him a headache', and he wore jumper that said on it: 'Saved From Public Opinion', and he carried a flag in this parade with these two little girls going down the street of Bangor every night. All the country folk, he said, would come and meet their friends and go out for dinner and so forth in Bangor main street. He often cringed, and he thought to himself: 'Lord, I'll go anywhere in the world, but never ask me to do anything like that!'. Well, you know that that's a bad thing to say to God on any occasion - and you know, God dealt with him, and to cut a long story short God filled Nicholson with the Spirit of God and he ended up leading the possession down the street banging a tambourine, delivered from public opinion.
Hallelujah! That the Lord would do that to us all tonight, because the fullness of the Spirit frees your mouth to speak of God. Indeed, I believe that, peculiarly, the fullness of the Spirit is for service. It is for power to witness, power to live for Christ. It's to utter a voice, to emit a sound, to speak, to utter articulate sounds, to use words in order to declare one's mind and to disclose one's thoughts concerning God. Now that is why it says in verse 19: 'Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord' - if you're filled with the Spirit, you will open up your mouth to praise God. It'll not only be spoken, it'll be sung - it'll be a great praise to God! There's a great need today, I believe, for an exploration in the mature theologically accurate and musically excellent development of praise. We need praise today, we need good singing, that's what we need! It's not unspiritual to have good singing, and you find from the word of God indeed, and through history books, that in times of spiritual blessing - the revival - the song was born.

In the Reformation old Luther, he brought the hymn singing back into the church. It had gone, but he brought back! He composed that great hymn: 'A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing'. 'Away in a manger, no crib for a bed' - he wrote it! In the Wesleyan revival Charles Wesley wrote 6000 hymns to his name. His brother John wrote many as well. Moody and Sankey in the late 18th-century and the early 1900s were still singing them, because out of the spiritual awakening they came speaking to themselves in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, making melody to God in their hearts! On one occasion Charles Simeon, who preached in Holy Trinity Cambridge, when there was a great outpouring of the Spirit among his enthusiastic congregation at the beginning of the evangelical movement in the Church of England - as he was seeing and witnessing great things of God, a church down the road who was opposed to it all put a new bell in their tower and made this inscription on it: 'Glory to the church, and damnation to the enthusiasts'! You see, good singing has generally rung the death knell of deadness. If there's good singing, you've a fair idea there's not much deadness. We need to get back to good singing, but you know you'll not do it by any instrument - only the instrument of your heart.

Making melody in your heart to the Lord with psalms - the inspired writings of David, Moses, Asaph. Oh, that we would sing the psalms again! Sing the psalms! 'The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want', we sing that one, but there are so many more! 'To the hills I lift up mine eyes, whence cometh my aid? Mine aid cometh from the Lord who heaven and earth hath made'. Spiritual songs, songs to do with anything with regard to the spiritual life - not particularly directed towards God. Such as 'Take time to be holy', and, 'What a friend we have in Jesus', concerning prayer. Then there are hymns which specifically are adoration to God, but the outcome of all these things and the motive for it is rejoicing - that's the point! Rejoicing, joy in the heart, the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22. The Spirit-filled life will be a fountain bubbling over with joy. Acts - the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost! Are you filled with joy? Another translation puts that verse like this: 'Making melody with all your heart' - not just in your heart, but with all your heart! A reckless abandonment in a manner of praise, praising God, a heart filled with spiritual music! When it's filled with spiritual music, when the spiritual orchestra of the church gets together, there'll be a spiritual symphony to God in praise.

The second result is thanking. You see, where the Spirit reigns there's gratitude to God, there is deep appreciation and spontaneous expression of what God has done. It's not an occasional thing, it's a continual thing - thanking God for Christ and your salvation, and everything that He is and has done. Do we thank Him? Do you know that the words 'think' and 'thank', in the English language at least, come from the same root word? It's interesting that, isn't it? For when we think, we'll thank. G. K. Chesterton said: 'The saddest moment in the life of an atheist is when he realises he has something for which to be thankful, but no-one to thank'. We have someone to thank, don't we? We have an appreciation - or at least we should do - and I want to ask the question here tonight: how Spirit-filled is the church? How Spirit-filled is this church?
You know, there are two exercises that God gave the church, so that they might thank Him and give expression to their gratitude. They are convened as a medium for our thanksgiving, can you think of what they are? The Lord's Supper - what's the other one? The prayer meeting. What are the two least attended meetings in the whole of the church? The prayer meeting and the Lord's Supper. If we think, we will thank.

Finally, as we close: submitting. We don't think of that often, perhaps, because it's submitting to one another, not just God. Our model is Christ, we are to submit to Christ, but by submitting to Christ we will submit to one another. We will submit to the oversight within the assembly, we will submit to the government as they submit to God. Are we submitting to one another in love? Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? I read some authors, and you could disagree with me if you wish, but they say you can't know if you're filled with the Holy Spirit - you can't know. Can you know if you're saved? Of course we can - you can know if you're filled with the Holy Spirit.

Do you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Do you? There's no formula you know, there's no quick fix. It's on your face before God, praying, meditating upon the word of God. It's obeying the word of God, it's asking God, it's dealing with your sin and yourself thoroughly and ruthlessly. It's surrendering your will to God, and it's by faith believing that God will fill you with all His fullness. I close with the words of our risen Lord Jesus Christ to any here this meeting that long to know the fullness of God's Spirit: 'The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely'. Take it, for it's for you.

Our Father, we thank Thee for Thy Holy Spirit - but yet in thanking Thee for Him, Lord, He makes us uncomfortable, for He is the Holy Spirit. If we are to know Him we will be holy. Help us, Lord, to redeem the time, help us, Lord, to understand what Thy will is for us - and we know this without a doubt tonight, that Thy will is that we be filled with the Holy Spirit. So, Lord, for those that really want Thee, we pray that they may find Thee as they search for Thee with all their heart. Amen.
Ephesians - Chapter 24: Christ In The Home Pt 1

"The Christian Wife"

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Ephesians 5:22-24

1. **WHY Does She Submit? (verses 22-23)**
   a. Lordship (verse 22)
   b. Headship (verse 23)

2. **HOW Does She Submit? (verse 24)**
   a. Ecclesiastically (verse 24a)
   b. Extensively (verse 24b)

Chapter 5 of Ephesians and we begin, as I've been announcing, a kind of sub-series within our series here in this epistle. I don't want to unnecessarily lengthen out our studies in this little book, but I feel it is important that we don't scour over quickly anything that is important within the word of God. Therefore we are entering in this evening to a passage that deals with 'Christ in the Home' - or at least that's what I have entitled it - how we relate within the home to the relationship that we have now come into in the Lord Jesus Christ, with those that we relate to within our families and indeed within our friends. As we'll see, as this chapter goes on, it also deals with the relationship of parents to children and vice versa, and also the relation between bosses and those that serve them, servants and masters. So we see the immense practicality of this little book before us, so I don't want to skip over anything needlessly - so we're going in, if you like, to a new series tonight looking at 'Christ in the Home'. In the weeks that lie ahead we will be looking also at the armour of God in chapter 6 - and I don't want to deal with all those facets of that armour in one week, we're going to take our time as we go through each individual piece of armour. It'll take us over Christmas, not too much hopefully, but we want to deal with what God is saying to us through His word.

So let's begin, and we'll read from verse 21 - although our study tonight will incorporate verses 22 to 24 we need to read, I feel, verse 21 to get the flow of the passage. Verse 21: "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" - we dealt last week with the fullness of the spirit, and there were many results and evidences that you are filled with the Spirit that we found in these last verses, and the third of those, if you look at your sheet if you still have it, was submitting unto other people. From there Paul now enters into this discourse on Christ in the home: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband".

We've said many times that chapters 1 to 3 of this epistle deal with doctrine. Now we can't make a clear-cut definition like that, but it is in a general sense we say it, that the first three chapters deal with doctrine and the next three chapters, 4 to 6, deal with duty - what we should do, all the practicalities of our beliefs.
incorporated in the way that we behave as children of the light. Therefore we are coming into an extremely practical section of the word of God in this second section to do with duty. And it seems, as I've already said, that we're coming into a new section, but although it's new in itself it's still linked to that verse 21 that we've already read, dealing with the fullness of the Spirit: "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God". Therefore if we are submitting ourselves in such a way it will filter into the home life.

Martin Luther, the great father of the Reformation, called this passage of Scripture - 500 years ago - 'The house table of the word of God', in other words this is where the word of God comes home. It's set upon the kitchen table, it's immensely practical, it kicks in within our lives day-by-day within the home. As we read through this passage we see that Paul is now talking about subjection to one another in the family relationships that we have - but if we were to go into this passage without realising the connection that it has to the words that come before it, we'd be foolish. We dealt last week with the fullness of the spirit, and that is the key, that's the key, that indeed is the key of all Christian life - the fullness of the Spirit - and if we have the fullness of the Spirit, we can be sure that the home life will be intact and it will be the way God wanted it to be in the first place. Therefore in chapter 5 and verse 22, right through to chapter 6 and verse 9, Paul cites three specific areas in the Christian home where submission is the will of God - as Luther said, 'the table duties' of the child of God at home.

We read of the relationship between wives and husbands - what we'll be looking at this week and next, chapter 5 verses 22 to 33 - the verses we read this evening. Then in chapter 6 verses 1 to 4, look down at it, we find the relationship between children and parents - very topical in the age in which we live. And then finally, chapter 6 verses 5 to 9, we read about the relationships of submission between slaves and masters. As I look at this passage of Scripture it brings to my heart and mind how we ought never ever in this world - the contemporary world, the modern world that we live in - never to underestimate the impact of the Christian family upon a pagan, irreligious, godless world. Never underestimate it! Just as the church, tattered and broken as it may be, that we've been studying in the weeks that have gone by, just as it is worn and lukewarm, just as it is going through trials and tribulations that perhaps it has never gone through before in these last of the last days, it is still God's chosen method to work through. And so in the home, even though it's attacked from every side, every angle: religious, political, cultural, every single angle - it is still God's way for a man and a woman and for boys and girls to be together. Never underestimate the impact that the Christian family can have on a pagan world.

Now, we have to enter this study tonight - we're looking at Christian wives - with care, not just because my wife and your wives are here and they're listening to everything we're saying, but in the world in which we are in there are two reasons why we need to be careful as we handle verses 22 to 24. The first reason we need to take care is that it teaches a divinely given order in marriage, and we are declaring tonight that it is from God - and in this world in which we live when you declare that anything is from God it is sneered upon. If it is from the Bible it's laughed at, but to actually say that these old worn pages - as the world sees it - is God's council and oracles for the way a modern age should live, will be laughed at. And so as we come upon these verses we need to realise that that is the reaction that we will get from this modern world. And also for the fact that these verses mention the word 'submit' - and in our age of liberation it seems that in the minds of modernists and academics that the word 'submit' is outdated, it's old-fashioned. It conjures up within their minds the idea of oppression, of dominance, of being trodden down - and therefore as we enter into such a study we need to be ready and prepared to be lambasted by a modern society, and even by a modernistic church that misunderstands what we say when we speak of submission. We need to also realise that not only do we have a society that misunderstands what we are saying, but we live today in a politically correct society that perfectly understands what we are saying, but rejects it because it's of God.

The second reason we have to beware is the fact that these three verses that we're looking at tonight have been the most abused, perhaps, and perverted by sinful men within the church of Jesus Christ. You see, we
need to walk a fine line in these verses, we need to be very careful that on the one hand we are not compromising the word of God, yet on the other hand we are not falling over into legalistic Pharisaism. One writer who had experience himself as a pastor says this: 'God's holy word in the hands of a religious fool can do immense harm. I have seen couch potatoes who ordered their wives and children around like the Grand Sultan of Morocco - adulterous men, with the domestic ethics of Jabba the Hut, who cow their wives around with Bible verses about submission - insecure men whose wives do not dare go to the grocery store without permission'. It's because of such men that some, even within the church, have thrown out these verses from their Bible.

Much of the problem within marriage, and even Christian marriage, today comes from these two faults: either a blatant disregard of these verses (and any biblical truth with regards to Christian wives, or Christian husbands and Christian marriage) - on the one hand those who throw the baby out with the bath water, and on the other hand there is a great attack by those who hijack these truths for themselves. Ignorant, arrogant, egotistic men - who, for self-promotion and thrill, batter their wives into the ground. All biblical truth with regards to headship within the word of God teach order, that is important. There are roles within life, in God. There are roles within the church of Jesus Christ, and roles within marriage and in the family home. But that order, we must never neglect to find, is ordered equality between men and women. The difference between that ordered equality is order itself - in other words, men and women in the sight of God are all equal. They are human beings, they are immortal souls, they are each priceless in the sight of God - but their order is not the same. There's a difference - and this is where the world, and often the church, gets confused - there's no superiority or, indeed, inferiority but there is order. In other words, there are those that are first, and there are those that are second.

Now within the society that Paul was writing to, in the city of Ephesus, it was within the bounds of the Roman Empire, and we need to understand the cultural backdrop that there was there. A woman within that society was unimportant, they had no authority in the home, the only duties that they had were preparing food and bearing children. Men could do as they pleased within the home in Rome. But a Christian home - a home that was now coming on the scene through Paul and the preaching of the Gospel, and these apostles within the whole of the Roman Empire - this was a new thing, this was a new man, a new people that we were learning in weeks gone by, a new nation of God. There was something revolutionary about the Christian home, because the Christian home was where a husband and a wife were united in loving fellowship - and that was a concept unknown to the Romans. Believe it or not, actually within the New Testament Scriptures - as the oracles of God are revealed in Christ and the apostles doctrine within the New Testament - you find the elevation of women to a position of honour, respect and dignity which was a product alone, not of the women's liberation movement, but the product of Christ and Christianity. It came through Christ. If you want proof of that you only need to look at the Middle East at this moment, and see the religions that there are there - particularly Islam - that suppresses and, indeed, oppresses women. No regard for them at all, they are not equal.

Now as we look at this passage of Scripture, verses 18 to 21 have to be noted for I said to you in weeks gone by that these verses are one long sentence, and indeed we are still in that one long sentence. Verse 18 to 21 are dealing with the fullness of the Spirit as we've already said, and now we're coming into this passage about Christ in the home and the thought is - in the one, same sentence - that to be filled with the Spirit of the Living God, to be full of the third Person of the blessed Trinity, will bring harmony in the home. That harmony will be seen in the Christian life. She is described in verse 22 as one who submits to her husband as unto the Lord. And the question in our age, and indeed within a modern church is: why does she submit?

Our first point: why should she do it? We have been reading already in this epistle, and studying in great detail, that believers are all one in Christ - there is no doubt about that, all the walls of partition have fallen down. But as that has happened we ought not to make the error that all relationships, earthly speaking and in
worldly capacities, are now eliminated - they clearly aren't. There are still men and women, there are still masters and slaves, there are still children and parents - and therefore, although we are all one in Christ, we still must respect the various types of authority and government which God has instituted and ordained. Indeed, if you think about it for moment, every well-ordered society rests on two supporting pillars. There is authority - and if there is authority, for that society to work and not break into chaos and anarchy, there must be submission and subjection to that authority. And that is why we see anarchy and chaos within our own nation and, indeed, within the nations across the world - there may be authority, but there is no submission to it. And there may not be any submission to any authority, and yet at times in our own land there is no authority at all. There must be those who exercise authority, there must be also those who submit to authority - and the reason for that is that it is a God-given order. Now that must be understood before we go any further into talking about the relationship between a Christian wife and a Christian husband, and parents and children, and masters and slaves, we need to lay the foundation that this truth is of God and it's found in the very Godhead itself!

Turn with me 1 Corinthians 11 - now we don't have time to go into the whole teaching regarding the head-covering this evening, but it is related to the subject of headship. And as Paul begins his discourse in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, he mentions how there is order within the Godhead - 1 Corinthians 11 and verse 3: 'But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God' - order in the Godhead. The head of Christ is God, and there we lay the foundation right away that this is not something that some chauvinistic theologian with a long beard, who is dated and out of date, has thought up - that Paul the apostle has conjured out of nowhere - this order that is found within the family home, within the church of Jesus Christ, is one that you find in the Trinity of God Himself. We see it in governments around us - now, we are taught within the word of God, no matter what loyalists or republicans say, the word of God says that we are to obey and submit to the government - it is ordained by God. I grant you, it is evil, very evil, but if you can obey the government without denying or disobeying the Lord - God says we ought to obey them that have the rule over us. In fact, within the word of God, it seems to me that bad government seems better to God than no government at all. The absence of government within a land brings anarchy and chaos, and no society can survive without it.

The home is very similar. You see, Paul is saying in these verses [that] there must be a head in the home, and there must be obedience to that head - there you have it: authority and subjection. Without those two pillars there will be anarchy and chaos - there must be a head in the home and there must be those who are obedient to the head. In the book of Genesis and the first few chapters you will note that God indicated the man is the head at creation, it was from the very beginning, before the fall. You will note also - as Paul mentions on other occasions - that the man was created first, and the woman was created for the man. And by the man being created first, he was placed in a position of authority and the woman placed in a position of submission. Now that's clear - it's not very popular, it's not very 'PC' or fashionable, but that is the word of God, that's what we find God has revealed to us - and as the children of God it doesn't matter, I say again, it doesn't matter what the world does, we ought to obey God rather than men! But that relationship of authority and submission never, ever, ever implies inferiority. And that is why the world and liberal Christians and theologians would have you believe it implies inferiority, because they want to destroy this beautiful and essential doctrine from the word of God. Now think about it for a moment: this doctrine cannot mean inferiority! The foundation of the doctrine, as we read in 1 Corinthians 11 verse 3, is found in the Godhead - the Lord Jesus Christ is subject to the Father, but in no way is He inferior to Him! Of course He isn't! But yet, within that Godhead, there is order. And the woman is not inferior to the man - in fact, in some respects, some would say that she is superior in her devotedness, in her sympathy, in her diligence and heroic endurance.

Verse 21 and 22 should be read like this, I believe: 'Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God, wives unto your own husbands, husbands loving your wives'. In verse 22 in the Greek the word 'submit' is
not found, for we are carrying on - at least Paul is carrying on in his long Greek sentence from verse 21: 'Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God, wives unto your own husbands, husbands loving your wives'. And the fact that it is not mentioned, is the fact that it is inferred - I'll read it again with the inference: 'Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God, wives submitting unto your own husbands, husbands submitting unto your own wives, loving them'. The idea is mutual, it is mutual submission - but submission in different ways. The submission of the woman is to be found within verse 22, submitting unto your husband as unto the Lord for he is your head, verse 23, even as Christ is the head of the church and the Saviour of the body. Verse 25 we find the husband's submission, he is to submit in love to his wife, giving himself for her! And if that's not submission, what is? So men, don't get on your high-horse - it is mutual, it is both parties, and in a sense it is right when we say this expression: 'They would do anything for each other'. We can 'Christianise' it: 'They would do anything for each other in the Lord'!

The Lord taught His disciples, did He not, to cease from throwing their weight around - not any longer to seek to be greater than another, and in fact you will note as you read the New Testament that they failed many times to understand that great truth. Even at the Last Supper, before the Lord would die, they were still arguing about who would be the greatest among them. And the Lord had to get up and wash their feet to teach them that the greatest among them is he that serveth! In other words, the one with authority builds other people up. You see, that was the difference between our Lord and the Pharisees, the Pharisees built their own authority up in the eyes of men to make themselves more important - but our treatise from the word of God, our remit, our agenda as believers, walking in Christ and meant to have the mind of Christ, is to esteem others better than ourselves! By nature we want to promote self, but verse 21 shows us that the fullness of the Spirit enables us to submit.

Now I want you to remember - and this is extremely important - that this passage of Scripture Paul is writing to believers, never forget that in these epistles. Paul is writing to believers, he's speaking of the Christian home, he's not speaking of your neighbours that aren't saved, he is not speaking of the world around us - although marriage is important for them - he is talking, if you look at the passage, of those who are in the Lord. He is talking of a Christ-pleasing home - don't get it in your mind for one moment that Paul is telling a woman to submit to the abuse of an unbelieving husband, don't have the idea that he is telling a woman to be silent to a dictating, legalistic prude who behaves like a Christian Stalin - that is not what Paul, nor the Holy Spirit is saying! But note that Paul is speaking to purely believing couples who are seeking to please the Lord and walk in His ways. That's important.

What secondly is important is also that this is not an exhaustive discourse on marriage. Paul gives no directive to widows who are left on their own, Paul doesn't speak of the one parent family that we have inherited in our society, because they were very rare in that day. He doesn't speak of domestic violence or wife battering because, as far as men were concerned probably in those days, they closed a blind eye to it all. He doesn't tell us what to do in the case of unwanted divorce, or the dysfunctional family that we have in this great century that we have entered into. But what Paul is speaking of here is not a cure for the circumstances that we find in the world and also flowing into the church, but he speaks of a prevention, of how married couples, two married Christians, ought to avoid [problems] in the home.

Now, in light of that, the first reason why you should submit as a wife is lordship, verse 22: '...as unto the Lord'. Submit yourselves unto your husbands as unto the Lord - now some men that you might read could be classed as chauvinists and say that the husband is like the Lord, and he's to be treated like the Lord, and some of you husbands might like to be treated that way! But that is not what Paul is meaning here, what he is saying is: submission is a duty to the Lord. It's as if you are doing it for the Lord, doing all things as unto the Lord! So you are submitting to your husband as unto the Lord. The inference is that if you are woman who has submitted to the lordship of Christ in your life, you'll have no difficulty submitting to a godly husband - no problem! If Christ is the Lord of your life, in submitting to your husband you would be submitting to the
authority of the Lord Himself - if...he is behaving as unto the Lord! Now mark that, men! If she has to treat you as unto the Lord, you ought to treat her as unto the Lord - and we will look at this next week - as Christ treated the church and gave Himself for her! And if he is a godly man, and she is a submissive [wife] there'll be few arguments in the home. There'll be little or no reluctance or attitude of rebellion.

Now, I really don't want you to misunderstand tonight - this doctrine is not teaching that she has to become a slave to her husband. It's teaching that the husband must first submit to Christ, and if he is submitting to Christ then there is no reason why a woman who is submitted to Christ also ought not to be able to submit to her husband - do you see the thought? If both are living under the lordship of Christ there will be harmony in the home. And her attitude is to see her husband as God's divinely appointed head, the one who He has placed in authority, who represents the rule of God in the home - and she is to accept his decisions as best, as he walks unto the Lord. Now that doesn't mean there's to be no discussion between the husband and the wife, indeed he should listen to her counsel! It doesn't mean that the husband can't leave responsibilities in the hands of a trusted wife. I want you to see this: that this is not a dictatorship, this is mutual respect within the happy Christian home! If it is happy it will be built upon that foundation of mutual respect.

Now the question, therefore, that comes from this point of lordship is: do we cultivate our walk with God in our marriage? And this convicts us all - not just in our own personal lives, but as a couple, as a family - do we seek to walk with God, for the lordship of Christ, as in our own personal life, must be cultivated in marriage also. That's why Paul tells us that a Christian should never marry a non-Christian, you should never be unequally yoked with an unbeliever - and that verse is not talking about marriage, by the way. It's talking about every association that compromises you - that can be business, that can be church life, that can be a religious order, that can be anything under the sun where light cannot have fellowship with darkness, nor God or Christ with Belial. Young Christian, it's not just marrying a non-Christian, but the yoke - as we looked at in a Gospel meeting not so long ago - was something that went on two oxen, and there was a stronger one and there was a weaker one, and I believe that you can be unequally yoked if you seek a relationship with a carnal Christian. I believe there is no difference, for that carnal Christian - you will be sure - will pull you down. Warren Wiersbe says: 'Such a home invites civil war from the beginning'.

This submission to the lordship of Christ must begin in marriage, but I believe it must begin far, far before that! Before you're even, perhaps, praying or thinking about marriage, you must be praying that if you enter into a relationship with a girl or a fellow that there will be that submission there to the lordship of Christ. And if you're going with someone, before you're married with the prayer of God and the word of God, [make sure] that you start building a foundation - for if you enter into marriage with a bad foundation, sins committed before marriage have a bad habit of being carried into marriage and causing problems. William Culbertson, the ex-president of Moody Bible Institute, warned of the sad consequences of forgiven sin - read the life of David and you'll see those. His son rebelled against him, his kingdom was in chaos, the illegitimate child died. Oh, we see from Psalm 51 that his sin was forgiven and God saw grace upon him and lavished it in forgiveness, but there were consequences.

The second reason why she ought to submit, and why you wives ought to submit is headship. It's the reason given in verse 23, not only '...as unto the Lord', but, '...For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body'. Her husband, your husband, is the head and the head has the sense of the head in the body, but also the sense of the head as a leader, as the spokesperson, as the person that will be responsible at the judgement seat of Christ.

Paul says it's the same relationship between Christ and the church, we have one head - Christ Jesus. Now the idea in 'head' is 'servant-leader', that is clearly the idea, for the illustration that Paul gives is Christ. And if we look at the life of Christ we find that, that He was the servant, you see Him taking the towel from round His waist and washing and drying the disciples feet. You see it, the servant-king of God! He is the head and,
verse 22 says, and also the Saviour of the body. That word 'Saviour' that you read there in the Greek can also be translated and has a meaning 'preserver'. So you see what Paul's saying, the husband is the head, he is the servant-leader, and he is also the preserver of the wife. As the head he loves her, he leads her, he guides her in godly ways and as the preserver he provides for her, protects her, and cares for her as saviour. Is the Lord Jesus Christ not our head? Was He not our head sacrificially? We read in Mark 10:45: 'For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister', or not to be served, but to serve, 'and to give his life a ransom for many'. Luke 22:26: 'He that is greatest among you', Jesus said, 'let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve'. The apostle told the elders - the oversight within the assembly - not to lord it over the brethren, isn't that right? Not to lord it over the church, and in the same way the husband as head, he is the head, he is not to lord it over his wife.

There are certain boundaries and they are God's boundaries, God gives them. As one writer has said: 'It can never be used selfishly', the doctrine of headship, 'and can never command what God forbids'. Your husband can never tell you to do something or inflict upon you something that God forbids, or forbid what God commands. A husband cannot instruct you to refrain from what is God's counsel. Headship is not unlimited, it is not unconditional but in connection with lordship it is a great responsibility. Women, maybe you thought I was going to be hard on you tonight, but this responsibility of men is awesome. The boundaries that they have to work within, they have the greater judgement - James 3:1, 'My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation'. Men, in a marriage relationship, are asked to be like Christ! What can be more difficult? To be like Christ when the church isn't watching, to be like Christ when your brothers in Christ aren't watching, when it's just you, the wife and the children! A Christian husband, you see, is called to a life of Christ-likeness, and as Christ was for the church we are to be as family men. As Christ rode, and trod and kneeled a life of prayer for His own in John 17, we are to pray for our own, our family. We are to be priests, great high priests before God, in intercession for those that are our kith and kin, we are to seek God's counsel for them through the word of God and through prayer. And men! - we sin...oh, we sin when we do not lead our wives.

How can we expect our wives to respect us and submit if we aren't submitting to Him? The problem today, I believe, within the church - and maybe it's a filter through from society where men have been trodden underfoot by the women's lib movement, and maybe they deserve it for many a year, but it has got so out of hand that it has turned on its head and men won't be men anymore! And that's why in fellowships around here there are women ministering at the table, there are women praying, there are women giving out the emblems, there are women doing everything! And that is wrong! But what are the men doing? Young man what are you doing? What are you doing within the life of an assembly? What are you doing for the Lord? Are you usurping, - are you sitting back and letting the women take the lead? There's many a woman missionary had to go to the field because God couldn't find a man who He could speak to. Oh, that we would suffer this word of exhortation tonight and realize the power that this marriage can be for God and for Christ. And women (for it's your night tonight!) you need also to realize the value that you have in the eyes of God. You have great value and you need to value yourself, you need to realize that you're needed by your husband, that you're needed by the church - yes, you're needed by the church! For if God believed that Adam could live self-sufficiently, Eve would never have been created, isn't that right? Ivor Powell in his commentary on this book wrote this: 'A world without women would be a battlefield upon which men would die for supremacy. A world of men would never know the laughter of children and the joy of being young. A masculine world would eventually become an international graveyard. Men may furnish a house, but only a woman's touch can make it a home. Males enjoy a sense of importance, but the lustre of achievement is only made possible by women whose influence sometimes removes mountains'. And I believe it is true to say, generally speaking, that behind every good man is a good woman.

Now women, take the challenge from the word of God, you don't have to have a position within the church of Jesus Christ, it baffles me that nobody can do anything unless you give them a title or position within the
church. There are plenty of things that can be done, and that the Lord may have you to do, if you would only go and do it, women. I'll not stop you, the oversight won't stop you. For in the New Testament it strikes me the importance of women in God's plan: Mary worshipped at the feet of Christ, Martha prepared meals for Christ, Dorcas made garments and helped the poor, Priscilla helped her husband to instruct a young preacher named Apollos, Peter's wife's mother arose from her bed to serve the Lord, a devoted band of women served the Lord. Paul commended Phoebe to the church at Rome, chapter 16:2, 'That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also'.

A good woman in a marriage, a good woman in the family, and a good woman in the church is a jewel of heaven. If you want to know how to be a good woman look at Proverbs 31. There is nothing more attractive, you can read it when you get home, nothing more attractive than a woman fulfilling the role that God has assigned to her. Why is it that people, even Christians, even the followers of Christ hate this doctrine? They detest it! Paul is accused of being a bigot, of being narrow minded, a woman-hater, or that his views just reflect the social customs of the day and therefore aren't applicable today at all. Do you know what that is? Whenever you find that, beware! You would be surprised at the places where I did find that, reading today - but that is a subtle, indirect attack on the inspiration and infallibility of the word of God: 'It was for then, not for today' - you better believe that it's for today, friends, right today. History testifies that if you refuse God's word you refuse Him!

If you look at history you can see the chaos where God's order is altered. By usurping the place of leadership and authority, and acting for her husband - Eve, what did she do? She introduced sin into the human race! And it has happened down the ages in families, it's happening through the cults and through liberal Christianity, where women have left their God-given sphere and wreaked havoc in the local church! And do you know something? Whether they realize it, or admit it or not - ultimately the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ is at stake. When divorce is used by Christians as the natural, desirable option and answer - and my heart goes out to those who have this inflicted on them - but when Christians in the world see it as an option, see it as a 'get-out clause', when young people run into marriage with non-Christians, or without consulting God and rush into marrying any Christian, the name of Christ is dishonoured!

Finally then: how does she submit? Quickly, verse 24: 'Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing'. How does she submit? First of all: ecclesiastically. 'Ecclesia' is the Greek word for church, and that's simply what it means: like the church, 'churchily'. She submits 'churchily' unto him, just as the church submits unto Christ, you - wife - are to submit unto your husband. Christianity is not down on women you know - for nothing could more exalt the role of a woman than comparing her with the role of the church that Jesus Christ shed His own blood to purchase! The church's subjection to Christ is your pattern as a wife, that's your pattern. Imagine that! To live as Christ and His church together in holy matrimony. Yes, I acknowledge what Paul says in Galatians 3:28: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus' - but get this, as we go into this study in the weeks that lie ahead, get this into your mind: equality of worth is not equality of role. They are different, and just as our submission to Christ elevates our spirit - you know, as you bow to Him in your own spiritual life - so when the wife bows to her husband who is Christ-centred and falling under the lordship of Christ, so her life, her walk and her very countenance will be enriched.

She is to submit ecclesiastically, and secondly extensively. Look at the very last word in verse 24: '...in everything' - now note that is not a carte blanc obedience, that is in everything in accordance with the will of God! No wife is expected by God to obey her husband when it would mean a compromise of her loyalty to Christ. Paul says in Colossians 3 verse 18: 'Wives, submit', and obey, 'yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord' - as it is fit in the Lord, that's the quality, that's the qualification.
As we close, to submit to his godly authority is obedience. Wives, listen: to not submit is sin. You can discuss it, you can disagree about it - but woman, for Christ's sake and God's sake, have a desire at the end of the day that he fulfil his God-given role. The beauty about it all is, as verse 32 tells us, that this is a great mystery - for Paul speaks not only concerning man and woman, but Christ and His church. And marriage is given an exalted state by God, for we are living out a picture of Christ and the church - the married couple is playing out an illustration of the greatest theme of the ages. The loving husband is likened to Christ, and the holy wife will be likened to the church that He will marry! What a weapon in the hands of a holy God to use in His conquest! So let us begin to live out, by the Spirit's help, that great drama of the ages of Christ and His glorious church.

Our Father, we thank Thee for the practicality of Thy truth. We thank Thee that there's nothing that we need apart from it - and we pray, Lord, for all those wives in this building tonight, we commit them unto Thee and ask for them the power and the grace to live godly in Christ Jesus. We pray for the husbands, that as they seek their wives to submit to them, that they would submit to our Lord Jesus Christ. And Lord, for all of us, that we would do all things to the glory of God, that in this dark, sinful age, that the bright light of Christ may be seen in us. Hear us we pray, in Jesus name. Amen.

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Ephesians - Chapter 25: Christ In The Home Pt2

"The Christian Husband"

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Ephesians 5:25-33

1. Sacrificial Love (verse 25)
2. Sanctifying Love (verses 26-27)
3. Symmetrical Love (verses 28-33)

Now let me make you welcome to our Bible reading tonight, here in the Iron Hall - it's great to see you all out with us, thank you for coming and may the Lord bless you for making the effort to come around His word this evening. Ephesians chapter 5, Ephesians 5 and this is our 25th study in the book of Ephesians - and this is, as it were, a sub-series within the whole study of the book. And what I mean by that is that in chapter 5 we are beginning to look at 'Christ in the Home' - or at least that is what I have entitled it - in other words: the impact that Christ has upon the family relationship and upon the home. Now this is not some philosophical, religious ethic that just changes the mind and spirit, but it actually changes relationships - it comes into the very heart of life itself, the family, and it has an awesome impact upon a relationship between a man and a woman, a husband and a wife, and between a parent and a child, and as we'll see in later weeks between the master and the slave. There is a sphere of influence that Christ has, and if we fail to recognise that Christ Jesus, the Lord, influences everything when He comes into the life we have failed to realise what this great Christian life really is - it impacts everything, it should change everything. So we're looking at 'Christ in the Home', and we looked last week at the Christian wife and we had a little bit of time also looking at how the wife relates to the Christian husband, and this week we're going to look specifically at the Christian husband - but the wives have something to listen to as well this week!

But we'll begin our reading at verse 25, that is where our study begins - but we'll read from verse 22 to get the whole context: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour' - we saw that that word could be translated 'preserver' - 'of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband".

'The Christian Husband' - the key verse in this passage, as in many of our passages there has been a key verse and it's important that we notice them to interpret the passage, the key verse this week is verse 31 I believe. Look at it: 'For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh' - I beg your pardon, 32 is the key verse - 'This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church'. And those two verses together form the key that we have here in this whole passage, verse 31: the relationship between a man and a woman, two separate entities, two individuals who have been brought together and begun to love one another, and are united in marriage and become one flesh. Now that's all that verse 31 says, it's purely speaking of the marriage relationship, and indeed it's a quotation from the book of Genesis chapter 2 and verse 24 - and the point is 'one flesh' as God ordained it in the beginning, as God made it, a man and a woman come together, are married and become one flesh. But
the dual purpose of the passage, and the dual key of it is found in verse 32: 'This is a great mystery', Paul says, 'but I speak concerning Christ and the church'. So in verse 31 he speaks of one flesh, the marriage relationship; and then in verse 32 he says, 'But this is a profound, a great mystery, for I speak concerning Christ and the church'.

So the keys to the passage are verse 31 and 32, and from it we see there is a dual purpose in the passage. It's as if there are two spheres that are entwined together, uniquely, as one; there are two themes, two purposes - but Paul brings them all together into one thing, one entity. Of course the passage speaks of marriage, and if we were to define marriage we would say, at least, that it's fourfold. First of all an emotional relationship, as we read in the book of Genesis - and it's important always to go to that book of beginnings to find the definitions of life - and there we have that it is an emotional union: you remember God looked at His creation and He saw that all was good, but yet He said this: 'It is not good that a man should be alone' - and so He created Eve, a help-meet for Adam, so there is an emotional relationship there that marriage fulfils. And then we could define it, secondly, as being a social relationship - it meets all social needs: it continues the race, it populates the world...and Adam was told, 'Be fruitful and multiply' - that is one of the reasons for the marriage union. So it's emotional, it's social, and then thirdly it's physical. It is the relationship that God has ordained whereby we fulfil the natural, physical desires that are given to us by God, the sexual urges and appetites that God has put within us and created within us - that is God's ideal, ordained by Him for that purpose.

But fourthly, and primarily given to us in this passage this evening, it's not only the emotional need that is met by marriage, and the social and physical - but Paul speaks specifically of the spiritual need. This union, this marital union meets a spiritual need and it has a spiritual purpose. And Paul is saying to us all in this century, this evil century that we have now entered into, we must not fail to recognise that marriage is a spiritual thing. It's not a legal thing alone, it's not only something in the eyes of the state, or even in the eyes of the church; it's not a cultural thing, it's not simply a relational thing of convenience - but this marriage union, whereby a man and a woman become one flesh, is spiritual. And even the most physical aspect of marriage, when the two physical bodies become one flesh, that itself entails a spiritual act. I believe, personally, that in that act there is an exchange of the soul. That is why, I believe, that God abhors the sins of fornication, adultery, and all the perversions of His own ideal. And that is what this world, that is dying and breathing its last breath in depravity, has failed to recognise: that when a man or a woman unite outside the marriage relationship they are exchanging souls, they're going into a deep relationship of personality with one another - and the one-night-stand makes a mockery of God's ideal! You are playing spiritual 'Russian roulette', it is an abomination to God! You've heard the expression 'soul mates', and I believe that that is a well founded expression - it is the deepest knowledge that two human beings can have of one another, and that is why God abhors and abominates any perversion of His plan and His ideal.

Now, if the previous verse that we studied in-depth last week, verse 22, was on its own it would be very unfair to all the sisters in the Assembly here tonight! But it's not, it's not on its own, but it gives with it a high standard of the husband - there's not only something expected of the wife, but indeed I believe there's a higher standard expected of the husband, God's appointed head in the home. And you can get no higher standard, for the standard that is given is the standard of Christ! The illustration that is given by the Holy Spirit through Paul, is that the marriage relationship should operate just like Christ and the church operate together. Now, as we enter into this study, just as last week, we need to note the balance, we need to understand that husbands - in the light of what we studied last week - are not to keep their wives in subjection alone. Wives are to be subject to their husbands, they are to obey their husband in the Lord, they are to recognise their husband as the head of the home - but the husband is not to lord it over the wife, he is not to keep his wife in subjection. But the other side of the coin to her subjection to her husband, is the great love of God in Christ reflected in her husband - what a high standard! It's remarkable! You can't get a higher standard - morally speaking, spiritually speaking - for this man, this husband, to represent the love of Christ in his marriage.
The man said it well when he said: 'No wife would mind being subject to a husband who loves her as Christ loves the church', isn't that right? There'd be no problem, ladies, would there? It would be no problem to do what your husband said if he loved you as Christ loved the church, because you'd know that in the depths of his decisions, in the depths of his wisdom, was a love like Christ's love and a wisdom like Christ's wisdom. A man on one occasion feared that he loved his wife too much, and a spiritual man counselled him and asked him if his love for his wife was more than the love of Christ for the church. Isn't that the point? That wise spiritual man told him: 'Only when you go beyond that love are you loving your wife too much!'. In other words you can't love your wife too much! Because you can never exceed and you can never - as we begin we need to realise - you can never, ever meet that love wherewith Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.

Within this passage of Scripture our Lord's love for His church is presented in three wonderful parts. The movements within this whole song of love, if you like, incorporate the past, Christ's love for us in the past. Then we have Christ's love in the present, and then eventually His love for His church in the future. This love of Christ that we find here is to be reflected - and this is Paul's point - His love must be reflected in marriage. So what are the ways in which that love must be reflected? The first way is found on your sheet, your first point: it is a sacrificial love. Verse 25: 'Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church,' now that's the past, isn't it? That is the past, the previous aspect in Christ's love: He gave Himself. Love your wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself. We're talking about the atonement, we are on holy ground, we're talking about the ransom payment, the purchase price, indeed the greatest price ever paid in love to purchase any bride. When you go into the book of Genesis you find there Adam lying, and God puts a deep sleep over him, and God thrusts His hand into his side and takes forth a rib from Adam and with it He makes a wife, Eve. And we have a holy parallel at Calvary, for God thrusts His hand into the side of His own Son and brings out, by precious blood, a people unto Himself - isn't that beautiful? Brings out a wife, a holy bride, from the death of Christ, from the blood of Christ, from that great price wherewith we are bought, for we are not our own, we are bought with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus, as a lamb without blemish and without spot. And that is the past love that Paul is giving husbands as an example of how we ought to love our wives - what a price, what a love, what a giving of self! And that's the point: give yourself! For God so loved the world that He gave!

Do you give yourself for your wife? For that's what a husband is to do, he's to give himself. You see, this is radical. Of course, to women's lib today and to a modern politically correct society that we live in, this is old-hat, it's Victorian, puritanical stuff that we're talking about. But in the world which Paul was in, and the world that the Holy Spirit was inspiring these words to, this was radical, this was revolutionary! It was never heard of before, and people didn't want it - and I'm talking about the establishment, the academia, they couldn't handle it! Indeed, if you look at the way marriage was held in the pagan world you find a few home truths. If you look at Demothnases (sp?) he said this: 'We have prostitutes for the sake of pleasure. We have concubines for the sake of daily co-habitation. We have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately, and of having a faithful guardian for all our household affairs'. Zenophon (sp?) said - and it was his belief that this should be the husband's aim that a wife should do: 'The wife might see as little as possible and ask as little as possible' - that's what a wife was to be! To see as little as possible in the home and to ask as little as possible. Socrates, you know him, you've heard great things about him, this is what he said: 'Is there anyone to whom you entrust more serious matters than to your wife? And is there anyone to whom you talk less?'. One writer tells us that the ancient pagan man breathed adultery - that's not an exaggeration, he breathed it, he sweat it, he lived adultery! The marriage bond was virtually meaningless, it didn't mean anything at all!

We may assume from the Old Testament that the Jews had a better view of marriage, except of course in our Lord's day - when He walked upon the earth there was the ultra-liberal Jews who didn't have a terribly superior view of marriage than these old pagan reprobates. Of course there was the school of Helel (sp?) and he believed, that Rabbi, that you could divorce your wife for almost anything - even if she burnt the dinner
you could divorce your wife! And he was very popular, as you can imagine - everybody was joining his school! But that was even the Jewish view of marriage, it had fallen into disrepute, it wasn't looked upon in any sacred way. And to that backdrop you can imagine what it was for Paul the apostle to come and say: 'Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church', imagine! Imagine the impact, the explosiveness of what that meant to those people - to love as Christ loved the church? If you think that it had an impact then, you better believe that it has an impact now! That in our world, and even in the church, to love your wife as Christ loved the church - you feel the impact, husbands, when you hear that, don't you? It's a hard - in fact it's an impossible thing to do, yet we are to strive after it and try our best by the Spirit of God to love them, to give ourselves for them.

It's a sacrificial love and a sacrificial love is simply a selfless love, isn't it? That's what sacrificial means, to lay your life down - and it's selfless. I believe that this is primarily, in the light of Scripture, the reason for much marital failure today: there is a lack of selflessness. They go into marriage deciding what they're going to get when they divorce, before they've even tied the knot! There's no selflessness in it any more. And even within the church there is little selflessness, isn't there? There's little sacrificial love, like Jacob for Rachel - you remember, he sacrificially worked 14 years to win her. He didn't care for that other seven years after he was done out of his bride, he went on the extra seven, because true christian, godly, holy love seeketh not her own - isn't that Paul says? 1 Corinthians 13, go down the definition of love - you don't seek your own, it's not a selfish love, it is a love that is sacrificial, which is a love that is willing to pay the price. You hear the men say: 'I'd die for my wife' (maybe you don't hear too many of them say it - but sometimes, maybe in a fit of excitement, or delirium, they shout: 'I would die for my wife') - isn't that right? But how many husbands die daily for their wife? I would hope most of us probably would die for our wives if it came to the bit in a situation - but dying daily is a different thing, isn't it? To be selfless for our wives, to pay the price of what it means to love as Christ loved the church - 'as Christ', let those words sink into your psyche, 'as Christ'!

Philippians 2 gives us a perfect illustration: He thought it not something to be grasped, but He made Himself of no - not 'low', 'no' - reputation, He humbled Himself, He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Now, how many marriage guidance counsellors would set down in their first lesson Philippians chapter 2 and say: 'Now men look, that's your standard, that's what you've to live by'? That's too high a standard, why would Paul even make such a comparison? Paul makes the comparison because that's what's needed! A selfless, sacrificial love, a love like Christ's great love where:

'Out of the ivory palaces,
And into a world of woe.
Only His great eternal love
Made my Saviour go!'

Was His love not a special love? For I hope all of you are united already to your wife if you're married, that's the case isn't it? You're already united! But He was not united with His bride, He loved her when she would not receive Him, He loved her - while we were yet sinners Christ died for us! How many of us love a person when they don't love us back? How many of us love a person when they rebuke us, disdain us, detest us? How many would love if they crucified us? But He loved the unlovely, and there's sometimes we're unlovely, but we're to love nevertheless.

His love's selfless and special, it's also a satisfying love, for He sees of the travail of His soul - Isaiah says - He sees what His great love at Calvary wrought when people come to Him, when His sheep hear His voice and follow Him He is satisfied. You remember when He brought that sheep home, the great rejoicing there was: 'The sheep I've lost has come home!' - and His love is a satisfying love. Can you imagine how the Lord felt when He saw a mother clutching the child who had just been given life again? Imagine that! How satisfying His love was! And if you give love in the marriage relationship, men, it will satisfy - if you give anything, indeed, the word of God says you will receive good measure, shaken together, pressed down and running over! Do you see what's coming through here? Christ's love is selfless, it's special, and in turn it is satisfying - but the point is: it is never, ever selfish. Never!
We could say it's a protective love. It's protective, it's never thoughtless or careless with the one He loves. He possessed the ability to foresee, didn't He - the Lord - into the future, He knew what we would need, He knew the grace that we would need for the trials that we go through, He knew the equipment that we would need spiritually speaking to live in this adulterous generation and to come through to heaven eventually. He knew, and He looked forward and He was able to protect us from these things. You remember He was out preaching and there was 5000 people all around Him, and He knew that they needed fed, and He protected them and fed them. Out in the storm, there He was, and His disciples thought they weren't being protected and they shook Him awake, 'Master, carest Thou not that we perish?' - and He woke and He stilled the storm! And He's still stilling storms, praise the Lord! He protected His own sheep. He went to Simon, He could see that he was going to betray Him, but He could see that He was going to need help to get through it all: 'Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to sift thee like wheat, to have thee - but I have prayed for thee'. He protects, that's His love, that's the nature of it! In the Old Testament He sent the ravens for old Elijah, didn't He? He sent an old fish for Jonah to protect him, to stop him getting drowned He sent it. And this is the miracle: that that protective love of God in Christ is the love, men, that you're to have for your wives! It's unbelievable, isn't it?

It's a protective love, it's a provisional love. It provides things, doesn't it? Paul says to husbands in 1 Thessalonians 3 and verse 10: 'If any would not work' - notice it doesn't say 'could not work', this is a matter of the will, not predicament - 'If anyone will not work, neither should he eat'. Husbands have got to provide, as far as they can they've got to provide for their wives materially speaking - and Paul taught that to meet the need, the Lord Jesus Christ for the church give up all that He possessed. He knew they needed to be reconciled, so He went to the cross to provide for them, the sacrificial Lamb being Himself, to shed His blood for His own people. He knew they needed an advocate in heaven to represent them before the bar of justice, and He went to heaven and He represents us now at the right hand of God as our Great High Priest! It's a provisional love for He's praying for us at this very minute, in John 17 before He left this scene of time He prayed for us, and He hasn't stopped praying since. And men, if we're going to be the husbands God wants us to be we need to pray for our wives, as Christ prayed for the church. We need to pray for our families, our children, our mothers and fathers, the whole gamut of the family - because Christ loved His church like that!

His love is a present love - and what I mean by that is: Christ is with His bride. He's present with us, isn't He? That's the whole point - we wouldn't want to meet like this if Christ is not in our midst. But how many husbands can say they're present with their wife? It's like the couple that were sitting watching television in the living-room on the settee. And there was a gas explosion, and the settee went out the window and them along with it, and they were left sitting on the front lawn. And the woman started crying, and the husband says: 'What are you crying about? It's not a time to be crying!'. She said: 'I'm so happy, for it's the first time I've been out in years'! Isn't that what some of our marriages are like? Christ is present with us, He is present with us - and we need to be present, we need to spend time with our loved ones!

And here's the great climax of Christ's sacrificial love for us: it's a faithful love! 'My sheep hear my voice and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish. No man shall pluck them out of my hand, neither shall any man pluck them out of my Father's hand' - it's a faithful love. And if we are to be faithful, as our Bridegroom is faithful to His church we must be faithful as husbands. Old Jeremy Taylor said: 'Faith is unspotted chastity' - that's what faithfulness is! To be chaste! He goes on to say: 'That is the marriage ring' - you know, the old Puritans didn't believe in marriage rings because they believed that your word should be your bond, and your faithfulness should be the marriage ring that speaks that you are another's! He says: 'It ties' - that chastity ties - 'two hearts by an eternal band. It is like the cherubim's flaming sword set for the guard of Paradise'. Husbands, how chaste are we? How chaste are we in our minds and our eyes?
This is a sacrificial love - we could finish at that and we'd all fail, isn't that right? But secondly, it's a sanctifying love. Paul says this in verse 26 and verse 27: 'That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish'. This is the Lord's love presently, not the past love, but how He is loving the church at this moment. And His love is manifest to His church in sanctification, in holiness, giving the power and the ability and the grace to live a holy life down here on earth. F. W. Grant translates this verse like this: 'That he might sanctify it, cleansing it by the washing of water by the word' - that's how He sanctifies it, by the washing of the word. In Palestine, before a bride was married, before she went to the ceremony, she passed through the ceremonial purifying waters. She was made clean before she united with her husband. And the word that Paul is trying to get across here is 'sanctify'. We are, as husbands, to sanctify our wives, as Christ at this moment is sanctifying His church.

Now 'sanctify' is the same idea as 'holy' - it means 'to set apart'. And in marriage the husband is set apart for the wife, and the wife is set apart for the husband - and any interference with that setting apart is sin! Of course, the church has been set apart positionally, hasn't she? She is already sanctified in that she is in Christ, and we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, but she day by day is being sanctified, and we individually, practically speaking. It's a process, a moral and spiritual preparation getting more accentuated until the day that we actually come and see the Lord face-to-face, and we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. It's like Esther chapter 2 and verses 12 to 16, before she was presented to King Ahasuerus she underwent a one year course of beauty treatment before she was prepared to meet her King. The process of sanctification within Christ's church is created by the washing of water - now that's the washing of the word, that's not speaking, at least I don't believe it's speaking about baptism or anything like that - it's speaking about the word of God, simply your life being washed and cleansed when you hear the words of our Lord and you obey them. Sure, He said that - John 15:3 'Now you are clean', He told the disciples, 'through the word which I have spoken unto you'. John 17:17, He prays to the Father for us: 'Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth'. And just as the blood of the Saviour cleanses us from guilt and from the consequences of sin, the water of the word of God cleanses us continually from the defilement and from the pollution of sin. The Psalmist asked, the young Psalmist in his mind at least asked the question - 119: 'How shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to thy word', 'Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee' - and it's this cleansing influence of the word of God that is continually sanctifying, the church is being bathed and cleansed by the agent of the water of the word of God.

So, here comes the other sphere, the parallel: therefore husband's love ought to be a cleansing love. It ought to be a sanctifying love, it ought to sanctify his wife and it ought to sanctify himself. And we - think of this - we husbands ought to be the means of our wives sanctification! Now the question is: do we provoke her to anger or do we provoke her to sanctification? In other words: both husband and wife our becoming more and more and more like their Lord Jesus Christ. Are you helping your wife to be more holy? Are you helping her in your attitudes and in your reactions, in your answers and in your behaviour, in your habits? Wives are you helping your husbands be more holy and be more Christ-like, or are you winding him up? You see, the point is: if the lordship of Christ is what marks a marriage, the relationship in the home will be a holy one! It will be one whereby husband and wife together are becoming more holy and are constantly growing in grace as a pair as well as an individual, together as one person, one body, they are becoming more holy. They are being sanctified, for the word of God - as Colossians 3:16 says - the word of Christ dwells in their hearts richly, with all wisdom. They are teaching and admonishing one another in Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs - singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

We don't have time to look at it, but 1 Peter and chapter 3, in verse 1 you find there that the holy life of a saved wife is able to influence, even to conversion, her unholy, unsaved husband. But as you go further down that chapter to verse 7 you find something else - and we will take time to read it. 1 Peter and chapter 3
and verse 7: 'Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with [your wives] according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel' - now note that, ladies: 'unto the weaker vessel', that is not a sexist remark, that is God's word - and that's fact. In the beginning it was Eve that sinned first, and in that she is the weaker vessel, I believe that is one of the reasons that within the local church she is not given a position of leadership. So we have to honour that, not disdain that, we've to honour that fact and protect as the weaker vessel...'and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered'. What an amazing thought: that if our relationship - husbands and wives - is not right with one another in some point, that it could be hindering our prayers!

Verse 27, we must move on. The reason He sanctifies His bride, the church, is: 'That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish'. The church isn't perfect, and our wives aren't perfect either - and I'll pay for that later! But isn't that right? None of us are perfect, and His church isn't perfect - it has spots, it has wrinkles. And spots are defilement that comes from without, from contact with unclean things - it's an outward uncleanness - wrinkles come from decay from within. And because we become defiled by the world and from the flesh within, we need cleansing don't we? We need to be cleansed continually with the word of God - James taught: 'Keep yourselves unspotted from the world' - and the way we do that is through the word of God. As the church is nourished by the word of God those wrinkles and those spots will disappear, and the church will become cleaner, it will become more youthful, more beautiful if we allow the Spirit of God to apply the word of God to our hearts and change us. And the point is: our marriages also will change!

Wives aren't perfect, but they will change when you're a holy husband - that's the point. When you love as Christ loved, when you sanctify as Christ sanctifies, and then one day - and here is the future love - one day in glorification He will present to Himself a holy church, a glorious bride. A. T. Pearson (sp?) said, think of it: 'When the omniscient eye looks upon us at the last day, He will not find anything that is too immaculate for His holiness' - not even a pimple, not a mole on a human face. How incredible that His awesome holiness that we were thinking of yesterday morning will look at us on that day and not find one thing. He will say: 'Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee'. When He hung upon the cross, and when He was about to die and breathe His last and give up the ghost, surely He looked back at the earliest stages and recalled what was determined by His holy Father. And then, with an exultant cry of relief and joy, He exclaimed: 'It is finished!' - but that was only the finish of the final phase, for there were more phases to come. And there will be a day that is yet to come, when again He will exclaim in triumph as He looks at us, absolutely perfect - and as we are robbed of pain, and robbed of death, and robbed of trial, and every memory of sin is gone - He will say again: 'It is finished!'.

But we must move on. It is a symmetrical love - and what 'symmetrical' means is simply a shape with parts in it that reflect one another if you like. You know if you had a shape on a piece of paper and you put a mirror, you would get a symmetrical image, an identical image, yet it's still one entity. And this is what Paul is saying from verses 28 to 33, that marriage is the uniting of two persons, but they become one entity - but there is this symmetrical relationship. And after he deals with Christ's love for the church, Paul now reminds husbands again that this is your pattern, this is your pattern for living as a Christian husband - you are to imitate the love of Christ for His church. Indeed, he goes on to say, verse 28, you are to love as you love your own body, your own wife. Love your own wife - that's monogamy - love your own wife and love her as yourself! It's interesting the amount of times Paul mentions 'your own wife' and 'love as yourself'. In verse 28, the first part, he says 'his own body', and then in verse 28 the second part he says 'himself'. In verse 33 he says 'himself' again, verse 29 he says 'his own flesh' - and the point is, when two become one flesh in union, the husband loves his wife if he loves himself because he is one person with her! Do you understand? Two have become one, and if he doesn't love his wife he's not loving himself!

It's the golden rule of life, and indeed it's the golden rule of marriage too: 'Love your wife as yourself'. The Lord said, 'Love thy neighbour as thyself', 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you' - but this is
what it is in marriage: 'Love your wife as yourself'. This is the self love that is permitted within the word of God, and just as we have found already in chapter 4 and verse 16 of this epistle that love is the circulatory system of the church of Jesus Christ, it's what fits it all together and keeps it together as the body of Christ - so love keeps the body of husband and wife together in the home. There should never be the cry from a Christian home: 'I'm starved of love'! Because if you're loving your wife as Christ loved the church, and if the wife is reverencing her husband that should never be - if there's a submitting to the lordship of Christ all will be well! And this is a symmetrical love in that it is mutually satisfying; each party is to satisfy the other. You're not to seek your own! It's a man loving his wife, and he does it and he is loving himself, and if he is loving himself of course he will be satisfied emotionally, socially, physically and spiritually - and there'll be no temptation for him to look elsewhere for fulfilment!

In verse 29 he is to nourish. And the word 'to nourish' has the sense of 'to mature'. And the man, every man and every woman, has the instinct to care for their body, to nourish - that's inward feeding - and to cherish, that's outward, to keep warm and safe. And you feed your body, you clothe your body, you bathe it, you protect it from discomfort, pain and harm - and your survival depends on it - and that is what Christ did for His church! That is what we as husbands are to do for our wives. Now imagine this, our time has gone, but imagine this folks: our marriage home is to be an illustration of the great drama of the ages. Imagine that! It's to be a representation, an object lesson to the world and to those around us, that this is the great love story of Christ and His church - and it makes marriage a serious thing, as I've said many a time, not to be entered upon lightly or unadvisedly, but with due thought and consideration. Not because you get on with a man, not because you have things in common, not just because he's saved, but because it's God's will!

And in verse 30 and verse 31 and verse 32 we have the climax whereby Paul tells us that this is showing us the representation, this marriage is the mystery. And a mystery, you remember, is something that was hidden and now revealed - it's not something mysterious, but God is now revealing that this is what it's all about! But in verse 33 he comes back to this point, just in case we get carried away with the spiritual mystical church in Christ and forget about our responsibilities in the family - and he comes back and reminds again: wives, reverence your husbands; husbands, love your wives.

Now as we close let's take just one more. Imagine if Christians adhered to this, and if Christian husbands and wives have the Spirit of God - and they do - and have everything that they need to live like this, why are they not living like it now? And the point is further up the chapter that we dealt with a couple of weeks ago, and it's this: one - the problem of marriage is, and always has been, sin; and two - the answer always has been, and always will be, the Lord Jesus Christ. And if the husband and the wife are filled with the Spirit, that's the point, it's in the same chapter - if you're filled with the Spirit it's the answer to marriage, it's the answer to the home, it's the answer to revival, it's the answer to everything! It is such a home as this, and only this, that will commend the preaching of the Gospel from that pulpit and in your life.

Our Father, we hail the day that we will stand before Thee and before Thy Son, and we will stand in white robes of righteousness without spot or wrinkle. Thy bride, bought with the blood of Christ out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. And Lord, in the light of that great fact, we pray that husbands will be husbands as Christ, and wives will be wives as the church, and Lord, that we will do all things in our homes to the glory of God. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - January 2001
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Ephesians 6:1-4

1. **God's Will For Children (verses 1-3)**
   a. Obedience To Parents
   b. Fellowship With The Lord
   c. Natural Rightness
   d. Scriptural Adherence
   e. Resultant Blessing

2. **God's Will For Parents (verse 4)**
   a. Do Not Provoke
   b. Nourish
   c. Discipline
   d. Instruct

Ephesians chapter 6, and we enter a new chapter - in fact, the last chapter of this little book. This is the third part of our sub-series within the epistle to the Ephesians, and we're looking at 'Christ in the Home'. We've looked at the Christian wife, last week we looked at the Christian husband, and we've looked both those nights at the Christian marriage and what it entails to the glory of God. Tonight we're going to look at 'Christ in the Home Part 3' and it's 'Parents and Children'. Now before I read this passage of Scripture, many of you may think: 'Well, this boy doesn't know what he's talking about, he hasn't got any!'. Well, I'm in good company because, as far as I can tell, Paul didn't have any either! And that's who we're reading this evening, and he was inspired by the Spirit of God - so I will take the word of God, as he did, from the Spirit of God and apply it to your hearts tonight. So it doesn't matter, really - didn't matter to Paul, and it doesn't matter to me - so listen to what I have to say tonight.

Verses 1 to 4: 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord'. Now, before I go on any further, there's a wee tune I can hear and it's somebody's phone or something, maybe you can't hear it - it's gone off now, that's alright - just in case there's an emergency and somebody's children need their parents, or something like that!

OK, now: this is a great subject we enter into this evening, for no matter where we look in the society in which we live today there is rebellion all around. We looked at the relationship between husbands and wives, and we have looked at how the wife is to submit to the husband - and we find that that is not 'in vogue' today, and there is a rebellion within the marriage relationship, so much so that marriage is declining today. It's better, in the eyes of the world, to live together, to co-habit, and not to make that commitment - in fact, the government has set that in stone by making it a benefit for you not to marry. You see it in that relationship, you also see it in the relationship that we're entering into tonight: parents and children. Children are rebelling against their parents, and indeed also in legal circles that is also being set in stone. Next week, God willing, we will look at how this relationship is breaking down also between employers and employees - and it seems that employers have to go very far lengths to keep men and women from going on strike, and it's very difficult to be an employer in the days in which we live.

Verses 1 to 4: 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord'. Now, before I go on any further, there's a wee tune I can hear and it's somebody's phone or something, maybe you can't hear it - it's gone off now, that's alright - just in case there's an emergency and somebody's children need their parents, or something like that!
We see it in our own land, with relation to the government and citizens - that citizens no longer recognise the government as appointed by God. As the book of Romans teaches us: we may not agree with everything that the government tells us to do - it would be a funny thing if we did - but yet we are still to recognise that the powers are ordained by God. Sadly we find it in the local church, when members will not adhere to God's guidance through overseers. And there is rebellion all over the world, no matter where we turn we find it. We find division, we find antagonism wherever we look, and it's strange because the humanist tells us that we live in the most educated time ever, supposedly it's the most civilised society that the world has ever seen - yet this antagonism, this division and rebellion, seems to be rife all over, universally there is a panorama of division.

Now Paul's solution in our little book is found in chapter 1, verse 10 that we looked at many months ago - this is the solution to this problem in the world: 'That in the dispensation of the fullness of times [God] might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him'. That is the answer to all the division that there is in society, and even within the church of Jesus Christ. God's great plan of the ages is that one day, because of the atonement of Christ at the cross, He will bring all things together 'one in Christ'. In other words, God's answer for this problem of rebellion in this sinful world is: regeneration. Regeneration! To be born from above, to be born again of the Spirit of God - and when that happens in the life of a believer there will be spiritual harmony that will mark that child of God. We have looked in these last couple of weeks - and this is our third week - at how that spiritual harmony overflows into the home, into the heart of humanity. When the doors are closed, when no one else is looking but it's just you, the wife, the children, the grandchildren or whoever - but they see you as you really are, and it's then that this great Christian faith kicks in. It's then that it becomes different than all the other religions in the world and the impact of the Christian family, as we have been looking at, cannot be underestimated. Indeed, we learnt in chapter 5 - the theme of this chapter being the fullness of the Spirit, that great subject - that it is when the wife is filled with the Spirit that she will be submissive to her husband. We learnt last week that when the husband is filled with the Spirit he will love his wife and submit to the love of Christ - as Christ loved the church he will love her! As the couple - one person - are united together in matrimony, that couple will submit to the lordship of Christ in their marriage together.

Now we come to the Christian child. Paul again comes with the same theme: Christian children, they submit to the authority of their parents. Verse 4 is the last verse in a series of verses in a passage that begins in verse 21 of chapter 5 - remember that the divisions that we have in the New Testament and throughout the Bible were added by men, they are not inspired of the Spirit of God, and some of them, as we've said before, are put in good places and others of them are not put in such good places. This is one of them, because Paul's train of thought is started in verse 21 of chapter 5: 'Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God' - and then we have all the relationships: the wife to the husband, the husband to the wife, chapter 6 now we have children to their parents. And Paul's train of thought is this - and if we miss this, we miss everything - that the key to the Christian life, the key to the church of Jesus Christ, and the key to a harmonious home is the fullness of the Spirit of Almighty God. Therefore, if it is a Spirit-filled home, children will obey their parents in the Lord for this is right.

Now we'll begin looking at God's will for children from this passage. Your first point on your study sheet: God's will - what is God's word to the children? Often people think that God has nothing to say to the children, but when you look into the Old Testament and indeed look at the prophet Samuel, it was only a child that God could speak to at that time. It's good to see some of the young people out, but this doesn't just apply to children, it applies to all of us who are children by the flesh. We may be grown up, but we are still someone's children and that relationship always goes on until our parents pass away and we go to glory. But here we have God's word to the children.
Now I want you to notice this first of all: that Paul is, himself, admonishing children in the assembly at Ephesus. Now that is so important - he is speaking through this letter to children who are in the assembly, listening to his letter as it is being read out. That's refreshing, isn't it? That the boys and the girls came to church, they went to worship with their family, they came to be with the people of God, they weren't segregated - it's important to have Sunday School and children's meetings, but it's also important that children are brought into the body of the church and listen to the word of God, for that's how many of them have got saved. There they were, the children meeting with the church, the families attending public worship together, and Paul addresses the children first. Isn't that strange? Well, it's not really strange because he addresses the wives first, he addresses the children first and he addresses the slaves first in the next passage. What he is doing is - as we have learnt in the last few weeks - that societies values are being turned on their head by the church of Jesus Christ!

What does Paul say to the children? The first thing on your sheet is this: he says that God's will is that they be obedient to parents. 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right' - obey! In the Greek language that word literally means 'to hear under', to hear under. It's not: 'Listen to me!' - you know the way sometimes you lose your temper - 'Listen to me!', that's not what he's talking about. But he's talking about, in a child, an ear that is listening and willing to obey. Not being forced, but a willingness to listen. The verb is in the present imperative tense, which means this: it's continuous. This is an obedience that continues right throughout life, right throughout every decision that a child makes, it is to be in obedience to the godly wisdom of the parent. Now, it's a stronger word than 'wives obey your husbands', because it's a word that implies it is implicit - you must do this. You don't discuss it, like a husband and a wife would reason together about a decision that they are about to make and then the wife must adhere to the husband's final decision over it all, this is different - the child must implicitly obey their parent. Paul is saying first of all, with regards to obedience to parents, that it is a fundamental duty of all children to obey their parents - whether they're Christians or not makes no difference, because the child-parent relationship is ordained of God over all mankind, and this continual obedience must be seen!

Now there's a modifying factor to all this that motivates that obedience in relation to the church of Jesus Christ at Ephesus. And although this is something that relates to all humanity, whether they're saved or unsaved, Paul now begins to narrow this down to the Christian child and the Christian parent. The second thing Paul desires for these children, and it is God's desire for them, is: fellowship with the Lord. 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord' - and what that means is simply what it means for husband to love a wife as the Lord loved the church: it's 'as unto'. Do all things to the glory of God - and what Paul is saying to the children is: 'You're to obey your parents, or your father specifically, unto the Lord'.

Now turn with me to Colossians chapter 3, just over a few pages, and verse 20. And we get again an amplification of this thought from Paul, Colossians 3:20: 'Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord' - so in Ephesians he says 'as unto the Lord', in Colossians 'for it is well pleasing unto the Lord'. So children who obey godly parents are obeying the Lord - and that's the way children ought to see it, as pleasing the Lord. And it's a thing about attitude, and this is what is so important within the book of Ephesians: it's not just the outward appearance, it is the attitude of the heart and the mind that makes the difference before God. It's not like the wee boy whose teacher sent him into the corner of the room to sit down, but he said to himself: 'I'm sitting down on the outside, but I'm standing up on the inside'. That's sometimes how we obey God - outwardly - but the attitude within us has failed to be submissive to the lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. This is attitude that Paul is talking about, and he is saying: 'Yes, Christians are not released from normal obligations of life' - that parent-child relationship that is across the whole earth, they're not released from that because they're saved. Indeed, we go a step further, if anything the regeneration makes them, or ought to make them, better children within the home. That is God's will for the children. Now, it is not God's will that they obey their parents in sinfulness, because that that would not be 'as unto the Lord'. They're not to obey in sin, but they're to obey the Lord and suffer the consequences - even
if it means to go against their parent's wishes, if they want them to do something sinful, and obey the Lord rather than obeying men. So, they are to obey parents, they are to obey parents 'as unto the Lord'.

Thirdly, Paul shows us that this is a natural righteousness. He says: 'for this is right'. You may think that's obvious for him to say such a thing, but what is he getting at? Well this is the first feature of motivation: why children should obey their parents - 'for it is right'. What Paul is saying is: it's a natural thing, it's built-in in the law of nature, it's ordained of God in creation and this proves the rightness of the action, this proves that it is right to obey parents. The parent brought the child into the world, and that's the natural order, that surely the one that brought the child into the world should be obeyed by the one who has been brought into the world. We see that even in the animal kingdom, it testifies to that natural order of authority and submission. Those who are immature, impulsive and inexperienced should submit to the authority of their parents who are older, wiser and experienced. But sadly, we would be blind in our world today not to see that that is not so - and I do not speak about the church, I speak about the world. We could spend all night speaking about the church, but as we look into the world we see that that fellowship, that natural relationship between a parent and a child is breaking down - and we can see the breaking down of civilisation because of that!

As Warren Wiersbe said: 'The modern version of Ephesians 6 verse 1 is this: 'Parents obey your children, for this will keep them happy and bring peace to the home' - and I add a postscript to that: '...and keep you out of the law courts'! That's reality today, isn't it? Children are taking their parents to court! And this natural rightness that we find here - our third point - it's starting to break down, but that is Paul's first reason why we obey our parents as unto the Lord, because in creation it is naturally right.

Now fourthly, he goes a step further. The second reason why you obey your parents is because it's scripturally right. There is a scriptural adherence, and he quotes from Exodus 20 and verse 12 - from the 10 commandments - and also Deuteronomy 5:16: 'Honour thy father and thy mother'. I think it's interesting that Paul appeals to their knowledge of the law - don't forget he's speaking to the children here, and he quotes this as if they know what it is - and I believe they knew what it was! These children in Ephesus knew what Paul was quoting when he said: 'Honour thy father and thy mother' - they knew, I believe, he was quoting the law of God. Now, although the New Testament teaches us that we are not under the law but under grace, this shows us that the righteousness of the law is still the revelation of God's holiness - that has not changed. We can't scrumple the law up and throw it in the bin because we've entered into grace, but the law is still God's revelation of His holiness. We still can't approach it, except live by it by the Spirit of God - and that's important, what they could not do without the Spirit we can do with the Spirit. And Paul is saying that, he is reinforcing that the Lord is important for believers by saying: 'Children, honour thy father and thy mother'. Paul said that in Romans 8:4, that we are to live, as Christians, the law of God by the Spirit of God - he says: 'That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit'. If you and I are walking after the Spirit, the power of God's resurrected Christ is in us to live the law of God!

All the 10 commandments are given forth in the New Testament scriptures, and indeed this commandment: 'Honour thy father and thy mother' was quoted by the Lord Jesus Himself. That shows us that the New Testament believer is to observe these 10 commandments - the only one that is not mentioned is: 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy'. And it's wrong for a New Testament Christian, just the same as an Old Testament believer, to fail to honour their father and their mother. Let's not lose that, we are not under law but grace, but this is still God's standard of holiness and it is still sin to not honour them in our hearts. 'Honour thy father and thy mother' - that word 'honour' literally means 'to estimate' or 'to fix value upon'. That paints a beautiful picture, doesn't it, of honouring father and mother: to value them, to estimate them of high esteem, that's honouring in the truest sense! This honour is the inward attitude leading to the outward obedience of obeying your parents as unto the Lord. It's not just an obedience, but it's an obedience that comes from a deep love, a deep desire and respect and honour to obey your parents. I believe that that
honour goes on right throughout life, I believe it goes into adulthood - when they need you the way that you needed them, that you're there for them and you love them as they loved you.

So, there it is: 'Honour thy father and thy mother' - it's a scriptural adherence. It's not just something natural in nature or in society, but it is something that God has commanded the child of God to follow. Fifthly he tells the children: it is good to obey this will of God because it has resultant blessing. He says the third motivation is because it's for your best interest: 'Honour thy father and thy mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth'. It has a blessing, if children obey their parents as obeying the Lord it will bless them, it's in their best interest to do it! Now notice that the promise that's given here is only the outcome of obeying your parents, it's not the main reason for doing it - the main reason for doing it is that God has commanded it, that's the important thing, because it is right! But if you do what is right - in all things - God will bless you for it. Now you can note this in a general sense if you think about it for a minute - and it's not too hard to think about this - of a child who receives no instruction and no correction from his parents, and that's what we're living in today: children who get no direction in life, no moral perspective or outlook at all.

Think of the implications of that! William McDonald says: 'That child would be personally miserable and socially intolerable'. I can't remember who it was, it's only coming to my mind now, but someone told me this week of an undertaker who buried, last week, seven suicides of young men. Seven. We live in a socially miserable generation, and we live with socially intolerable children - you have to sit on some of them in the children's meeting to make them behave, because in life they haven't been given any direction, they haven't received correction or instruction! And we can see it on a national scale, that the abortion of the family has had it's reaping - and we are seeing the results of the family unit being demolished by government, by state, by religious, established churches and everything! 'It will be well with thee', if you obey your parents, and it will not be well if you disobey.

The fourth motivation and the second blessing that comes from obeying your parents is found in the commandment itself, for the commandment is said to be the first of promise. Exodus 20 verse 12: '...that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee'. Now that's a bit different, if you look at it in verse 3, with what Paul says. Moses says, '...that thou mayest live long on the land' - verse three, Paul says: '...live long on the earth'. He changes the word 'land' to 'earth', because in the book of Exodus the promise was given, to the children of Israel who were wanting to enter the promised land, by God that they would live long literally in that land if they obeyed their father and their mother. But we live in the church age today and that doesn't apply to us, and Paul knows that so he brings in the earth and he makes this a more general promise - but yet still there is the blessing there that, if we obey, we shall be blessed.

What Paul is saying is not that we'll inherit the land, or even the earth, but he is saying this promotes a full life. 'That thou mayest live long on the earth' - in the Old Testament it was literally living long, but now it's something else. Sure you know, and I know, that obedience does not result in longevity - a good son can die young. And because a son or a daughter dies young does not mean that they have died because of disobedience to their parents, but this is what I want you to see: this is a principle, it's not an absolute black and white guarantee, but it's a principle - and the principal here is this: when children obey their parents in the Lord they will escape a great deal of sin and danger, and therefore avoid the things that will threaten to shorten their lives.

If you train up a child in the way that he should go, he'll not go to the pubs, God willing he'll not go to the clubs - but hopefully, hopefully he will go to the church of Jesus Christ, he will be brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord and he will not come across the dangers that this world presents. That is the principle that Paul is writing down here from the Spirit of God, it's true in a general sense that a life of discipline and obedience to God's word and to your father and your mother - who are godly and trying to instruct you and
admonish you in the ways of the Lord - will be conducive to health and long life. But if you rebel, if you're reckless you're in danger of premature death! As Matthew Henry put it: 'This gospel that we preach has its temporal blessings as well as its spiritual' - isn't that right? It's not all about 'pie in the sky when you die', it affects your life now! It is abundant life that God wants to give now, and if we live according to His precepts - this isn't 'health and wealth gospel', but it's the commandment of promise that we will have certain blessings that you cannot have if you're in the world.

Life is not only measured by the quantity of time, and I believe that's not what Paul is meaning here, but rather the quality of experience - that if you want to have true life that obedience to parents, children, will bring enrichment no matter how long your life is, for it will embellish your character traits. If you go with friends to the world and do all the things that the world are doing, you will become a little bit like them - if not all the way. You will form habits if you disobey your parents that will destroy your life! Your character and your personality will change, maybe even the spouse that you meet and marry will change your whole future because you disobey your parents - and the whole point is this: sin robs us! And it robs children who are not obedient to their parents.

The awful condition of children today in our world, I believe largely, is a direct result of rejecting God's word. We don't have time to look at these passages, but in Romans 1 and in 2 Timothy 3 we find that disobedience to parents is a characteristic of the last days that we are living in today. And if you look at those two passages of Scripture you will find [that] the sins that are surrounding disobedience to parents are heinous abominations that you could hardly imagine, or would want to think about! But smack, right in the middle, is disobedience to parents. That shows you how serious it is in the eyes of God, and it tells me this: that by nature a child is totally and utterly depraved. A child is a sinner that needs to be saved by the grace and the blood of Christ, and therefore every single child needs to be instructed by their parents, and the church of Jesus Christ needs to tell them how to be saved.

That is God's will for children: that they obey their parents, that they are in the Lord and obey them as the Lord for it is right, for it is said 'Honour thy father and thy mother, and so it will be well with thee'. But what is God's will for parents? That's what we find in verse 4, he says: 'And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord' - God's will for parents. Paul is telling us this: that if children are left to themselves they'll become rebels. Now a lot of people would say: 'Boy, he's harsh' - you see that's the truth, isn't it? In fact, if any of us are left to ourselves we'll be rebels, if we're not arrested by the grace of God along life's road and converted by His Son, we're servants to sin and slaves to our body and fleshly desires - isn't that right? The wee children are no different if they are left without instruction, this is why Paul tells parents in verse 4: train them, instruct them!

And sadly, as we read the word of God, the Bible records unholy results of men who did not instruct their children and didn't train them. We read of David who neglected Absalom, and then we find later that he pampered Absalom, and later we find a dead Absalom! And no matter how David wept over him, it wouldn't bring him back. He set a bad example and the result was death after Absalom himself had rebelled against his own father. Then you find Eli, don't you? And he failed to discipline his sons, it says in the word of God that he brought disgrace and defeat to Israel. God said, listen, I quote: 'His sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not'. God cursed the land because of it. You read of Isaac, he pampered Esau - and his wife, she showed favouritism to Jacob - and the result was a divided home and a divided nation. And then Jacob, who had been shown favouritism, he was partial over Joseph - remember, he gave him a coat of many colours! And God had to rescue Joseph from a pit because of that favouritism, and God had to take him to Egypt, and God had to make a man out of Joseph!

Instructions and responsibilities are now balanced, and here we have an instruction to the father. It's interesting, look at verse 4, he speaks specifically to the father because the father is the supreme head - God-
given head - of the home. Now what Paul says to fathers is unusual in his day - what he said to children was not unusual, that's the way children were meant to behave in the world in which we are reading here - but this that he says to the parents is very, very strange. The first thing he says is this: do not provoke - '...ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath'. You see, in Paul's day the father was supreme, and when a baby was born the baby was brought before the father and it was set before him, and if the father picked the baby up the baby was accepted into the family, and if the father didn't pick the baby up - believe it or not - it was rejected, it was either sold or given away, and in some cases the baby was taken, set outside the door, the door closed, and the baby would freeze to death in the exposure. Now that was legal! That was the world that Paul is writing to, so you can imagine the impact of it when he tells fathers not to provoke their children! This is a new thing, it's new to this world that the child's feelings should be considered at all!

What Paul is saying again - as he already says with regards to authority, with regards to the authority between wives and husbands, and now children and parents - is this: don't abuse it, fathers. That's what he's saying: 'Provoke not your children to wrath' - don't abuse the authority I've given you, don't use the authority over your children to abuse them. What is to be done is the opposite, you find it in Colossians 3:21: 'Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged'. You see, if you provoke them they'll be discouraged, but that's not what Paul's asking us to do. Paul's saying: 'Don't provoke them, and therefore they will be encouraged'! So many children need encouragement in our world, and the reason - I believe - why Paul addresses the father specifically here is because he is the one who's probably prone to provoke the children more than the mother. Isn't that true?

The word for 'provoke' in Greek means 'exasperate', it means to incite or to frustrate. If you think about it for a moment: what frustrates children? I'll tell you what frustrates them: unreasonable demands, undue harshness, constant nagging. As Montgomery Boice put it: 'Goading their children into a state of perpetual resentment' - how many children have you seen like that? How many children have been sinfully driven from the side of the Lord by a harsh, legalistic tyrant who calls themselves a father? Perhaps it's their way of bolstering their weak ego and their lack of achievements in their life, so they belittle or lord it over their children like a mini-Hitler, to show that they have power, to show that they have strength - and many fathers have an insatiable desire to dominate, because in life they are nobodies in a man's world, so in their family they have to tread their children into the dirt!

That's why, in many homes, we have children with very low self-esteem. Some would say that you hear too much about self-esteem today, and that is true - but you know, Paul writes about self-esteem because he tells husbands to love their wives as they love themselves, as they love their own body. He doesn't tell them to hate their own body, or to hate themselves - if they're going to love their wife they have to love themselves to a certain extent, not in a sinful way. And the child must be loved, the child must know encouragement and self-esteem, they can't have a lack of worth. You provoke a child by saying one thing and doing another - you know what they're like, they can see through you right away, can't they? You provoke a child by blaming and never praising them, by an inconsistent, unfair approach in discipline, by maybe showing favouritism to one child over the other, by making a promise to them and not keeping it, by making light of their problems that they see as very, very great. And, oh, as I look at this I say to myself: 'Boy, how do parents need to be filled with the Holy Spirit to be able to do that'! But you see, that's it - they need to be filled to do it.

Secondly, Paul tells them: don't provoke, but nourish. The word in the Greek for 'nourish' literally means 'to bring up' - or sorry, he says 'nurture' but I have put it down as 'nourish', because that's what it means 'to bring up'. Indeed in Ephesians 5:29 the exact same Greek word is translated 'nourish'. Calvin translated it 'kindly cherish' - you're to kindly cherish the children. Now 'nourish' conjures up in our mind the idea of providing food and shelter and clothing, and that's included and it still is God's ordained responsibility for the husband to provide for the home. But you know, it means more than that, it's talking emotionally and spiritually - that
the husband is to nourish the children by sharing love and encouragement, and the love of God and the word of God. You remember the Lord Jesus Christ as a little boy, it was said in Luke 2:52: ‘...and Jesus increased in wisdom, stature, favour with God and with man’ - that was balanced growth if there was any! It was growth intellectually - He increased in wisdom. It was growth physically - He increased in stature. Spiritually - in favour with God. And socially - in favour with man. Let me tell you this: that our Lord Jesus Christ received the greater deal of that in the home, with a holy mother, and a holy earthly father, and His heavenly Father.

Let me say this: nowhere in the word of God is the upbringing of our children assigned to outside the family unit - nowhere! Many today in this world, in this express world that we live in, give their children to be brought up by strangers who they don't even know, who look after them while their parents go out, perhaps, to work and they don't need to work. They're high-flying, they're earning thousands or they're climbing the ladder, and their family is suffering because of it! I heard of a toddler being taught yoga by the child minder of a believer! We dare not let the world bring up our children, we are to nourish them and cherish them.

Thirdly, we are to discipline them. The word 'nurture' that you have is quite a weak translation, if I can say that, for a stronger translation is 'chasten'. It means instruction, and indeed in Hebrews 12 - you know the passage about disciples, the Lord's children, being chastened - it's exactly the same word. It's the idea of learning through discipline, and it's talking about correction that may be verbal, or indeed corporal. Now, we're getting onto a thorny issue here - for today some psychologists and educators, and children's workers and social workers oppose any corporal punishment at all. They see it as an archaic philosophy of punishment that's outdated, we have evolved beyond that in our mental state and physically speaking. The cry is: 'Let them express themselves! Let them do as they wish! If you discipline them, if you punish them, it will suppress their personalities and perhaps warp their characters' - and sadly even some Christians today now have swallowed this belief that their children will grow up scarred if they are punished.

Well, children are expressing themselves alright. I'm well aware of the backdrop of child abuse in this evil world, and indeed of parents who have taken this principle to Satanic extremes of abuse - but again, let us say this: beware that we do not opt for a knee-jerk reaction! We must beware that we don't throw the baby of biblical corporal punishment out with the bath water of brutality! You see, this is what the church does at times - because the world, or some evil people in the world, go in a certain direction we forget about the whole thing entirely! Now, let me say this, and let me be clear: that a heavy-handed approach to child discipline is forbidden by the word of God. 'Provoke not thy children to wrath' covers it; 'Love them not in anger', lest you injure the body or lest you injure the spirit and they turn away from you or turn away from God.

We're not talking about flying off the handle - and I support any efforts to eradicate such sinful behaviour - but to ban smacking is unbiblical, it is a denial of the word of God and those who ban it will reap what they sow in rebellious children. That's what you find within the word of God, and let me say this: you hear some comparisons of what smacking is like, and I want to say that it's like comparing extracting a rotten tooth with grievous bodily harm! Isn't it? To say that this is physical abuse? And let me go a further step: to say that this is wrong is to accuse God of sin! Now beware, for in Hebrews 12 verse 6 it says this: 'For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth'. Proverbs 13:24: 'He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes'. Is God wrong? Let's discuss this a minute (only I'm going to be the only one speaking, that's the only thing!). Let's think about it: is God wrong, is He? Why do we have to upstage God? Why do we always have to make a better idea? Now I'm not talking about using a cannon to squash a flea or anything like that - Evangelist Brady Wilson said of his mother that she had an old razor strap which hung on a nail in the kitchen and under it was the sign: 'I Need Thee Every Hour' - that's not what I'm talking about. In fact an over use of discipline will be useless at all, won't it? It'll lose the whole impact of the thing! And I'm not saying that if you discipline your child you'll have a model
Christian or a model citizen on the earth, I'm not saying if your child has failed that you didn't do anything right - but what I'm saying here is: in the word of God there's a principle and it means this: if you want to give your child the greatest opportunity of development in every area of life, like the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, you'll discipline!

Speaking of disciplining your children, Susannah Wesley - the mother of 17 children, including John and Charles - said this: 'The parent who studies to subdue self-will', studying to subdue self-will, 'in his child works together with God in renewing and the saving of his soul. The parents who indulges it does the Devil's work, makes religion impractical, salvation unattainable, and does all that in him lies to damn his child, soul and body, forever'.

Fourthly he says 'instruct'. The word is 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord' - and that word 'admonition', as we finish, simply means 'to instruct', 'to encourage'. And the book of Proverbs is full of it, isn't it? It is a picture of a father, encouraging, sharing wise counsel with his own son. That is simply saying this: we must instruct our children! If we don't teach them the world's going to teach them, and - oh - how the world wants to get them! And oh, how the devil is out for the family today! He wants the home.

But here, as we end, is the instruction of God to us. Deuteronomy 6:7: 'Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up'. Now listen, this is the question: do we teach our children the word of God and do we talk to them about it? As Matthew Henry said: 'Instruct them to fear sinning. Inform them of and excite them to the whole of their duties toward God'. It'll not give you the perfect child, but it will give them the greatest opportunity of living a godly life in a sinful world.

Our Father, we are so conscious in a sinful world that even holy things are made to look sinful. We are conscious also, our God, that it is difficult in our day to live holy and godly in Christ Jesus. It is difficult to be a parent, it is difficult to be a child - but Lord, we thank Thee for the Spirit of God, and we pray that we may be filled by Him so that we may be able to walk by the Spirit and not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. We pray Lord, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that You would make our homes holy places where Christ is exalted, and where the light of the Gospel can be seen in changed and holy lives. For we pray these things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.
Ephesians 6, and we're coming this evening to the end of our passage, and let me remind you that - as we often say - the chapter outlines and verses that we have in all the English versions of the Bible, it's important to note this: that the Bible was not written in English, the Bible was written in Greek, ancient Greek, biblical Greek. Therefore these outlines that we have of verses and chapters are there to help us - it would be a hard job, wouldn't it, to find passages and verses without them, and thank God for the men that devised them - but sometimes (and we must remember that it was men that devised them) they are devised incorrectly with the gist of the passage. We found that in chapter 5, that there is a passage that begins in verse 21 of chapter 5, and it doesn't end until verse 9 in chapter 6. So the chapter division is a little bit misleading - it's important to note that.

So, we are finishing what has been a sequence of verses from verse 21, right down to verse 9 of chapter 6. The topic and the theme is found in verse 21 of chapter 5: 'Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God'. So, we've looked at wives, who have to submit to their husbands. We've looked at children, who must submit to their parents. We are looking now at slaves, or servants, who must submit to their masters. So, there is the theme, and we're carrying it out again this evening in the will of God.

Let's read from verse 5 of chapter 6, through to verse 9: "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him".

Now we enter, as I have already said, the third and the final sphere of this theme that Paul gives us, of submission. Here we have the submission of servants to masters, or to put it into our modern language: the submission of employees to employers. Now it's natural that, as Paul deals in chapter 5 and chapter 6 with the Christian household, that he should include this relationship between the servant and the master - because, in the ancient world, that relationship was incorporated within the home. Every house, almost, was affected by the master-slave relationship. It is estimated that there were 60 million slaves in the Roman
Empire as a whole - 60 million! That is a third of the population of each of the largest cities within the Roman Empire, including Rome, Corinth, and the city that we're reading about tonight: the city of Ephesus. One-third of those populations were made up of slaves! There would have been masters as well in Ephesus, as well as those slaves, so you can see the relevance of what Paul is writing to this church in Ephesus.

We read in the New Testament of Philemon who was a master, he was in Colossae, within the Colossian Church, and he was a master - his slave was Onesimus. Most of the people that Paul is writing to were either slaves at the moment he was writing to them, or they had been slaves, they were ex-slaves now - or as the Bible calls them: freed men. Most of them at one point had been in that master-slave relationship. Now, it's important for us at the beginning of this study, as an introduction, to understand what New Testament slavery really was. To understand this passage of scripture we must move away, and clear away, some misconceptions that people have had.

Many think that New Testament slavery was open to extreme exploitation - that slaves were mistreated, and great violence was done to them - that is simply not true as you read the New Testament and read historical records. There was the teaching, however, of Aristotle who believed that a slave was merely a tool, that he or she was an inanimate object, a thing, that could be used by their master for a desired end. Indeed, Roman law, to a certain extent, enforced that by saying that a slave was not a person, a slave was a thing to be owned, to be bought, and - if need be - to be sold. He was not a legal person in the eyes of Roman law, and because of that some slaves were mistreated, but it wasn't a general rule within the Roman Empire. Some who were mistreated was the slave of Augustus - we read in historical writs about him: he was crucified because he killed a pet quail! His master crucified him.

There were other mistreatments of slaves, and because of that we read about a slave rebellion started by Spartacus - and maybe you've seen the film all about how the slaves rose up out of their mistreatment, their maltreatment, and rose up for their rights. But let me say this: that conception of slavehood is pre-Christian. Spartacus was before the birth of Christ, and all this maltreatment and mistreatment of slaves was before our Lord Jesus Christ was born, and certainly was before the epistle that we read before us. Slavery changed greatly within that period, and by now - the period in which we are reading, the book of Ephesians - things had changed magnanimously. Under the Romans most slaves now could hope to be free before old-age. In fact, in Augustus Caesar's time he had to curb the releasing of slaves simply because too many owners were releasing them! Indeed we learn that 50% of all slaves in the Roman Empire at this time were released before they were 30 years of age, they were given their freedom. If, perhaps, a slave decided to stay with their master, he had the liberty of, in fact, owning his own property, and he himself - if he wished - could have his own slaves! He could even invest money in property, or land. He could sell that property, and Roman law said he could buy his own freedom back.

So, you see how this slavery is, perhaps, not as we conceived. Some might say: 'Well, there was still social class distinction' - well, to a certain extent there was, but generally speaking there was no social class distinction between slaves. In fact, slaves regularly were given the same social class as their master - so if their master was upper-class, his slave was upper-class also. Indeed, we read that he often dressed in the same way as his master, and if you were walking down the street you would hardly be able to tell the difference between slave and master - they were put in the one class distinction. In fact, some slaves even sold themselves that they might obtain Roman citizenship.

So, we cannot make the mistake - and this is what often people do - of comparing Roman slaves with the slaves that, perhaps, we had hundreds of years ago in the United Kingdom, or indeed with the slaves in the past century that has gone by - African American slaves in the United States of America. You cannot compare the two together, because slavery - believe it or not - in this particular age that we're reading of within the New Testament, was much more humane and much more civilised. Now the Bible is attacked all
the time, isn't it? Every chance that every man, or scholar, or theologian - liberal - can get, they attack the word of God and try to tear it apart. This is one of the ways in which the word of God has been attacked: it is condemned because it does not condemn slavery anywhere within the word of God. Although the thrust of the gospel message is against everything, and every philosophy, that hides behind the precept of slavery, still men come out and say: 'Well, the Bible doesn't condemn it'. In fact, believers are described as being the slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, we must notice - believers - first of all, that every single place where the gospel message has penetrated, and the Spirit of God has moved, slavery has disappeared and the abuse of slaves has gone. Not by revolution of morals, but rather by reformation, spiritually speaking. Now, to the Bible's accusers I would say this: in this passage that we have read, from verse 21 of chapter 5 right through to now verse 9 of chapter 6, both the marriage relationship and the parent-child relationship are said to be instituted by God. Isn't that right? God instituted both of them, but He doesn't institute slavery. Look at the passage, it is not there - we must note that tonight as we study this passage. There are four other things that I want to share with you tonight, for any who would accuse the word of God of being with double standards here, and ask the question: 'Why does the word of God not condemn slavery?'.

First of all: the word of God here does not condemn it because there were positive reforms in action, in Roman government at this time, reforming slavery. In other words: it was already happening! So why would the Bible condemn, or even suggest, social changes when those social changes were already taking place? Secondly: the practice of slaves and masters in society in general, with both the masters and the slaves, was not considered evil - it was considered the norm. Thirdly: the condemnation of slavery would have brought the economic structure of this present society down around the people's ears! This is the way society was ran, with masters and slaves. If Christianity had begun to condemn slavery - knowing right well that the positive mechanisms to reform slavery were already coming in in government, knowing well that the gospel message would penetrate these people and change their views of slavery - the Christians would have been seen to be economically subversive. Masters would have been launched into poverty, and servants would have been begging bread - that is not a message that would commend Christ to anyone, is it? But fourthly, and most importantly, and foundationally: the brotherhood of Christianity would eventually exterminate slavery. The fact, as Paul has been saying within this epistle, we are all one in Christ - there is no longer any bond or free - and once that great revolutionary, converting, regenerating message would penetrate the hearts and minds of unbelievers and convert them, there would be a massive change in society that would mean that slavery would go beyond the pale. The Gospel - hallelujah! - the gospel eventually would deal a deadly blow to slavery!

I hope that gives you your answer. The answer is simply this, 1 Corinthians chapter 1 - Paul's message, and subsequently our message, is the Gospel. '[I came] not to baptise' - not that baptism is wrong, but that was not his primary goal, his primary goal was that he would preach the gospel, preach the cross - and that's what we must do today. Ultimately it was that preaching of the gospel that led to the downfall of slavery. It wasn't his chief end to pull down slavery in society, it wasn't Paul's chief end to reform the Roman Empire - but I'll tell you this much: just as Wesley and Whitefield in their preaching resulted in the abolition of slavery in the United Kingdom, the abolition of child labour, and the elevation of women, and the care of the needy, the gospel message is revolutionary and reformatory to all society! We must grasp this, and this is what enthuses me as I study these verses of Scripture: that in the home, in the marriage relationship, in the child-parent relationship, in the school relationship, within the church of Jesus Christ, wherever we live our lives, and even in the workplace, the gospel of Jesus Christ and the message of the word of God turns everything upside-down!

We must note that in no sense does Paul confuse a 'social system gospel' with the spiritual order of the church of Jesus Christ. We do not believe in a social gospel, but there are certain things that are required of
us as believers, the way we ought to live: in charity towards the poor and so on, that we read within the New Testament. But the crux of the matter is this: if you preach the gospel in the spirit of the word of God, and the Spirit of God, those effects will come into being! So then, to understand slavery is not just to disprove the Bible's critics, but as we come to study this topic it also brings the importance of understanding the parallels that there are between the slave-master relationship, and between the relationships that we work in employment today, between the boss and the employee. It's so enthusing - isn't it? - to realise that this message directly applies to you and me today.

So, let's look at what Paul says first. First of all he talks to Christian servants, and he tells them: 'Christian servants, obey!'. Verse 5: 'Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh' - now the word for 'servant' there is the word: 'bond slave'. But this principle applies to more than just slaves, it applies to all - as I have already said - in the servant/employee relationship. Although, as we have said, the New Testament doesn't condemn slavery, it says more than that - because it speaks first of all to the slaves! Now, we noted this last week, when he's talking in the marriage relationship who does he talk to first? Wives, those who are to submit. When he talks about the parent-child relationship who does he address first? The children, those who are to submit. And now, as he comes to the slaves in this society that he is living in and writing to, although the Bible doesn't condemn slavery, he gives them the respect and the honour to address the slaves first - those who are to be submissive.

It thrills me, you know, to think that the Bible has more to say to slaves than it has to masters and to kings. I believe the reason for that, Paul tells us, again in 1 Corinthians 1:26: '...not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called' - and in fact, if we were to be honest and look at it carefully, most Christians are probably found in the lower socio-economic brackets of this world. Again - here we go again - the Bible, and the word of God, and the Spirit of God, is turning upside-down the value system, the status system, of this old world! So he addresses slaves first - those who are lowest in the eyes of the world, yet those who cost the blood of Christ to buy to Himself for His own purchased possession.

These instructions are effective - let me say that. If you put these into your life they will make a difference in your work relationship, because in the first century - what we're reading about here - they made a great difference in the early church of Christianity. We learn from historical books that Christian slaves were a higher price than heathen slaves! Why? Because they were better slaves! Why? Because they were carrying out the directive from the Spirit of God that we find within the word of God here - and surely that must be the case? That we as employees, or employers, should be a better employee or a better employer - why? Because we have tasted of the grace of God, and we have got the life of the Lord Jesus Christ within us. You can see that, if you wish, if you read the book of Philemon. Onesimus ran away from his master - Onesimus the slave running from his master Philemon - and he came across Paul. He was converted by the grace of God, Paul sent him back, because Paul was inferring that if you are now a converted slave, you must be a better slave! You know the story, he went back - and here was Paul's injunction upon the master: 'You must treat Onesimus, now, as if you were receiving me'.

We will see the relevance of that as we go down this passage, and later look at God's directive to masters. But what Paul is saying, as we look at the slave, is this: as a Christian our standard always - young people, listen to this now - must be higher than the world's! Always! It's got to make the difference, it's got to be God's standard of holiness. Paul talks about that in relation to these slaves. First of all: in respect. Look at your first point: Christian servants ought to obey respectfully, verse 5: 'Be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ'. First of all: 'obey your masters according to the flesh' - now, that means this in the worldly sense, the employer has the jurisdiction in the physical and in the mental realm over the employee. In other words, your boss has jurisdiction over you! Paul is not saying that because you're now a Christian all those social relationships just come down - it's not the Sixties liberation, you know what I'm talking about, of burning certain things to be
liberated of everything! That is not what the liberty that we have in Christ is - yet there is still that fleshly relationship between the employer and the employee, but what Paul is saying here is this: it is according to the flesh, and although he has jurisdiction over you physically and mentally, he cannot dictate to you with regards to the spiritual realm.

The employer cannot order the conscience, he cannot tell you what to believe and what not to believe, he cannot tell you how to carry out your religious convictions at all! He has no jurisdiction there, because he is the master according to the flesh. Therefore, even though he is according to the flesh, Paul still says - verse 5, look at it, that we are to obey him: 'with fear and trembling'. Now that's not a servile fear, an abject terror of shaking in your boots, it's not: 'Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full sir' - that's not what Paul is trying to say. It's a dutiful respect, it's honour for a boss, or for a master, of his position and his authority - and it should be a fear, not a shaking in your boots, but a reverent respect of honouring that position of the employer.

You see, what brings this home - and the fact that it does relate to the Christian home in the first century - is the fact that many slaves lived in the family home. Now you can imagine the friction, at times, that must have caused - for the slave and the master to live together - and even, from the perspective of the slave, the familiarity that bred contempt for his master. Imagine living with your boss every hour of the day! That's what we're talking about here - and there could enter into the heart of even a Christian slave some resentment, even an inward sarcastic resentment that said: 'Whenever I get a chance to get one over you, I will get one over you!'. The likelihood was, inferred I believe by Paul, that some disobedient slaves had brought shame to the name and the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ because of their disrespect towards their master. Indeed that's why, I believe, Paul wrote to Timothy and instructed him and exhorted him to tell all the slaves in his congregation, 1 Timothy 6:1: 'Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed'.

Now that may easily be seen - in the case of a Christian slave and an unbelieving master - how the testimony of the Lord could be dragged down if a Christian slave does not honour Christ in the face of an unbeliever, and witness to him through his life. But can you imagine, now, taking it a step further - how this can be intensified if the slave is a believer and the master is a believer? Now, you know what I'm talking about, because sometimes within the work relationship the resentment can become greater when there is that spiritual relationship of the Christian brotherhood, if it is used in the wrong way. Think about this: perhaps the slave, in the assembly, is a teacher and an elder - and perhaps the master, in the assembly, is just a member. And when they come into this work relationship there is a resentment because of their capacity, and their responsibility, in the assembly, and vice versa - and the friction that could be caused there, the problems, the resentment.

Paul has set out how, in the church, barriers are to be broken down - haven't we read that in the book of Ephesians? How there is no longer any wall of partition between any of us, yet Paul is saying here: that is what it is like in the church, but if you are a believer in the workplace you must abide by those instituted relationships of master and servant. You must fit those obligations that the world puts upon you, and you must fit them to the glory of Christ and His name. That is why Paul went on to Timothy in the second verse of chapter 6 of 1 Timothy: 'And they that have believing masters, the relationship between a believing slave and a believing master, 'let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort', Timothy. As one writer put it: 'There can be no place in the Christian employees life for subtle insubordination towards his employer, or for cleverly concealed contempt or sardonic humour' - no place! It must be respect!

Secondly, Christian servants obey conscientiously. Verse 5: '[with] singleness of your heart, as unto Christ'. Now that phrase: 'singleness of heart' is beautiful, and a lot of modern translations have wrecked it by trying to get the meaning across, and they have lost the idiom, have lost the metaphorical description, of what Paul

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is communicating. He is saying 'singleness of heart', he's talking about conscientiousness, putting your eye on the thing and going for the goal. In other words, to put it in contemporary language: 60 minutes work for every hour of pay! That's difficult, isn't it? I would concur with many that the Protestant work ethic - so-called - has died with the Protestant doctrine. The old doctrine is dead and so is the work ethic, it no longer applies. But what Paul is saying here is that you need to be conscientious as a Christian slave, singleness of heart - in other words: sincerity, sincerely, an undivided mind in your work, no ulterior motives or hypocrisy.

You know what it's like when an employee is going to move on in a week or two from now - you know what it's like. Maybe you're a boss, I don't know, but you know that their heart really isn't in the job where they are, sure it's not? It's in the next post, it's in the next place - well, what Paul is talking about is the opposite of that! Singleness of heart - that you are present, body, soul and spirit, as you are working as a slave or as a servant for your employer - that your mind and your heart is there. What is the key to that? How can you do that? I know you're saying in your mind: 'Well, how is that possible?'

Well, here it is, thirdly: it's spiritually possible. That is obedience, as a servant, spiritually - because as Paul says: it is unto Christ. Verse 5: '...as unto Christ' - that's the only way that you can respect your employer, that's the only way that you can be conscientious: by being obedient spiritually.

Now, let's just say this in a digression: that tells me that there can be no distinction between the secular and the spiritual. You can't do it. You can't say: 'This is my business world, or this is my employment world, and this is my Christian world', because Paul just blows it out of the water with what he's just said. Your employment has to be unto Christ, and he is saying this: even in your work, your menial task - whatever it may be - if it is a good work, it can be done for Christ. Now there's a term that is banded about within Christian circles: 'full time service'. Now I know it's an expression of convenience for those who are evangelists, and missionaries, and pastors, and so on - but it's not accurate, it's not scriptural, because Paul is saying here that we are all in full time service for the Lord, for we are all to be working as unto Christ! All that we do should be for the Lord Jesus Christ, it should be to glorify Him, and it should be to win the lost. The lowest task, it may be, becomes a love song of praise to the Lord Jesus when we do it as unto the Lord.

I just finished this over the weekend - a little book - and I would recommend it to all of you. Now I warn you, it's a 17th Century book by a monk - this is before the Reformation, now, so don't be throwing me out because of this! They hadn't any more light than this - a French monk by the name of Brother Lawrence, it is called 'The Practice Of The Presence Of God'. The whole point of the book is that every moment of every day we can know the presence of God in our life if we concentrate on Him, if we shut out every other thought of anything else and just concentrate on Him. But one of the things that Brother Lawrence says within the book - and let me say this: he worked in a kitchen, he peeled potatoes, he cut carrots and brussel sprouts, and boiled them and cooked them, and served the monks. He wasn't any big preacher or anything like that - that was his daily service day-by-day, and he said this much: as he worked in the kitchens, even if he were called to lift a piece of straw from the ground, he would do it for the love of God - and that's how he practised the presence of God: by doing everything unto the Lord.

As unto the Lord! Paul goes on - amplifies it - look at it, verse 6: 'Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers'. That word 'eyeservice' is related to the word 'servant' in verse 5, 'Servants obey your masters' - it's derived from the same word 'eye-service'. What we could translate it like is this: 'eye-slaves'. How many 'eye-slaves' are there in relation to employment? Watching every move of the boss, not slacking when the boss isn't looking - that's not being an 'eye-slave' - remembering that there is an all-seeing Master, there is One who sees everything, all-knowing, all-wise, almighty, and He is always looking!

You remember when you were at school and you were told to do push-ups, the P.E. teacher turned around and you took a breather! Isn't that what we're talking about? I remember in the swimming pool, you had to
do so many widths of the pool. I got halfway, and when he turned his back I went back again! That's what we do, isn't it? 'Eye-slaves' - when that person of authority isn't looking we con them, theoretically, out of work!

William McDonald says this: 'The Christian's standards of performance should not vary according to the geographical location of the foreman' - isn't that right? The Lord has no use - and I say it so often, as we look at many passages of Scripture - He has no place for lazy people! Indeed, that's what the parable of the talents tells us. The servant who did nothing and buried his master's talent in his absence, was told by the Lord: 'Thou wicked and slothful servant'.

But how are they to do it? They are to do it as servants of Christ. Look at verse 6: do it as servants, slaves, of Christ. Verse 7 says as serving the Lord, not men. Verse 8 says it is the Lord that will reward you - it's to be unto the Lord! That's the great need of today, that we work unto the Lord, that we serve the Lord in our workplace. Think of what is possible: it is possible for the housewife to cook a dinner as if the Lord were going to dine with them! It's possible for the teacher to educate children, doctors and nurses to treat patients, solicitors to help clients, accountants to audit books, secretaries to type letters, shop assistants to serve the public, builders to build buildings, dustmen to empty bins, to the glory and to the service of the Lord! It's all to do with attitude, that's the key: if you're doing it as unto the Lord.

It's like the three men that were building a cathedral, and a passer-by asked the first man: 'What are you doing?'. He said: 'I'm chipping stones'. He asked the second man: 'What are you doing?', and he says: 'I'm earning wages'. He said to the third man: 'What are you doing?', and he said: 'I'm building a great cathedral'. You see the difference in attitude? As unto the Lord, and he goes on, verse 6: 'doing the will of God from the heart'. Do we work with a sincere desire to please the Lord? That makes a days work a holy sacrament! An act of sacred worship to go out to your work in the morning, brings untold glory to His name!

Fourthly, he says: do it gladly, obey gladly - 'With good will doing service'. In other words, we shouldn't feel an obligation to do it, any element of 'have to do' within our work, there should be no inward seething of resentment because you have to do your work. But he says it should be cheery, it should be willing, with gladness and pleasantness - and even if your master is harsh and unreasonable, it brings great glory to Christ if you even obey him in the Lord in that measure. That means this: there are to be no Christian sourpusses, none of them! There's no room for that within this passage of Scripture. There's no room for the attitude of the father whose son asked him: 'Daddy, why do all the idiots come out when you're driving?' - you know what I'm talking about? The attitude! What a motivation for a mother and a father in the drudgeries of life, for a husband trying to keep the budget afloat in the midst of ever soaring cost of living - what a motivation, that you can do it all to the glory of God! That's hard, but that's the life that we are called to live in Christ.

Fifthly, obedience is to be done by the slave or the employee rewardingly. The main incentive is not the reward, the main incentive is that it is to glorify the Lord and be as unto the Lord. But this is the outcome, and this is another resultant incentive to obeying in the Lord - that every good work that you do as unto the Lord, God will reward. He doesn't reward in status, He doesn't reward whether you're bond or free - He says that: 'whether bond or free' - but He rewards when we do works that are unpleasant, perhaps, works that are not enjoyable, works perhaps that deep down gall us in some sense. But when we bring ourselves to do it as unto the Lord, respectfully, conscientiously, spiritually, gladly, we will do it rewardingly - He will reward us.

What is done for Him, He always rewards.

But secondly, and finally: what does Paul say to the Christian master? We've said already that Christianity doesn't change the social distinctions, it doesn't do that - it's not the hippy movement. But what it does do is: it changes the heart. It changes the heart within society, so that that heart change is seen so effectively around, and it changes the responsibility of masters towards their servants. How do you guard against violence on the shop floor, or yelling in the office, ulcers in the stomach and nervous breakdowns on your medical record? How do you guard against all that? The answer is: you follow Ephesians! As a Christian,
you follow Ephesians - and first of all, as a master, if a master you are, you do as the servants would do to you. Look at verse 9: 'And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him'. Do as the servants would do to you, do the same things unto them!

Now, this is mutual, isn't it? We've see this right throughout all these relationships in this passage. First of all, the husband and the wife: 'Wives obey your husband in the Lord', but then there is a reciprocal love of the husband, to submit to the wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. Do you see it? Reciprocal! 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord', but then, 'Parents, provoke not your children to wrath' - there's that reciprocal, mutual responsibility in love. Now we come to this: 'Slaves, servants, employees, obey your masters in the Lord', 'Masters, do the same!'. It's not a one-upmanship, it's not a dictatorship, but it's doing as you would have them do unto you. Treat them as you would wish to be treated as an employer, don't exploit them, don't think - like Aristotle - of your employees as hands, but do what Boaz did in the book of Ruth chapter 2 and 4. When he greeted his workers we read he said this: 'The Lord be with you', and they replied: 'The Lord bless thee'. Now that means that that was a spiritual man, as a master he was sensitive to the needs of his workers and even the stranger Ruth when she came into his working field. There was a mutual respect and a desire to glorify God. How many times have you heard this: 'My boss is meant to be a Christian, but you'd never know it'? You see that's what Paul is writing against here. He is saying here: 'If you want respect as a boss, you show it. If you want sincerity, you show sincerity and honesty. If you want conscientiousness, you show it. If you want pleasantness, you be pleasant, you look after the welfare of your people. Do unto them - golden rule - as you would have them do unto you.

Secondly: without threats. Christian masters rule without threats. Look at verse 9: 'forbearing and threatening' - without those things. Now, in the Roman Empire at this time, a master could kill his slave if he wanted to - he could give his slave a beating, but he could actually kill him. Now that didn't actually happen most of the time, because it was too costly to kill him because he probably couldn't afford another one. But the point of it is this: that if he couldn't kill him - sticks and stones, the old story - he threatened him, or he forbore him in the sense that he could abuse him with his tongue, using threatening language. But Paul is saying here: 'No bullying behaviour, don't behave like an arrogant overlord' - forbearing threatening, without threats.

Thirdly he says this, like all these relationships of submission, you're to do it under the lordship of Christ. Now we get back to this every week, because Paul brings us to it. Under the lordship, knowing - look at verse 9 - that your master also is in heaven. The Christian master and boss has to always remember that they are not the final authority, that they have another Master, one in heaven, and they are His slave and His servant. No matter what the relationship is in the workplace, there is a spiritual equity, they are spiritual equals in the sight of God - and even if there is that authority in the workplace, they will both answer to God in the end. The servant, the master, will give an account to God on the same level that as sinners saved by the grace of God. Now imagine the sanctifying influence that that is in the workplace - imagine that! Imagine the impact upon your employees, or upon your boss, because you see God as your final Judge. If you're a boss it means that you'll pay them their wages, it means that you care about them even in their afflictions, in their illnesses, you should be concerned about their family welfare - and this, let me say, is true socialism. This is true socialism - not the abolishing of distinctions, but the levelling of all men under Christ! Ultimately, at the end of it all this whole passage could be summed up in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the rule that He lived His life by: the chief is the servant of all. As He said, 'Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant', and a good master on the earth will be a servant of heaven.

Fourthly: the Christian master will rule impartially. That means this: 'Neither', look at verse 9, 'is there respect of persons with him'. So if there is no respect of persons with God, you don't show any respect of persons in the workplace. No favours, in other words there is equity before God in the judgement of God.
when we will all stand before that Great White Throne. When we stand before the judgement seat of Christ, we're all equal.

In conclusion, let me say this: employees, employers, there is no option - no option. There is no distinction between secular and spiritual, it is implored upon you to do this as the child of God. Think of how many Christians that it has been said of them: 'They are murder to work for'. I hear this around the land, of Christian employers: they would get blood out of a stone! Think of how many bosses and fellow workers who have become opposed to the gospel because of their slacking Christian employees and a bad testimony within the workplace. Think of the impact it would have if we all lived as we should live! And how is that? The point of the whole of this passage, as we have been looking at it: be filled with the Spirit! And if you are filled with the Spirit, you will do all things to the glory of God.

Let's pray together - and as you bow your head, we all lack in this area, we would be liars to say that we are without sin. We all need to redeem the time more, and if you feel that lack within your life, why not come before the Lord now and just say: 'Lord, I confess this before you, and I ask you Lord, to help my weakness. Cleanse me from it, and give me the power to live as I ought to live as an employee or as an employer. Give me the strength to dare to do what is right'.

Our Father, we thank Thee for the word of God and its uncompromising standard. We thank Thee that there is no room for slacking. Lord, it's difficult - we do not undermine that, or underestimate how hard it is to follow it - yet Lord, at times we only find it hard because we're trying to do it in the flesh. But help us to walk in the Spirit, to be filled with the Spirit, and we shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - February 2001

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That was good singing to begin our Bible Reading this year - and this is the first Bible Reading of the New Year, and let me welcome you to it. We're continuing in the book of Ephesians, starting a new sub-series tonight on 'The Holy War' - looking at the armour of God in Ephesians chapter 6. Thank you for coming, especially if you're a visitor - perhaps it's your first time - we make you welcome and trust that the Lord blesses you around His own precious word.

We're turning to Ephesians chapter 6, the last chapter of this little book, Ephesians 6. As I have said, we are entering into another sub-series - we had a sub-series looking at 'Christ In The Home', and the influence of the Christian faith and the Lord Jesus Christ within the home, with regards to the wives, husbands, sons and daughters. Then we looked at how it infiltrates into the very workplace in the world, where Christians are put by God to be a witness - and that was a series in itself in this book. Here we enter another, and I've entitled it: 'The Holy War' - and indeed, this is perhaps the most famous passage within the whole of the book of Ephesians. It deals with the Christian armour, and we won't even have time tonight to deal with that specifically, but we will be dealing with the whole of the Christian armour in the weeks that lie ahead.

But what I want us to do tonight is look at 'The Christian Warrior's Brief'. Any army, or any individual soldier who goes into battle, by his superiors are usually given a brief: what their aim is, what their operation and the strategy of it is, with a view to victory. No soldier goes onto the battlefield intending to be defeated - or very few ought to anyway. So we look at the brief that God has given to His own divine warriors in Christ, the Christian soldiers that we've already been singing about.

So, let us read this passage of scripture tonight, that we'll be studying in the weeks that lie ahead. We'll begin reading in verse 10, where we left off just after verse 9 - and here's the final message and conclusion from Paul the apostle. You remember, the first half of this book has been dealing with the doctrinal things, the things - spiritually speaking - that we are blessed with in heavenly places in Christ - chapters 1 to 3. Then we saw how there's a split, we can't say it's a naked split, in that these two things are mixed together a little. But, from chapter 4 on, we look at the walk of the believer: how, practically, this doctrine or this belief behaves itself in every day life.

Now we come to an intensely practical chapter, and here is his conclusion of all this matter that he has been discussing about, of the blessings that we have in Christ: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your
feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak".

We're looking tonight at verses 10 to 12: The Christian Warrior's Brief. As I've said already, the Ephesians - after they read this letter, and get through the first five and a half chapters that we have studied already - I'm sure they are floating in the cloud of the heavenlies! They ought to be anyway, and we ought to be - looking at the blessings that we have in the heavenlies, in the Lord Jesus Christ! In chapter 1 we looked at the blessing of election, how God's free sovereign grace has chosen us unto salvation in Christ before the foundation of the world. Then in chapter 2 we looked at the wonder of salvation, how God - looking at our past in the perspective of the past - sees the ruin and the damnation and the depravity that we all had in our first state, the old man in sin and trespasses, absolutely and utterly dead. But he takes us up that mountain, and he lets us survey our past, and then he lets us survey what we have come to, how we have been quickened alive in the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life - and you have there that spiritual resurrection, and then throughout the chapter later on he goes into literal resurrection, he tells us how the power that rose the Lord Jesus from the grave, that set Him at the right hand of the Father, is the power that is available in us to live the Christian life in this world.

Then we saw the mystery of the church, and those Ephesians would have read of how God did a new thing, He created a new man, a new community and society in the Lord Jesus Christ - and that the middle wall of separation and partition has been broken down, and all nations, all cultures, creeds and colours, can be brought together in the church of Jesus Christ. There can be peace and unity! Then we saw the gifts of the church that God has given, that it may operate in the way that He has ordained. Then in recent days - chapter 5 - we have been called to walk as children of light. The whole theme of that chapter is to walk worthy of the calling wherein we are called. Then there is that great climax of being filled with the Holy Ghost of God, and if there is any secret to the Christian life surely it is that: that we be filled with all fullness of God! We learnt, practically, how that fullness of the Spirit operates in the life of a husband and in the life of a wife, and in a man and a woman in the assembly - how it operates in ordinary everyday lives, right from the assembly to the home. How children that are filled with the Holy Spirit obey their parents, how parents that are filled with the Holy Spirit do not provoke their children, but bring them up in the fear and discipline of the Lord. How it infiltrates into the workplace, we Christians are not to hang our fiddle behind the door, we are to go to the workplace and tell of Christ, and show Christ in our very lives.

So, if you like, these Ephesians - from chapters 1 to 5, and six and a half - have been lifted into the heavenlies about all the blessings and inheritance that they have in Christ. Yes, they have been challenged...but now, like a slap in the face, they are brought down to earth to a bloody, gruesome, gory battlefield. They have been sunk down to the grounds of the spiritual war, the holy war that we read about in this passage - the battlefield of the Devil. But the miracle of this book is this: the first five or so chapters, outlining all the blessings, outlining all the life of light that we are to live in the fullness of the Spirit - the message must be this: even in the battleground of the Devil, that life can be lived! That is it! 'Finally, my brethren', verse 10, because of all these things, 'be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might...and fight the good fight with all thy might'.

Surely is it not so, that if our Lord Himself - perfect, sinless, undefiled, separate from all iniquity and transgression - if He was harassed by the Devil...is the servant greater than his Master? Shall we not be on such a road as that to face the Devil and all his foes? And my question, at the very outset of our meeting tonight, to each believer in this building is this: are you in a war? Are you in the holy war of God or the
alternative? - and the only alternative can be: are you in the world? War or world? Indeed, I think that many Christians live today as if they didn't have a spirit - not a soul now, the soul is the seat of your affections, the soul is your personality, the soul is who you are, distinct from the body, but the spirit is the part of you that has been given to you by God, the part that relates to God, the part that is dead in trespasses and in sins until you are regenerated by the grace of God - and when it becomes alive within you, that is the part, that is the mercy seat where the sinner meets with the Saviour and you have communion. Do you walk in this world as if you had a spirit? For this is a spiritual war.

I would say that if Christians are living the Christian life the way they ought to be, it will not be a picnic. Immediately you're saved, it's not long - if you're living the Christian life the way the Bible tells me about it - until you find the foe face-to-face in your life, and you immediately realise: 'This is a battle that I am in'. Now, there's a gospel song - and I must say, I do not like it all, it grates on me every time I hear it - some of these American singers sing it: 'Sunshine and Roses'. Now, that's not the Christian life that I read about in Ephesians chapter 6 - there are many blessings within it, I don't underestimate that, but it is certainly not all 'Sunshine and Roses'. It is a bloody battlefield, it is a terrible thing that we read about where there is so much at stake. We as Christians, we can't just be born again, we can't just have the blessing of God's forgiveness - what fool would turn that down? - but we are actually, when we trust Christ, when we are saved by the grace of God, being enlisted into the battle of the ages! And if you don't want to fight, you don't want Christ!

So many within the church today have imbibed a materialistic view of life - it is not the spiritual but it is the carnal. Materialism today is simply the philosophy that anything that is without a physical cause does not exist. This pulpit exists because a man made it, and that man was material - and a material cause had a material result. This building, everything you see around you practically - of course they deny creation totally - but if it hasn't a physical well-being at the very beginning, it doesn't exist. So, of course, materialism doesn't believe in your spirit. Materialism doesn't believe in God - but has the Christian church, and individual Christians living and breathing in a materialistic world, somehow imbibed this view in their minds? A world, and certainly now becoming a church, to whom the supernatural is a stranger! It almost doesn't exist. When men talk about the supernatural there is a question mark in the mind of many Christians, a scepticism that the supernatural must be a stranger never to be courted. But, my friend, if you're going on in the Christian life - and many of you will know what I'm talking about: going on with God - you will find, very soon, that you're standing in a horrific battlefield in the war of the ages!

If you doubt that, you only need to look at our author in this little book: where was he? He was in a prison, chained to a Roman soldier. This man Paul, if anybody knew, knew what it was to be in the holy war of God. Watchman Nee, in his famous book on the book of Ephesians, says that the Christian's experience in this little book begins with sitting - isn't that right? We are sitting in heavenly places in the Lord Jesus Christ, blessed with all spiritual blessings. He says that it then leads to walking: walk as children of light, walk in the calling wherewith ye are called. But it doesn't end there, and that is why in chapter 6 we are met with not sitting, not walking, but standing. You see, you need first of all to sit before you can stand. That's the order in the book, and that is God's order, the order the Holy Spirit has ordained within this theological treatise of how we are to live. You've got to know the blessings that you have in Christ before you can fight in this battle. You've got to come into the realisation of what Christ has done for you, and the blessings that He has bestowed on you - and then you must walk worthy of that calling before you can ever stand against the foe.

Paul calls that in this chapter: 'wrestling with wicked spirits' - wrestling! Have you ever wrestled with wicked spirits? Many people are, from day to day, attacked - God's own people - by Satanic forces, by principalities and powers, rulers in high places that we are reading about. Now we must beware, as many in this world attribute things to the Devil that we bring on ourselves. In other words, when you break a divine law, when you transgress God's commands and precepts, and the outcome is bad - don't blame the Devil, it's your own fault! Many of the things that we do that come from our own flesh, and the old man within our nature, are
brought on us by ourselves and our own lust - but let me say this: do not throw the baby out with the bath water! There are people who know physical attacks, attacks on the mind, on the body - and we tonight, as we study this passage of Scripture, must take these things seriously and we must ask the question: are we helpless [against] such a foe? Can the Devil come into our lives, into the church of Jesus Christ, into our homes, can he oppress us, and are we to stand and not challenge him?

How do we fight this holy war? This holy war in which Satan is committed to knock Christians out of the battle as fast as he can. And the more you are in the battle, Christian, how do you fight it? Because the further down you get to the front line, the further you engage in the army of God, the hotter the battle becomes, and the Devil is out and out for you! He doesn't waste his ammunition on spectators...no, but he wants to get men and women in the front line of the battle.

We've said before that this little book of Ephesians reminds us of the book of Joshua, because you remember that Moses was promised that land flowing with milk and honey, and it was Joshua who was going to have to go across the Jordan and enter into the land with the people, into that blessing. Now, people have an idea, a misunderstanding, I believe in their mind - and it's sometimes because of hymnology - that Canaan is heaven. Canaan is not heaven! Dear help us if Canaan is heaven! Because, when the Israelites got into Canaan, they had to fight their way in, and all the time that they were in it - for the first few years or so - they were fighting to get all the Canaanites out. I don't want to go to a heaven like that! But Canaan speaks of the spiritual life of blessing that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ - it's ours, it's been promised by God, it is our purchased possession that the Lord Jesus Christ won for us at Calvary by His own blood. But nevertheless, there are those Canaanite-ish, demonic principalities and powers who want to withhold our blessings from us! If we are to get hold of these blessings that we have in spiritual heavenly places in Christ, all those things that we have been talking about in weeks gone by, we will have a fight on our hands! We need to realise that that old Devil takes no prisoners.

But thank God tonight that the Lord doesn't leave us on our own. He doesn't save us and give us a pat on the back and say: 'Away you go, try your best'. He gives us a brief, He tells us how this battle is to be fought, how we are to walk, how the holy war is to be won. The first thing He tells us is your first point there on the sheet: the soldier's preparation for battle. Now, we're not going to read the whole book - don't panic! - but it's everything that we've learned in the last few months as we've been studying this book. He's reminding us of the order, I believe, we must not take this chapter out of context, we must remember that Paul - the Holy Spirit through him - has been teaching us to sit in heavenly places with Christ, to walk in holiness by the power of the living God, and now he's coming to the battle: to stand. The point of the book is this: no Christian can hope to enter warfare without learning these first two things.

You can't enter the holy war without being able to rest in Christ, sure that's obvious, sure that's how you're saved: to rest in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, in His blood at Calvary. But it's more than that - in faith, as a believer, to rest in Christ, to realise the blessings that you have, and to sit down in them and enjoy them, ponder them, and let them become part of your spirit - that's what must come first! Then secondly, by the strength of the Spirit, you must follow the Lord Jesus practically in a holy life. You can't fight a battle if your hands are unholy, you cannot be on the Lord's side if, by your action and your way of life, you're on the world's side! If you're deficient in either - if you're deficient in your sitting in Christ, if you're deficient in your walking in Him - you can be sure that you'll be deficient in your standing in the battle. If you're talking about spiritual war, if you're talking about spiritual oppression or anything like that to do with the holy war, or if you look at yourself as a Christian soldier - and you're not sitting, you're not walking, and you think you're standing - it's only talk! It's only talk. You can't take it out of God's order - and let me go further and say: Satan can afford to ignore you. He can! I wonder, today, how many Christians he's ignoring - you don't bother him.
'Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees'.

Does he tremble much for you? Is he worried about you? Someone might say: 'I don't care [about] the Devil. The Devil's as faraway from my mind as I like. I'm not worried what the Devil thinks of me!'. Well, is that a scriptural way to be? I think not! Turn with me, tonight, to Acts chapter 19. I want to have my name in lights, big big letters, shining bright for all to see - in verse 13 we read this: 'Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded'. I want to have my name in lights in hell! Do you not? If you had to cast a demon out tonight, would the cry be from the spirit of that poor possessed creature: 'Paul the apostle I know, Pastor such-and-such I know, missionary on the other side of the world I know, but who are you?'. You see, that's what we're to strive for. 'I don't care what the Devil thinks of me' - you ought to! You ought to care! In a battle you ought to care how you are walking, how you are fighting - and the soldier's preparation for the battle is to sit in what Christ has done for you, to walk in a life of holiness, and then you will be able to stand and fight this battle.

Secondly, in the brief that God gives us, it is the soldier's power for the battle that you find in verse 10 of Ephesians chapter 6: 'Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might'. Now, turn with me for a moment to Jude chapter 1 - I'm going to get you to turn to a few passages of Scripture - Jude chapter 1 and we're going to read from verse 9. In the summer we studied this passage in a little more depth - but we have, in verse 9 of the only chapter in Jude, the account that we don't find anywhere within the whole of Scripture of the incident over the body of Moses. In verse 9 we read this: 'Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the Devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee'. Michael the archangel couldn't rebuke the Devil. Now, as we come to this great topic tonight, we need to remember that we are no match for Satan. Let that be grounded in your mind. Satan is extremely powerful, all you have to do is look at the book of Job and see what Satan was able to do to a man's body, see what he was able to do to his family home, to his friends, to all his wealth and livestock - wipe them out in a few days! And Satan, we need to realise, is a powerful foe!

The Lord Himself said that he came as a murderer, to rob and to kill, he is the greatest thief of all. Therefore the first command that God gives to us in the battle - engraven this in your heart - the first command is this: that if we are to fight this battle, we must be strengthened by the Lord. Verse 10: 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might'. I am utterly convinced, more even so in recent days, that most Christians in evangelicalism today are 'trying' to live the Christian life. Listen to that: 'trying to live the Christian life'. Maybe trying by prayer, or trying by understanding the Bible, trying by going to church, trying by witnessing to a saint everyday - many of those things are good things, but the Christian life was never meant to be 'tried'! It was never meant to be striven after! The life of Christ in you is what it is all about! It is the life of God, the might and the power of God flowing through the spirit of the individual child of God. You can't live the Christian life no matter how much you try, and you tonight who have tried know that you can't! You can't live the Christian life, and its sure that you can't fight the Devil, in fact I believe that you cannot do anything that is in this Bible - not one thing - you can't do [it] by trying.

Do you know where the Christian walk and the Christian holy war takes off? When you come to a brick wall of self and say: 'I can't do this' - that's when it starts. When you say to God: 'I can't, I can't live this life' - and I wish that a lot of us, myself included in my times of delusion, would just waken up and realise that God does not want me to live a holy Christian life, but my God wants to live His life in me! There's a difference.
This is the faith that we have, it's the life of God in you, as Paul says over and over and over again, it's Christ in you, when you come to the realisation that you have a total inability to do anything for God! That's why in verse 10 it's in the literal passive imperative tense, it means this: 'Be made strong in the Lord'. Be made strong in the Lord, find your strength in Him! You need to be made strong! It's in the continuous tense: 'Be daily strengthened in the Lord'. Day by day, in all of your Christian walk, that is the secret to the Christian life - the open secret - God's life transferred to you in communion with Him!

Oh, that you would get that...oh, that I would get that: that that is how the strength of God is conferred to you, through meeting with Him, through communing with Him, through fellowshipping with Him. The preacher is powerless without it, the missionary can do nothing without it, the personal worker will never lead a soul to Christ, the Sunday School teacher will never lead a child to the cross, the office worker will never have a ministry or a witness, you'll never even have the power to do your ordinary work day by day, if you don't realise that God wants you to live His life! The book on the book stall entitled 'The Calvary Road' by Roy Hession - that's the theme of that little book that blessed me, it's this: the only life that God is pleased with is His own life. The sooner we get to realise that the better, we'll stop striving, we'll stop trying to be like other people, and we'll just try to be like God and His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Wasn't it Isaiah that said: 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength'? Warriors need to be waiters, that's where you'll get your strength - and you must have that strength, for that is the power of battle.

Thirdly, the soldier's position for battle is found in verse 11. After you have derived that power from God, he says: 'Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil'. Now, it's this word 'stand' that I want to concentrate on. There's been 'sit', 'walk', and now 'stand'. The Greek verb 'stand' has a preposition before it, it's the word that's after it in your version in the English, 'stand against' - but in the Greek it comes before. It simply means in the Greek language: 'hold your ground' - against stand! Hold your ground, stay your ground, put your bearings down and your anchor and don't move an inch! Now this is an important truth that I want us to note tonight, for if you make a comparison, foolishly, with modern warfare to the holy war here and what the Christian warriors are taught to do - you'll make a fatal mistake! Because modern warfare has the intention, indeed the command, of invading foreign territory, of going forward. The command of modern warfare is to stand! Whereas offensive warfare is - 'March', but that's not the command here. The command that God gives us in our war is to stand!

You see, the ground that we're standing in is not disputed by us, it's disputed by the Devil. It's our ground! We own the ground, and it's the enemy that wants it. We don't need to struggle to keep it, but we need to make sure that the Devil does not get a foothold on it. We have a foothold, we're on it! That's why it's not struggled for, that's why nearly all the weapons that you read about in the whole of the armour of God - we'll see in the weeks that lie ahead - are defensive. Every single one of them are used defensively, except the sword that can be used offensively, but you can also use a sword to defend yourself - and the whole purpose of it is to stand on the ground that God has given you. That's the difference between defensive warfare and offensive. Defensive is: 'I have got the ground, and I only seek to keep the ground'. Whereas offensive is: 'I have not got the ground, and I am fighting in order to get the ground'.

Not this war - hallelujah - my Lord Jesus Christ has won the war! He was the one who fought the offensive war, but ours is now defensive. He is the one who went into foreign territory and gained the ground and the victory over Satan. He is the one who, through the cross, carried the very fight to the threshold of hell and led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men. And today, tonight in our world, and in the church of Jesus Christ, we only fight to maintain the victory! He's won it - hallelujah - it is finished, it's all done. He finished the work that God gave Him to do, and we tonight, if we're redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, are to stand in the victory already won - and God was so pleased with that work and that victory that He rose Him from the dead, and proclaimed Him Lord, and Victor, and King of kings, and Lord of lords. He gives us that ground, by faith in grace it is ours. We are not holding by attacking, we are holding by defending what is
already ours. We are conquerors tonight, in fact Paul says we are more than conquerors through the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not fight for, but we stand in, the victory

Practically, let's get practical for Paul is practical here: what happens when we are faced with an attack? Say the old Devil comes into the home, as he does so often today, or he comes into the work situation - and you find a circumstance that you can't deal with, practically speaking, and it's going to overwhelm you. Maybe you pray, and you fast about it, and you struggle over this great issue in your life. You try to resist what is happening, but nothing seems to change - why? Because so often in our Christian life, when we are faced with the enemy, we're trying to fight into victory - isn't that right? We're trying to defeat the Devil, and by doing so we're giving up the ground that has already been given to us and is already ours. To us, many a time in a conflict, the victory is a distant thing, we have to strive for it and reach out for it - but God is saying the victory is ours, here and now.

Watchman Nee, in his little book, relates an incident where he came across an attack. He said that he tried everything: fasting and praying, and doing all sorts of things. He was reading the book of the Revelation, and he wrote this: 'It only took a breath from the Lord to finish off the man of sin, and here am I trying to cause a hurricane'. He got it, you see. Satan doesn't need to be defeated, he is defeated. Oh, hallelujah, he is defeated already, we have won the victory - and only those who sit, who walk, are able to stand. Satan, his primary goal - I believe that this is what his primary goal is - not simply to pull Christians into the mire of sin and backsliding, but first of all he wants to get you off the ground of your perfect triumph and victory in Christ. Then it will be easy for you to sin, when you get dejected, you think: 'God's not for me. I'm not blessed, I can't do anything for the Lord Jesus, I must look so poor in His sight' - when the Devil pumps all that into your mind you will move away from standing in the victory that Christ has won for you, and it'll be no problem to sin.

Do you see his plan? He wants to rob you of the rest that you have in Christ. Don't let him! Oh, Christian, don't let him. That is his plan, and praise God, God has told us that's his plan - and also He has given us away of escape, His own armour. Paul says, verse 11: 'Put on the whole armour of God' - there's no room here for nominal Christianity! No room for half-hearted fundamentalism, no room for it! The whole armour of God, there's no provision for the back, which means there's to be no retreat. There's armour for the head right down to the toe, there's no chink of the body that the enemy can penetrate. It's an out and out onslaught, standing your ground, defending the patch that God in Christ has given to us! If only, tonight, each one of us would stop trying to gain the victory, and start trying to maintain it. We will have a great triumph if we take that step.

Do you know how we'll do it? By stopping asking the Lord to enable us to overcome the enemy. We all do it: 'Lord, help me to overcome this great foe' - even more than that, not even looking to the Lord to overcome him. We're asking the Lord to do things He has already done! Praise Him - we ought to praise Him - that's the secret. The secret is praise, coming into the presence of God and praising Him that He has given us the victory already. He has defeated the world, the flesh, and the Devil - and the key is faith, faith in what Christ has done, not in my work, not in my striving. 1 John 5:4: 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith' - we ought to praise when we pray! If we don't, we will continually face defeat, and we will continually give the Devil ground that he has never had and isn't his right at all. Are you facing defeat tonight, Christian? Young Christian, are you flat on your face with defeat in sin? You're crying to God to give you the victory, but God the Spirit would point you to Calvary and show you - through the death, the resurrection, the ascension and the giving of the Holy Spirit in fullness to men and women, and boys and girls in Christ - that you've won! Oh, if He could lift you up to those spiritual realms and let you see what is yours in Christ, and see yourself in Christ - that's what it's all about.
We must move on. The fourth point, the brief that God has given us fourthly is: the soldier's predator in battle. He has given us an outline of who it is we're fighting. You will know, in any war, that the Intelligence Corps is an important element of the army in battle, because you need to know your enemy - don't you? You need to know what to expect. This enemy of ours is called 'Lucifer, the Son of the Morning'. He's called the 'Devil', meaning 'The Accuser'. Indeed, Revelation 12 says that he accuses the righteous day and night before the Throne of God. Satan he is, the Adversary, the enemy of God. He's called the Tempter, the Murderer, the Liar. He is described as being like a lion, a serpent, an angel of light, and the god of this age.

Now, we need to think about this: is our battle against philosophy? Is our battle against false religious persuasions and cults and so forth? Is our battle with a pagan, irreligious government and politicians? No! Look at the verses, look at the word of God, verse 12: 'We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places'. We need to be careful not to be wrestling with the Devil's instruments, but to wrestle with the Devil himself! Demonic forces, battalions of fallen angels, evil spirits with great power. I believe many have fallen for Satan's plan, that materialistic outlook: 'If I can't see it, I don't believe in it'. Liberal theology has birthed that awful heresy from hell, that Satan was the evil influence - that Paul was talking here about the Roman government and Nero when he speaks of Satan - [it's] of the Devil himself to delude us that he is only in the mind. A little red figure with a pitchfork, and horns and a forked tail!

Some Christians go to the other extreme, and they're too morbidly occupied by evil and the Devil and all of his realms. But we want to strike a balance tonight, and we want to make sure that in the Iron Hall Assembly, that we are not ignorant of his devices. So, let us come and see what Paul asserts, in verse 12, about these spiritual beings that we wrestle with. The first thing that he asserts is that it is a supernatural battle, it is a wrestling that is supernatural. Secondly: it's a wrestling that is personal. That word 'wrestle' literally means a hand-to-hand fight. The root idea is a swaying back and forth, while locked in mortal battle. It's not an exchange of weapons or guns, or artillery, but it's sweat with sweat, breath against breath, and muscle against muscle. The third assertion that he gives is: that it is futile to wrestle in the flesh. Now this is conquering wisdom - get those three things if you want to conquer in the battle, first of all you need to be wrestling supernaturally, second you need to wrestle personally - don't be relying on your church or your parents or your husband or your wife, it's a hand-to-hand combat, and if you think you're going to win it in the flesh it's futile! We must move on, God help us to move on in this fellowship from vain evangelical lip service to these truths - and realise that Satan never retreats without a fight. To realise in the church of Jesus Christ, we need wrestlers!

In Ephesus they were witnesses to what was called 'Curious Arts' - there was much occult and Satanic worship and so forth going on, and specifically this is the book in the New Testament that tells us the most about the kingdom of darkness in verse 12. Look at it, he talks about principalities, powers, rulers of darkness of this world - the Greek word for all those phrases is: 'cosmocrats' (sp?). You could translate it literally into English: 'Cosmocrats'. You've heard of 'securacrats' (sp?) - 'Cosmocrats' of this darkness. Possibly high-ranking demons, such as the Prince of Persia and Greece that you read about in the book of Daniel that hindered the archangel in his divine errand to answer prayer - [in] Daniel 10 you can read about that. These are princes of darkness!

Then he goes on, verse 12: 'spiritual wickedness in high places'. Literally 'evil spiritual beings in the heavenlies', and we see here evolving, verse 12, a spiritual hierarchy, a disciplined chain of command in this evil realm. Some actually believe that this, verse 12, reflects the same spiritual command that you find in the Scriptures with regard to the angels themselves - after all, these are fallen angels. This is a far cry from 'Caspar the friendly ghost', isn't it? Serious stuff, wrestling with this great power - is he not called, in this very book, the prince of the power of the air? He is God's arch enemy, under his power there are countless demons seeking to saturate the world with evil and exclude God. This is the explanation for what's
happening in our world! The world can't give you a reason, but God tells us this is why: we are not wrestling flesh and blood. There may be a hostile world system, kings, and rulers, and sinners, and politicians - but behind it all there is the Devil himself! Two thrones at war, Satan seeking to usurp God, and the church of Jesus Christ, in the power of God, called to displace his influence and to bring glory to God in Christ - what are we doing about it?

Are we in the battle? There's so much more I could say to you tonight. We haven't time to go into it, we will have in weeks that lie ahead, but let me just say this: the consensus of all of Scripture is this, that this realm in which we are called to live is the Devil's realm. He is the god of this world that has blinded the minds of them which believe not! Paul's commission to the Gentiles in Acts 26 was that he, by the preaching of the Gospel, would open their eyes to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. It is Satan that keeps souls from God! This old world is his. We are not to be ignorant of his devices, but let me say this in closing: we must realise tonight that if we are to fight this battle, turn with me to Colossians as we close, Colossians chapter 1 verse 16. We need to realise what our victory is: 'For by him', the Lord Jesus, 'were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him', chapter 2 and verse 10, 'And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power', verse 15, 'And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it'! Hallelujah! For our Saviour has triumphed - and just like Gideon (remember he went into the battle and God said: 'No, 32,000 is too many', he put it down to 10,000 soldiers, and then God told him: '300 it's going to have to be, and you're only allowed to go into the battle with trumpets and lanterns'). What was the difference about that battle that they won? It was fought in the strength of the Lord! In the Lord's strength!

This is the Christian message: all of it - listen - is substitution. When God was wanting to forgive us, what did He do? He substituted us for Christ at the cross, and when God wants us to have the victory, do you know what He does? He doesn't change the plan, He substitutes Christ in us, in here. Simpson said this:

Fainting soldier of the Lord,  
Hear His sweet inspiring word,  
I have conquered all thy foes,  
I have suffered all thy woes.

Struggling soldier, trust in Me,  
I have overcome for thee.  
Fear not though thy foes be strong.  
Fear not though the strife be long.  
Trust thy glorious Captain's power,  
Watch with Him one little hour.  
Here Him calling: 'Follow Me' - listen!  
I have overcome for thee'.
What a Saviour! Let's bow our heads, and if you're in that battle and you feel it hot and hard - praise God that there's a Victor, and we're fighting in the victory, not for it. Oh, that you would rest in Him tonight, and stop fighting and stop striving, and just let Him takeover - Him who has won the battle, Him that is the life. Will you let go, and take hold of that faith that overcometh the world?

Father, help us to live the life of faith. Help us to walk in the Spirit, and disown the arm of the flesh for it will fail us. For we wrestle not against flesh, and Lord our foe is an awful foe - but we thank Thee that greater is He that is in us then he that is in the world. Lead us into victory in these weeks, we pray in the name of our lovely Lord Jesus, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - February 2001
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Now let me welcome you to our Bible Reading tonight here in the Iron Hall. It's great to see you all with us, especially if you're a visitor - perhaps this is your first time, we're glad to see you tonight, and we trust that the Lord blesses you through the preaching of His own inspired truth. Thank you for coming, and may the Lord bless you.

We're turning to chapter 6, again, of Ephesians, chapter 6 of Ephesians. We're entering our second study in this sub-series: 'The Holy War', looking at the armour of God and this spiritual battle that we have all been called to fight in through our salvation. We're reading tonight from chapter 6, and we'll begin reading at verse 10, where we studied last week from verse 10 to 12.

We begin at verse 10: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness".

Our subject this evening is 'The Christian Warrior's Armour'. Last Monday night the subject was 'The Christian Warrior's Brief', and we looked at what God tells us we must do before we even begin to fight that battle. And we see, in verse 10 and 11 especially, what we need to do - first of all we need to be strong in God's power for this fight, it's not a fight that we can fight in our own strength. Verse 11 also told us that we must put on the armour of God in order to stand against the wiles of the Devil. We spent much time last Monday night looking at this old foe, the arch enemy of God and God's people, Satan himself. We looked at how every believer is called into that battle with him, and let me just say that I have realised that battle all the more in the week that has gone by - since I've begun to study in this study. For Satan does not like his cover being uncovered, he doesn't like it one bit!

The consensus that we came to last week is that the word of God teaches that this world in which we live, the world into which we have been born, the world which we often call our home, is the Devil's realm. It is the place where the Devil holds sway. Indeed, we looked at the text, 2 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 4, which reads: 'The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them'. To summarise it, it's saying: 'This world is his, he is the god of this planet'!

If you cast your mind back to the first few chapters of the book of Matthew, in chapter 3 you find there the temptation of the Lord Jesus Christ - and you remember, during one of the temptations of the Lord, Satan took the Lord Jesus to a high pinnacle and showed Him the whole of the kingdoms of the world. It was in Satan's remit to offer to the Lord Jesus all of those kingdoms, if He would just bow down and worship him.
Have you ever thought about how Satan had the power to do that? How Satan could give to the Word of God, who created all things - without Him nothing exists, and all things, Colossians tells us, were created for Him - how the adversary, the Devil, could offer to the Lord Jesus Christ all of the kingdoms of this world? Of course, the answer is simple: he could offer them because they were his. They still are his.

The question could be asked: how did he get them? For the answer to that question you would need to go into the beginning, into the book that is the book of beginnings, the book of Genesis - right into the garden of Eden, between that perfect fellowship of God and man. You would have to witness that great holiness and sanctity that there was in the beginning, you would have to then see the serpent coming into the garden, you would have to see Eve being tempted - and there, in that snapshot of history, you would see the handing over of the world's reins over to Lucifer himself. It was Adam, our forefather, who handed the deeds of this world over to the Devil when he sinned. Death came upon all men by that one man's sin - and because of his original sin there in the beginning, this world has been handed over to Satan himself.

You don't have to really know that in order to see the Devil in our world today. I think this proves more than anything that the Devil has blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them and they believe. They cannot see what is going on in our world! They cannot see the falsehood of relativism that is ingrained in the minds of so many folk, even on the street, who have never had an education - they just believe: 'My way is God's way, and I'll get there in the end. I'll follow my path and God will shine His love on me'. 'All roads lead to God, it doesn't matter what religion you are. As long as you're moral, sincere, and believe in some kind of a deity' - and even if you don't, you believe in yourself as a deity - 'it doesn't matter' - there is this hotch-potch of a smog of relativism, that 'We'll all get there in the end'. If you can't see that in the philosophical world, you look to the moral world, and you see ingrained in the cultures of this whole planet great debauchery and depravity of all kinds that we couldn't even mention here from the pulpit tonight. Great licentiousness, licence on every hand, everything goes in the religious world and also in the moral world.

Kent Hughes puts it like this: 'This world is approving of things even dogs in the full sway of their animal instincts would never do'. All it takes is for you to turn to the first chapter of the book of Romans, and read the account of the world as it was in Paul's day. It gives a detailed reflection, indeed, of how it was in Noah's day, and how it is today, and how the Lord Jesus Christ says it will be in the coming of the Son of Man - which is on a day that is not too far off, I believe. This is the Devil's world! We hear sung: 'This is my Father's world' - no, it is the Devil's world. We must come to this conclusion - and this is important - that the Devil is unredeemable, there are no redeemable features within him, there is no virtue. He is a dark void as a creature and will always be so, and he is trying to bring this planet to hell, he is trying to drag our loved ones, our friends, our relatives, our workmates, down to hell with all his schemes, with all his lies, with all his plans. That has been his plan for all time, and will never cease to be so!

Indeed, his plans are specified in verse 11 that we looked at last week - and let's look at it, we didn't get time to look at this specifically. We're told to put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil. The Greek word for 'wiles' there in verse 11 is the Greek word 'methodias' (sp?). It is the word that we derive our English word 'method' from. So if you look at this verse, what it's saying is that we adorn the armour of God that we may be able to stand against the methods of the Devil himself - speaking of his cunning, crafty ways, his artistic strategies whereby to drag the world down to hell. He has a method to his madness, it is not simply wild, chaotic evil that is let loose - this being, this principality, this old fallen angel has a plan for this world and it is damnation!

If you think of this for a moment, the old Devil has been perfecting this for years. If you read through history you will find that he has sat on church councils, he has introduced heresy into the church of Jesus Christ. In our land he presently sits on the boards of universities, and he - in our world, contemporary as it may be - is
at the forefront of technological and scientific discovery of all kinds. This Devil is an expert, he is an accomplished philosopher, theologian, and psychologist. And unless we realise tonight - as the soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ - who our enemy is, we will be soldiers with our eyes closed, and we won't even see our own grave! We won't be able to see how the Devil is trying to draw us in with all the baits he can, until we are bound by him - yes, even as Christians - under his sway and control.

Now think of this for moment: imagine if you studied mathematics for 100 years. I studied it for 7 or 8 years, and I still can hardly add 2 and 2 together! Imagine studying it for 100 years! Imagine having the privilege of reading thousands of years of theories, looking at Einstein and Newton and all the theories of gravity and physics - and if you were given that time, probably all of us or any of us at least, could become experts in almost anything! Satan, if you think of it, has had thousands upon thousands of years to study humanity, to study human disciplines, and in the end to subvert the race through them. Satan is an expert at his art, he is an expert at deceit, he is an expert murderer, and liar, and thief - and he is the expert accuser of the church and believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's his job, and if I can say it tonight - it galls me to say it - but he's good at it!

One of the most sinister roles he has is masquerading as the agent of God, for that was his role in eternity past before the fall. He was that great cherub above all creations, in the garden of God there he was in all his splendour and glory - he's used to being an angel of light, and so much today he appears in that way. If you turn with me to 2 Corinthians for a moment, chapter 11, we see that. 2 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 13, Paul is talking about false prophets and he says: 'For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works'. You can name them off - we wouldn't even have time to name them all tonight - the cults, the Roman Catholic system, Islam, Buddhism that we have all witnessed in the media in recent days, the New Age movement, apostate Protestantism, lukewarm evangelicalism, ecumenism of every kind. You look around, in the religious world at least, and you see Satan there as the angel of light bringing thousands to hell with him!

I believe that he has made inroads into evangelicalism, and even into fundamentalism. Indeed I believe that one of the plans of the Devil for [God's] servants, and indeed all Christians today - especially in Ulster at the minute - is to discourage them, to depress them, to make them become disillusioned as God's sovereign servants in His will. They actually get into a scenario where they believe that God has forgotten them, God has forsaken them, God's promises are not 'Yea and Amen', God is no longer good to them in His providence and in His care. But, like Martin Luther the Protestant reformer, who on one occasion doubted the goodness of God toward him and said this: 'For more than a week I was close to the gates of death and hell', how many of us are brought close to there by the Devil himself? Maybe you know what I'm talking about tonight, and we see it especially in our land among God's servants. Pastors, missionaries, evangelists - because of the day of small things, because of false doctrine, because of opposition the Devil has begun to get them! He is working inroads into the church of Jesus Christ to drag us down into the dirt, to discourage us, to disillusion us - and even, at times, he imitates the people of God and the power of God to do it. His evil methods, and schemes, and wiles are beyond our comprehension at times, for he is without conscience and without principle at all! No wonder Luther wrote in his great hymn, 'A Mighty Fortress':

'For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe.
His craft and power are great,
And armed with cruel hate...
On earth is not his equal!'
We have an enemy, and he is an awful enemy! He is a fearful enemy, and there is none his like upon the earth - but hallelujah! That's not the case in heaven! Turn with me to Colossians, we have to look at these verses again - we looked at them last week, but we can't let the Devil have any of the glory tonight. Colossians 1, and remember that Colossians is almost a mirror epistle of this book of Ephesians, you find the same themes right throughout it - Colossians 1:16. Remember it's the Lord Jesus it is speaking of: 'For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him'. Chapter 2, verse 10: 'And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power', verse 14, '[He blotted] out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it' - hallelujah! He has defeated him, haha!, the Devil is defeated!

Just like Aaron's snake swallowed up the snakes of Pharaoh's wizards, God's Snake still swallows up the Devil - isn't that wonderful? To know that all of the Devil's poor imitations are trodden down by the God Creator, the Lord Jesus Christ, by the Saviour of the world - He is the Saviour, He has sealed their doom - and we are strong in the Lord! We are not strong enough to face him ourselves, but praise God tonight, He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world.

As we think of that, and begin on that footing, let's look at verse 13 of our passage tonight [chapter] 6. Remember that Paul is under house arrest, and it's probable that he's chained to a Roman soldier, and he can survey this scene before him - he's looking at him from head to toe in all the armour of the Roman soldier. And Paul, as we read him, we find that he's always very quick to see spiritual lessons in the natural realm, and making illustrations out of them. Paul, here in this passage, focuses on six essential items. First of all you find a belt, then a breastplate, sandals, shield, helmet and sword - and then he adds a non-clothing part, which is the part of prayer. But that reminds us of what we learnt last week, that we wrestle not against flesh and blood - this is not a physical battle or a political battle, this is a heavenly, spiritual battle.

As Paul presents his charge to wear these seven items of the armour of God, Paul reiterates what he said in verse 10. Look at it, he tells us: 'Stand - be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might', verse 11, 'Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil'. Verse 10 is 'be strong', verse 11 is 'stand', and then verse 13 again he says: '[Put on] the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand' - and then at the very end - 'having done all, to stand'. It's a command, but just don't see a command, see a promise within it - Paul is saying, he is promising us that if we will really put on the whole armour of God we will stand, and we will be victorious. But note: it is the whole armour of God. Look at it: 'Put on the whole', the full, 'armour of God' - that's what's needed, do you know why? Because Satan is surveying your person, and he is looking for a chink, he is looking for an unguarded part of your spirit just to throw one of his fiery darts into - but if you're wearing the whole armour of God he'll not be able to get in. He's looking for an unguarded area where he'll make a beachhead.

That's what we find in chapter 4 and verse 27, look at it: 'Neither give place to the devil' - in other words, don't give a foothold to the Devil, don't give him any ground. In this 21st century in which we live in, we're inundated with foes, aren't we? We're inundated with enemies of every kind and on every side, we can't even imagine at times, perhaps like last week we aren't aware of it - but the fact remains that today is a day of awful sin, and sin is abounding on every hand. And when the fight reaches its fiercest it's very hard to stand, isn't it? It's hard to stand. But what Paul is saying in verse 13 is this: 'Stand in the armour of God, and when you've done everything else, stand'. He's saying: 'You see in the smoke of the battle? When you're standing resisting the enemy, and the smoke of the battle dies down, and the sound of battle cannot be heard any more, you are seen standing! Left there!'.
The armour of God is described in Romans as an armour of light, it's described in 2 Corinthians 5 as the armour of righteousness - and that armour of light and armour of righteousness is the armour that we have to have. Paul says this, note verse 13: 'Take the armour of God' - take it! It doesn't say 'make it' - take it! It is there for you, all has to be done is for you to lift up the armour of God and wear it! God has given you it, it's not your armour, it's the armour of God! We saw last week that the reason we are victorious - not can be, but we are victorious - in the Lord Jesus Christ, is because we are fighting in the victory. We are not to go forward, but we are to stand in the victory we are already in. We're not to let the Devil push us off. He wants to make us retreat, but our duty is not to go forward - we can't go forward any more - we are victorious! The Lord Jesus has defeated him in every area, and potentially in every area of our life - so we are to stand.

Is that not what the Lord told Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20 and 15? 'King Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's!' Stand your ground, that's what Paul said, don't be moved. Stand firm and when you have done all, having accomplished literally all things, stand! Withstand his assaults. And think: if we distrust our cause, if we don't rely on our Captain, the Devil will gain ground. If we don't follow the Captain of our salvation, if we neglect our spiritual armour, we give him an advantage. We are to ignore the cries and the wails of battle, we are to ignore the anguish and the bloody scenes that we see before us of ones who have fallen before us in the awful tragic warfare. We're not to be shattered or discouraged by some of the casualties that fall in the wayside, but we are to stand, stand, stand - and when we have done all, and the smoke of battle dies down, we're to remain standing!

The reason for that is because of the evil day. Look at verse 13 and you get those two words 'evil day' - and I believe Paul is speaking of the time when the enemy comes in like a flood. You know what I'm talking about: the time when you're overwhelmed by evil, overwhelmed by things that go against every sinew that is in your body - a Satanic opposition that seems to occur in waves at times. Sometimes it advances, sometimes it recedes - it is the day, the evil day, which is the special day of Satan's assaults! In Luke chapter 4 we find it in the temptation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we find there the onslaught of all the powers of darkness that could not make our Lord sin because He couldn't sin - and never you forget that! He couldn't sin, no possibility of Him falling, otherwise God would topple off His throne and fall into hell - never. But at the end of that wonderful discourse, in chapter 4:13 of Luke's gospel, it says this: 'And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him'.

In Isaiah 59 and verse 19 - and I have claimed this promise in the week that has gone by, in the very face of the Devil himself - we read this, now listen soul tonight in hardship, in distress, facing the onslaughts of the Devil himself: 'When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him'. What a verse! If that was the only verse you had wouldn't it be tremendous? The Lord is there! And Paul, looking at this Roman soldier - I don't know whether he's ever seen a battalion of Roman soldiers, but what they used to do was: when they were attacked they formed a human square or rectangle with their armour over their heads, their shields. There would be men right around all the sides, facing all the different directions, ready to fight the onslaught of the enemy - and if one soldier fell another took their place and rose up against the enemy. Their greatest duty, you see at that moment, all huddled together in a square with the enemy all around them - do you know what their greatest duty was? Not to go forward, because they couldn't go forward or they would separate, but their duty was to stand - and when they had done all, to remain standing! And above all, more often than not, they won because they simply stood and refused under any circumstances to retreat.

That's what Paul wants us to do. You might say: 'How can we face such an enemy?'. Do you know how we do it? By adorning the real armour of God Almighty. Think about this: what size are you? On the anvils of God's heaven there has been hammered out an armour for you, an armour with your name on it. But, my
friend tonight, this is the whole point of this epistle, isn't it? You have the doctrine, but what about the practice? The armour is there, and Paul says: 'Take it up! Lift it and put it on and wear it!'.

So, what's the first item that he instructs us to wear? The first item on your sheet is the belt of truth. Verse 14, look at it: 'Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth' - having your loins girt about with truth. Now that's the first step, indeed that's the first step of preparing for battle. This was a belt that was put around the soldier's waist. If you see a picture of a Roman soldier, you'll find out that underneath that belt there was a long skirt, like a kilt. That belt held up the kilt, and the prelude to battle was simply this: when the soldier saw the enemy coming, he would lift up and roll up the skirt, and tuck it into the belt, so that he could run or he could fight. He didn't want to trip up over the skirt, and that was the preparation, the prelude to battle. So, whenever you saw a Roman soldier tightening his belt, he was ready!

I used to play rugby, and just before the whistle went you were all on an edge. You've seen it: one foot to another foot, then you would tighten your laces and pull up your socks, then you would tighten your belt, you would fiddle around with your gum shield, make sure everything was ready - why? You were preparing, and when the Roman soldier was preparing for battle he would tighten his belt. And if the enemy was about to get him, he would roll up that skirt and tuck it in - and this was more than a sport, this was a life or death matter. My friend, this is spiritual battle! It's more than airy-fairy, pie-in-the-sky, this is real! This is everyday meat and bread of a Christian - at least it ought to be. And when you think that Satan is a liar, the liar from the beginning, the liar in the garden, and the liar every day in your Christian life, you better believe that you need the belt of truth! Truth defeats the Devil. This is how, Paul is telling us, to prepare to meet our enemy: to gird everything with truth. The girdle held everything together for the Roman soldier, and the girdle of truth holds everything, all the other parts of the armour, together for the child of God. It allows us to fight, it gives us the freedom to face the enemy.

There's an interesting story in the Old Testament in Exodus chapter 12, and there's one verse I want to refer to. Verse 11 in Exodus 12, we find the Passover, and the children of Israel are just about to be delivered out of Egypt by God - and you know where they would go: to the Red Sea - but before that they had to celebrate the Passover. Have you ever noticed the way they were told to celebrate the Passover? They were to eat that slain, burnt, lamb with their loins girt up and with shoes on their feet. Isn't that a beautiful picture? It's a wonderful picture of exactly what Paul is talking about here. The victory of the slain Lamb that we stand in, as we stand in it we must be girt about with truth, we must have our loins girt about and shoes on our feet ready to face the foe - standing in the victory wherewith Christ the Lord has made us free.

If you think about it, also the belt held the sword up. The sword was in its sheath in the belt. Think about this, Christian: there's no point in you using the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, if your life is not bound up with the truth of God. That's what's killing the church today: men and women that know the word of God, but their life is not bound with God's truth! It's not just necessary for us to hold the truth of God, but it's necessary that we be held by the truth of God - it must hold us, it must bind us, support us! It holds the rest of our spiritual warfare and armour together. It must be applied to our daily life, the truth of God - day-by-day, when we sit, when we rise up, when we lie down, when we talk to one another and to our children - the word of God, the truth of God, everything must be tested by it!

It's what we find strength from, it's what we will find protection in combat against the enemy with. Pilate stood and asked the question: 'What is truth?'. Looking into the face of the Son of God! 'What is truth?' - truth is the Word of God. We worship the Word of God - not this book - but the Word that was with God, and is God. But we have His written word here, and that is the truth of God that we're to bind ourselves round about with: the Scriptures. As the Lord said: 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free', 'Sanctify them'. He prayed to His Father for the church, 'through Thy truth' - 'Thy word is truth'! Ephesians 4 and verse 21, if you to look at it quickly, we read there of the truth of God in its exact, specific
realm. Ephesians 4:21: ‘If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus’. Imagine old Pilate asking the question: ‘What is truth?’, and there He was standing before him!

If truth doesn't bind us, do you know what will happen? The rest of our armour will fall to pieces, and the spiritual victory that we have in Christ...we will give ground to the Devil. All the other armour that we have will become useless, and untruth will get in. It's amazing when you study church history and you find out that God's great warriors of history overcame by the truth. Martin Luther, the father of the reformation, do you know what was said of him? History books tell me this, hard to believe: he memorised virtually the whole of the word of God - now it was in Latin mind you, but I wouldn't care whether I learnt it in Latin or not if I could learn it! Wesley, who was used to bring a revolution of God instead of a political revolution like France, he came up against the ecclesiastical system of the Church of England by preaching the gospel in the open-air. That great man Wesley, it was said of him that he memorised the whole of the Greek New Testament! God's overcomers had bibline blood, the word of God, they had the girdle, the belt of truth - and these warriors in victory had the truth in their heart, but they had the truth in their life. They had an honest, truth-trafficking lifestyle.

That's what Paul points out to us: that knowledge of truth, combined with a truthful character, holds together our armour for the fight. It's priceless - in a world like today's world how could it be anything but priceless to have truth. When the god of this world, the liar of the age, is sowing all his deceit round about, and we live in a morally exhausted planet where words have begun to be meaningless and have lost all meaning - they're manipulated now to mean whatever perverts and obscure men want them to mean. For the politician taxes has become 'Revenue Assessment Enhancement'. Perversion is now said to be 'gay'. Murder of unborn children is 'freedom of choice'. Marxism in the church is called 'Liberation Theology'. Sin, and repentance, and the blood, and justification, reconciliation, regeneration, means absolutely nothing! Grace is irrelevant! Preaching falls on deaf ears! This world rushes to a spiritual holocaust! Think of it: Bill Clinton tells a bare-faced lie for all of America to see, and he remains unimpeached - in fact he's held up as a great President because of the economic revolution that he's brought to that country. Think of what is broadcast on our television today, it's now accepted as literally objective truth - when you watch the news do you ever even think of questioning what you hear? You don't! You just lap it all up, and we believe almost everything we hear from the television - and this is Satan's strategy!

The sad thing is that this culture of untruth has begun to infiltrate into the church of Jesus Christ - and this is my fear, and this is my whole point of these messages in the weeks that lie ahead. In chapter 1 we can be a believer, we can be positionally sitting in heavenly places with Christ, but practically speaking we are controlled by fears, by anxieties, by temptations and habits, by the Devil himself! That is possible for a child of God - if it wasn't why would God give us armour? Why would God tell us to put armour on? But think of this, positively, the effect that a clear conscience has when facing the Devil. Imagine coming face-to-face with our great accuser with the truth! As Paul said to Timothy: 'Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck' - the way not to make shipwreck is to take the belt of truth, to tighten our belts, and to live by our belts, and let truth hold everything in our lives up.

Now, that's the first step of battle. My question to you tonight is this: have you taken that first step? Secondly we have the breastplate of righteousness. That breastplate comes from up here right to down here, and it is said to cover all the vital parts of the body. It was meant to protect from the arrows and the swords of the enemy. In this context, the spiritual breastplate protects from the fiery darts of the Devil, the wiles of the Devil. Do you know that Satan, probably everyday, and his hordes are aiming fiery darts at your heart, at your vitals? Just as the worldly enemy always shoots toward the chest, so Satan does that - and that is why God gives us, praise His name, an impregnable covering for the soul of the Christian.
We said with regard to the belt of truth that Satan was the liar from the beginning, and we find with regard to the breastplate of righteousness that, to the child of God, Satan is the accuser - indeed, that's what 'Satan' means in Devil. He throws things at the Christian day-by-day, the accuser of the brethren, and every believer comes across him - filling their minds and their heart with guilt for the things that they have done. The problem occurs when believers try to take their own righteousness and make it a breastplate - that's when believers get into trouble. They try to be better, they try their best to live a Christian life, they try their best to walk in the truth that we've been talking about. But do you know what Isaiah says in 64:6? 'We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags' - imagine what a breastplate of filthy rags would do for you in a battle! Wouldn't do much, sure it wouldn't? Our righteousness is not what Paul is talking about. Romans says: 'There is none righteous, no not one...all have sinned...all have fallen short of the glory of God' - but, praise God, the message of Romans is: there is a righteousness from God!

When we go into the book of Isaiah again, we find the Lord Jesus Christ in His pre-incarnate state, and we read of Him walking in battle, for He put on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation upon His head, and He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. Imagine this: the Lord Jesus Christ doesn't ask you to wear any second-rate clothes, but He gives you the armour that He wore Himself. Oh, how can we not be victorious? How can we not stand in the evil day? Paul describes in Philippians 3, if we had time we could look at it, verses 7 to 9 - how he had that breastplate of righteousness. Let's have a quick look at it, Philippians chapter 3 and verse 7 to 9: 'But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ', and he's just been going through all the qualifications he had in the flesh, religiously speaking and morally speaking. Those were gain to him, but he counted them loss to Christ - they're useless! 'Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith'.

That's the righteousness we need, and I want you to notice tonight that that is by grace through faith - that's how you get everything in the Christian life. By grace, God has given it. Through faith, that's the mechanism whereby you are given it. Faith! And, my friend, if you want to put the armour of God on tonight, if you want to gird yourself with that belt of truth, if you want to wear the breastplate of righteousness, and in the weeks that lie ahead put on every other part of the armour of God - you're going to have to have faith! Paul said to the Thessalonians: 'Putting on the breastplate of faith and love' - you must have faith toward God to put it on, and you must have love toward men to put it on. It is a righteousness that affects you toward God - God cleansing you - and a righteousness that affects others around you, because His Spirit is working in you an in-wrought righteousness of God in your life!

Someone has said: 'When a man is clothed in practical righteousness he is impregnable. Words are no defence against accusation, but a good life is'. Like Paul, what did he say? 'I work and labour to have a conscience void of offence toward God and men!' You see if you have a conscience void of offence toward God and men, you can look the Devil straight in the eye and he can't do a thing about it. Isn't that wonderful? The great accuser of the brethren - can I ask you tonight: do you have this? Oh, we're all trying it on our own steam, aren't we? But do we have God's breastplate of righteousness? Would we not be better tonight discarding our filthy rags, and by faith bending over and lifting up God's righteous breastplate that will become a deadly weapon in the hands of the Almighty?

In ancient times before a squire was knighted, do you know what he would do? He would spend a night in vigil in the Castle Chapel, and he would spread out his whole armour before him, and he would lie prostrate and offer up his soul to Almighty God. That's what we need to do. Our duty is to put on the whole armour of God and stand our ground. Stand our ground - what is that ground, as we close? Revelation 12:11, listen, the
martyr's of our God say this: 'They overcame him' - the great accuser - 'by' - and that word 'by' means this: 'on the ground of' - 'the blood of the Lamb, and by', on the ground of, 'the word of their testimony' - the word of what that blood does, the word of what that blood means - 'and they loved not their lives unto the death'!

There's an old rabbinical tradition that says this: that Satan the accuser had to shut his mouth on the day of atonement. What a thought! For our day of atonement started that day at Calvary, and if we're in Him it hasn't stopped yet and it's never going to. You may hear your accuser this evening, and every day of your life, but the word of God for your heart - and as we go into this spiritual battle together is this: we can stand, and when he has thrown everything against us, we can do all and still stand - why? Because if God is for us - if He is for us - who can stand against us? What a wonderful Saviour He is, isn't He?

As we bow our heads, and we have known the Lord's voice tonight, why not set aside those old rags? Why not be done with untruth, and half-truth, and spiritual compromise? Put on God's belt and God's breastplate, and stand in the victory of the Lord. We are overcomers tonight, not trying to be, we are - but we've got to, by faith, enter into that armour. Our Father, we thank Thee tonight that we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. We thank Thee that He is a nail in a sure place, and though the winds may blow, and the rocks may quake, and the waves may roar, our house is built on the rock Christ Jesus and will stand firm. Lord, may we have that deep spiritual realisation tonight, and may You impart grace to us to believe Thee - that Lord, You have won, and that we are standing on the victory side and none can be against us, for God is for us. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - February 2001
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Ephesians - Chapter 30: The Holy War Pt 3
"The Christian Warrior's Armour - Part 2"

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Ephesians 6:15-16
1. The Shoes Of The Gospel (verse 15)
2. The Shield Of Faith (verse 16)

Now let me welcome you to the Bible Reading this evening here in the Iron Hall, it's good to see you all with us. There are some visitors with us - several visitors in fact - and we're very glad to see you all with us this evening. Thank you for making the effort to come under the sound of the word of God, and we trust that the Lord will bless you for coming.

Ephesians chapter 6, and we'll take time to read from verse 10 again to get the whole of the passage of Paul's thoughts. We're looking at the second pair of pieces of armour that Paul has outlined, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Verse 10: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand".

As we study this passage of scripture week after week, it becomes greater and greater - the universal truths that we can draw from it. We could take a series - as many of you will already know - out of this little sub-series. For many weeks we could dwell on these thoughts, but we want to get from them the main themes that Paul has laid for us in this little book of Ephesians. We've been looking at the Christian warrior's armour, what God has given to us - and it is called the armour of God rightly so, because it is God's armour - it's not something that we have of ourselves, is that something that we conjure up or make by any of our works of faith. This is God's supernatural armour, it is the gift of God given to us.

One author has said regarding this chapter: 'If, for 60 seconds, we could see the size and the ranks of our enemy: General Satan, his cosmocrats, their lieutenants and foot soldiers - we would forever reject reliance on conventional methods, and would flee to God's armoury for instruction and for outfitting'. We see in verse 12, if we really believe it, that 'we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places' - we must then adorn ourselves with God's armour, nothing else will do. We must put on the armour of God!

As we study in these pieces of armour, we find that all of them correspond to the armour that the Lord Jesus Christ wore when He was upon the earth. In fact we looked last week at the book of Isaiah and saw that the armour that we are looking at here in Ephesians 6 is the armour that God Himself - omnipotent God - adorned Himself with. So He's not asking us to put on some second-rate Christian experience only for humans, but God Almighty is giving us His own armour, the armour that the Lord Jesus Christ wore, the armour that is victorious and has already been proved here in the sinful environment in which we live.

Last week we saw that we ought to be fitted out with the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness. It's important to be truthful - the way to be truthful, we learnt, is to uphold the truth of God, and the Lord Jesus tells us that: 'Thy word is truth'. But we saw that that girdle of truth held up the rest of the armour, it bound it
together. We also saw that the sword was attached to the belt of truth, and therefore we concluded that it wasn't just holding doctrine in our heads, but it was a life of truth, a life of transparency, a life of blamelessness, that should adorn the Gospel. Not just holding the truth but, as this great epistle teaches us, to walk in the truth, to have a life that testifies and witnesses of trustworthiness, faithfulness to the word of God and to the principles that are laid down.

We then looked at the breastplate of righteousness. We saw that that righteousness is the righteousness imputed by faith by the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, as the book of Romans teaches us, the righteousness of God specifically. Because our sins were imputed on Him at Calvary, His righteousness by faith in Him through grace is imputed to us in conversion. But we also see that there was another side to that: our lives must therefore adorn that righteousness of Christ in a practical righteousness - it's not good enough to say, like some were saying to Paul and in the church of Rome: 'Shall we sin that grace may abound?'. There must be a life, there must be a pattern of footsteps and - as the word of God says - conversation that lends itself to godliness, and testifies that the righteousness of Christ is living in my life.

It's amazing that, right throughout all these pieces of armour, the word of God is through it all. In fact, I believe that that is the whole testimony of these pieces of armour: the word of God, the word of God, the word of God, and then obedience to the word of God in every facet of our lives. And we're beginning to get the idea that the armour covers us from the tip of our head to the tip of our toe, so that the devil has no foothold with us, so there's no gaps, so that we are not left naked - and the way to be like that is to adorn ourselves with the word of God. So, tonight we look at the next two pieces of God's armour that He gives us. There's the shoes of the gospel - the gospel of peace specifically - and then there is the shield of faith.

Verse 15: 'And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace' - the shoes of the gospel. You will recall that last week we were looking at how Paul is under house arrest in Rome, he's probably chained to a Roman soldier and so he is looking at an illustration of what a soldier is like, specifically a Roman soldier. At this point, after looking at the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness, he casts his eye down to the feet of this Roman soldier. He sees a pair of sandals, on the sole of those sandals there are hobnails. Like spikes on a pair of golf shoes, or studs on a pair of football boots, they are there for a purpose: that the Roman soldier may have a footing in his battle, that he may be able to dig his heels in hard and not be moved. These shoes are sturdy shoes, leather shoes. They also have these prongs in them so that whenever the Roman soldier, perhaps, stands on a trap - a sharp trap laid by the enemy - it'll not stop him marching forward. These are soldier's shoes!

Now when we talk about sandals we conjure into our mind flip-flops, perhaps, that we take on our Mediterranean holidays, that flip on and flip off. But that's not what Paul is talking about here, these aren't 'Moses sandals', these are sturdy boots for war. On the bottom of them there is hard leather, and these studs and spikes - and then there are two pieces of leather, two straps, and they are wound around the leg right up to the very ball of the lower leg - tight! So that this soldier is able to move, so he's able to stand strongly without worrying about his footwear.

There are two thoughts, I believe, that Paul the apostle is bringing to us through the shoes of the gospel of peace. The first is very simple, and you've probably thought of it already: these shoes are for standing in. They are for standing firm, as the passage has told us in the introduction: that we are to stand, and when we have done all, to stand - to stand and remain standing! When the smoke of the battle has died down - and we have stood at the beginning - that when everything disappears and you can begin to see again, you're still standing in the same victorious position. We have been learning that that position is the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ. To stand in His victory, to stand on what He has won, the ground that He has given us by the blood of the cross - we are to stand in it, and having done all, to stand.
The second point that he has, I believe, is also the suggestion that the soldier was ready for battle. It is the preparation of the gospel of peace. He has readiness to go forth with his message, whatever it may be, or with his warfare - and even go into invasion of enemy territory. Paul knew what he was talking about. If you were to turn with me to Romans chapter 1, if you wish, verse 16 you will find that Paul knew both of these things in his life. He knew what it was to stand firm upon the victory ground of Christ, and he also knew what it was to go forward and to be prepared to take the Gospel wherever God led him. Romans 1 and verse 16: 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth' - I am not ashamed! It doesn't matter that it's foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jew, I am not ashamed. I will not be moved from off that ground, I am digging my heels in firm, I am standing. But in the same chapter you have verses 14 and 15, he says that he is ready to publish it: 'I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also' - a standing and also a readiness.

Now let's look, first of all, at this standing. Standing in the battle - we can stand in the battle and be at peace! Now I want you to see the seeming contradictions - or I'd rather call it 'spiritual paradoxes' - that you find so much throughout scripture. This Roman soldier, the picture Paul is painting, is standing in the bloodiest, smokiest battle that you can imagine - yet he is standing in shoes of peace! We can stand in a battle and be at peace, that's what Paul is saying. When we stand in the finished work of Christ, no matter what assails us, no matter what the devil can throw at us, no matter what comes from within our fleshly heart and what attracts - 'magnetism' from the world around us - we can be at peace! That's remarkable. In fact Romans 5 and verse 1 testifies of that in our salvation, that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: 'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God'. We have entered into it, through the finished work, in the process of salvation and we have been granted peace with God. Then what flows from that is the peace of God that passeth all understanding, and then we are meant to be at peace one with the other - isn't that right? As Colossians says, when we let the word of God dwell in our hearts richly, that is what will happen. We will know the peace of God that passeth all understanding, and we will be at peace with those around us: our brethren and sisters in Christ.

When that happens, when we are at peace with God, when we are at peace with ourselves, and when we are at peace with one another, James chapter [4] and verses 1 to 7 says that is the way the devil is defeated. You remember in that passage, James chapter [4], that he says: 'Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you'. That is in the context of peace with God, peace with yourself, and peace with one another - that is the victory that we have in the Lord Jesus, standing in these shoes. Now my question to you is: are you standing? Are you standing at this moment in the peace of God's gospel? It's very easy to answer, all you have to do is look into your heart and see if it's a storm of absolute chaos, or is it at peace? Someone has said that the heart is like the referee of the human being, when the whistle is blowing your peace is lost, the rules have been broken and there's a lack of peace now - but do you know that? Do you know that calm stillness of a child of God? Are you walking according to the gospel victory that the Lord Jesus Christ has given to us? You might say you're saved - and that's great that you're saved! - but there's another step, and it's walking in the victory of the Lord Jesus, it's knowing the peace of God through victory. It's what the poet said:

'Blessed quietness,
Holy quietness.
Blessed assurance in my soul.
On the stormy sea,
Jesus speaks to me,
And the billows cease to roll'.
I've said in the last couple weeks that I believe that the devil - to put it bluntly - has a lot of believers over a barrel. I believe that one of his schemes - and remember last week, one of his mischievous devices and methods and wiles - are restless spirits in the life of God's children. Restlessness, anxiety, fear - and believers, by this, have allowed Satan to bind them with anxieties and troubles. But if you learn to stand in the gospel of peace, that goes - it must go! You remember Israel's fearful enemy, Pharaoh, in the book of Exodus. You remember that he - just like Satan for us - was bent upon their destruction. But the night the angel of death appeared over Egypt, the Israelites, where were they? They were in their homes, shut doors, blood on the lintel on the doorpost - they were under the blood of the lamb! And when you're under the blood of the Lamb there's no need for restlessness! When God has promised: 'When I see the blood I will pass over you', when He tells you that there's protection under the blood, and if you're saved and standing in the victory of Christ, that is the peace of Passover! God has said, as He said to them: 'And thus shall ye eat it, with your loins girded and shoes on your feet'. Shoes of peace!

Wasn't it Isaiah said: 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee' - and we always forget to finish quoting that verse: 'because he trusteth in Him'. Trust, that's what it is. Standing, standing and refusing to be moved! Now, I believe the parallel to the book of Ephesians, and indeed the book of Hebrews, in the Old Testament is the book of Joshua. There's a mistaken notion that goes about Christendom and it's because of two reasons specifically. First of all: hymnology, and also Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress' - which I will not even attempt to criticise, but I do believe that he was wrong in this aspect. Many believers see Canaan, the promised land, as heaven - and many also see the Jordan as being our crossing over death to heaven as a believer. But, you see, if you look in the book of Joshua you find that for the Israelites, the children of God, that the battle only began when they got into Canaan. It was only when they entered the promised land that they had to put their battle armour on, and start fighting a very bloody fight and clearing the land of all the Canaanites, the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and all the rest of them!

In the Old Testament, to put it briefly - and we haven't got time to go into it - but typically speaking, the Red Sea represents the death of our Lord Jesus Christ and His resurrection. And you can see that by the fact that once the Israelites were crossing the Red Sea, and they got to the other side, the enemy began to chase them - and God sent His Spirit which closed those waters and all the Egyptians drowned. What did it say? 'All the Egyptians drowned' - all of their enemies were destroyed in an instant, they had no more enemies! They were free now to walk towards the promised land, although they went through the wilderness - and the wilderness in our Christian lives, to put it typically, represents the temptation. It represents, once we are saved, how the devil throws everything at us - and it's very difficult to be a babe in the Lord Jesus Christ, it's difficult to get to grips at times with the things that we have to learn, and the repentance, and the life, daily crucifying the flesh and daily carrying the cross of our Lord Jesus. But eventually what is meant to happen, just like the children of Israel, we cross the Red Sea through the cross of the Lord Jesus who died and rose again for us, we enter into those very early teething stages of Christian life, but eventually we ought to come to the Jordan.

I believe the Jordan represents our spiritual death, and our spiritual resurrection with the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that Canaan is the land of spiritual blessing, I believe it is the promised land of Christian maturity that we are all to strive to - and because of that, it is the very place that the enemy takes on the greatest battle because he wants to forfeit us from the blessing that God would have for us in His promises. The blessings are ours! Ephesians 1 tells us, our key verse, we are blessed - we are, past tense, 'we are blessed with all blessings in heavenly places in Christ'. But the second half of this book, as we all know now, is telling us to enter into the blessings that are ours - and we have got this mentality in evangelicalism and fundamentalism today, that: 'If the blessings are ours, I have them!' - no!

Turn to Joshua, so that we can lay this down. Joshua chapter 1, now this is a famous passage of Scripture, Joshua chapter 1 and we read from verse 2. God says: 'Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go
over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel' - listen - 'Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses'. Now there's a promise, the word of God: 'From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Therefore be strong'. Now, what we do is: we stop at verse 5, and say: 'Well, God has given us this, He's given to us! What do I need to be strong for?'. I mean the Israelites could have said, couldn't they: 'Well, if You've given us this land, Lord, why do we have to fight for it?' - isn't that right? But He says: 'Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them' - you're going to have to fight, you're going to have to divide the land - 'Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest'. Then verse 9: 'Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest'. Verse 18: 'Whosoever he be that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not hearken unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death: only be thou strong and of a good courage'.

Do you see the parallel? God says: 'That land is yours' - He'd been saying it since the promise of the land to Abraham, but they still had to appropriate their promises. That's the book of Hebrews, to me at least, you've got to go in, God has no pleasure in him that turns back, but you've got to take that step of faith. But the tragedy is for many, we can be saved and still in the wilderness of temptation, still grappling with the childish things, but we have to start to put away those childish things and become men - and quit you like men! We've got to begin to cross the Jordan that is uncrossed, and there is a lot of fruit there, there's a lot of corn that hasn't been touched for years. They were on Canaan land -don't forget that, they were stepping unto the land - but their job was to begin to appropriate these things. What was theirs, they had to claim it, they had to defeat Satan's attempts to deprive them of what was theirs, they had to go forward! And that is what Satan wants to do to every believer today, that is his battle strategy: to deprive us of what is ours! And we can't let him! The Lord Jesus died that we might have it, and it is by grace through faith that we can get it - and we're sitting here tonight, and whatever it is that we don't have, we can appropriate it now by faith!

Oh, it's wonderful. Josephus tells us of a Roman soldier on one occasion, who tried to run and he fell over and he fell on his back onto the stone ground, and he was despatched from the Roman army. You can't run in Roman soldier's shoes, they're not for running, they're for standing - and there is also this thought: they're not for running away. When a Roman soldier saw that there was an enemy that was very large, he had to fight to the death because the shoes he was wearing couldn't take him away! Now, we don't have to fight to the death and be worried about whether we'll win or not, the shoes of the gospel of peace can't run away because the Lord Jesus Christ who bought them with His blood can't be defeated! That's the thought.

But it's not just the security that we have in the Lord Jesus and His blessings, but as I said earlier, the second point is: Paul wants us to prepare for service in the gospel. Not just steadfastness, but swiftness in witnessing - that's the idea in the preparation, verse 15: 'the preparation of the gospel of peace'. It suggests promptness, a readiness. The Spanish translation says this: 'Having your feet shod with a joyful readiness to propagate the gospel of peace' - a joyful readiness to preach the Gospel! Isn't that what we need? There are millions around our world - millions, now - who have never heard, never heard. Isn't it the 10/40 window (I hope I've got the numbers right), no-one has ever heard, the centre of the planet, one of the largest scales in the whole of geography, and people haven't heard. The 21st century, the age of the website, the age of human cloning, and people haven't heard the gospel. Paul wants us to have a readiness to take that gospel. Satan wants to blind them, but he wants us - God - to take them and unbind then. And as we preach the gospel, is that not what we are doing? We are preaching deliverance to the captives, the recovery of sight to the blind, setting at liberty
them that are bruised. Paul quotes Isaiah and Nahum talking about this in Romans 10:15: 'How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!' and what the word of God is saying is that the feet that are beautiful in the eyes of God, are the feet that take the Gospel, that walk with the Gospel to those that need to hear it. That is the two inseparable things about the gospel of peace: you've got to preach it, but you've also got to walk by it! Those things are never divorced in Scripture, theory and life are never apart, the two must be inseparable - mouthing the gospel and manifesting it.

These shoes, as you've probably gathered, aren't dancing shoes for your pleasure. They're not carpet slippers for you, in your old age, to sit with your feet up by the fire and relax - but these are fighting shoes. As Peter said: '[We are to] be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear - being ready at all times. Like those eating the Passover, they were eating with their shoes on ready to go - and there's an interesting statement in Deuteronomy 29:5, to those very people God said: 'I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot'. These weren't Dr Martin's - but they went forty years ago, and the shoes that they wore going out were the same shoes that they had on. That is the gospel that we have, praise God it hasn't changed! Praise God it hasn't worn old - no matter what modernists and liberalists tell us today - it is the same gospel, it has the same power, because it points back to the same cross and the same Christ. We can go with it, we can be assured that if we are standing in the same gospel shoes that the apostles stood in, and that the Lord Jesus Christ procured, we can be sure that it will never grow old! The burning sands of the desert of temptation - it will last the journey. The sharp stones, and traps of the enemy, and adversity, won't wear them out!

Paul is saying that the sign of a Christian - and if you're a Christian tonight, the sign that you are one must be: a readiness to move, and eager to go and preach the gospel, the way of peace. Always ready at every opportunity to share it with those who have never heard. Now I want to make a little digression for a moment, because I believe that we are missing something in this passage that we so often look at in our Christian lives. I asked the question: why would a soldier be armed to the teeth, and be carrying with him a message of peace? It seems strange, doesn't it: how a Roman soldier, the state-of-the-art in military of the day, and in technology, could be carrying a gospel of peace to anyone? Of course, we've already looked in a sense that while the battle is raging outside, with regard to the Christian we can be at peace inside. It doesn't matter what the devil is throwing at us, that peace in the stern of our boat can be very very quiet.

But I believe that there's something more, I believe there's something connected with the evangelistic commission - and we tend to believe today that it's enough just to preach the gospel and leave the rest to God, and I don't subscribe to that theology. I do subscribe to the theology that salvation is of the Lord, but I also believe that God in His sovereign will has ordained that we be the means of preaching that gospel. I believe that here we have, in the armour of God, a method whereby we as the children of God are able, with the armour of God, to disarm in some measure the enemy! I believe that that's the purpose of this armour: that we, as we go forth with the gospel, are covered with God's armour so that we can, in a measure, defeat the devil - so that when we fire the gospel arrows that we have, that they will have a clear, clean entrance.

I believe that this is how we can preach the gospel and signs follow. I wonder have we lost, somewhere along the way - I don't know when - but have we lost the art of spiritual warfare? We've done the old pendulum again, haven't we? The charismatics go nuts, so we forget all about it! Isn't that right? But what that the Lord, our Lord, say? He said in Mark 3:27: 'No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house'. Of course, people object: 'Oh, but He did that at the cross. He bound him at the cross'. Yes, He did! But what are we saying? We have to appropriate that victory! We have to take the devil on, face-to-face, upon the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ at the cross - and that is the beginning of walking and standing in these shoes of the gospel of peace. Surely it's our job as foot soldiers to appropriate the victory face-to-face in the battle, and to spoil
Satan's kingdoms? Are we not told by Paul that we are labourers together with God? And if, as he says, God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, are we not told Christ is in us? And if God was in Christ reconciling the world, is Christ not in us doing the same?

Is that not why Paul told the Christians in Rome in chapter 16:20: 'The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly' - and the God of peace did that because the Soldier was wearing the shoes of the gospel of peace. You see, when we relax in our tents we're in trouble. When we feel safe, we're not following the beautiful feet of the Lord Jesus Christ on the mountains, bearing good tidings and publishing peace - but what we need to do is come to a position tonight by faith, whereby we say like that great hymn:

'Take my feet and let them be,
Swift and beautiful for Thee'.

Are you ready? Are you prepared, right now, to go wherever God tells you, to do whatever God asks you to do?

'Ready to go, ready to stay,
Ready my place to fill.
Ready for service, lowly or great,
Ready to do His will'.

That's what it is. But then secondly we have the shield of faith, verse 16, let's spend a few moments on this. 'Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one'. So, you have the shoes of the gospel and now you have the shield of faith. The question is: do most believers believe Satan is out to destroy them? Now, come on, this is important! Do you really believe Satan is out to destroy you? I know believers, and you talk to them, and you would think Satan didn't exist! But if he does exist, and you believe he exists, he exists to destroy you! That is his purpose - and if that is the case we need all of the armour of God to withstand, we need to cover every inch of us with the armour of God. Here we have the shield, next week we'll look at the sword of the spirit - and the shield and the sword go together, because our faith is attacked when the devil attacks the word of God. The shield of faith protects [against] the devil's attacks upon the word of God.

Paul says, verse 16: 'Above all' - above all! That literally means 'in addition to' - and I believe what he is meaning here is, we've already had the breastplate of righteousness, the girdle of truth, and we've just had the shoes on our feet, and he is saying: 'All those first three parts of the armour, that shield is above them'. In other words it's in front of them, it protects what you have already put on. Those other three things will be very weak if you don't have a shield. A breastplate will do you no good, or a belt, or shoes, if the enemy can penetrate your defence. So you need this shield of faith above all, it covers the rest of the armour already on. And of course the shield, in the battle, was literally put above all things - many a time you see a picture of all the Roman soldiers coming together in a square or a rectangle, and putting the shields over their head - that's what it was used for in its very nature.

But the miraculous thing about this shield is this: it's not just above all, but it is able to quench all - and that is a good enough reason for it being above all, isn't it? All the fiery darts of the devil - there's no exceptions, there's no Exocet missiles that can get past this shield of faith! It protects the child of God, it is a shield. Now, the word for 'shield' here is not the little round shield that you often see, that's commonly called in the word of God 'a buckler' - but literally the Greek says: 'a door-shield' - a door-shield. It is what it says: this was an oblong shield about two and a half feet wide, and four feet high. Massive, heavily armoured, it was a warrior's shield! It literally means 'taking the great shield of your faith that it may quench the fiery darts of the devil'.
Now, what were these fiery darts? Well, these were one of the most advanced weapons of the day, the most dangerous weapon, perhaps, in ancient warfare. It was a dart that was tipped with pitch, it was set alight and it was fired at the enemy. Dangerous if it gets into you, and past your defences! But the point was this: you have this big two and a half foot wide and four foot [tall] shield able to quench it! This shield was made of two layers of laminated wood stuck together with glue, and over that laminated wood there was a linen cloth, and over the linen cloth there was a leather hide, and at the top and the bottom they were galvanised with iron, and there was an iron crest put on the front of it. That's the kind of shield we're talking about - two and a half feet wide and four feet long. Once the darts penetrated that shield and stuck into the shield, they were immediately extinguished naturally. The history books tell us that after the Siege of Deracium (sp?) one man called Sceeva (sp?) counted no less than 220 darts on his shield! Two hundred and twenty that he had been protected from by this great shield!

What Paul is saying here is that these fiery darts, or literally these missiles, of the evil one - it doesn't matter how many he has, and let me tell you he has thousands of ways to set you aflame with destruction. And the problem with our bodies is: we are easily set aflame. We don't have to leave it all to the devil, for the Lord said: 'Out of the heart proceed adulteries, fornications, lies, murders, hatreds' - isn't that right? So when the fire comes, and if it penetrated and got past, somehow, this shield - if we weren't using it - and it hit us, we would go up in flames because we're very flammable, very sinful. But what a thought, what a thought indeed, that although these darts may be set on fire of hell, we've got God's shield. God's shield!

Now, his darts take many forms. They take filthy thoughts, sexual lust, business compromise, pride, worry, unbelief, jealousy, covetousness, and often they enter into our minds with accusing lies - the accuser, that's what he is - throwing lies, and telling us things about ourselves that aren't true, blasphemous thoughts at times even when we're on our knees in prayer, perversities that we think or contemplate, hate towards others, doubts, and burning desires that we want to fulfil! He shoots so much at us, doesn't he? There's times that we don't extinguish those darts right away, isn't that right? They catch light, they get into a bigger fire and that's harder to put out.

But my friends, if we would only realise what this shield of faith is - and as we have another five minutes left, let's look at what this shield of faith is, because people think it's working up, like I said before as one man said to me, some people think faith is standing in front of the mirror and saying - when you've got the chickenpox: 'I don't have the chickenpox, I don't have the chickenpox, I don't have the chickenpox'. Convincing yourself of something that's not true, and in a spiritual realm saying: 'God is going to give me that house, I have to believe that'. There are those who testify this, charismatics - they tell you that if you imagine the things, and dream about the things in your mind, God will give you the things. Now, that is not what faith is - what is this shield of faith? It's only mentioned here in the New Testament scripture, so we have to go into the Old Testament to get an understanding of it. It's a metaphorical term, I believe. I shield in the Old Testament always generally represents the person of Almighty God. It represents His protecting care.

The first mention about a shield in the Bible is in relation to Abraham. You remember, in Genesis chapter 14, there is the battle of the patriarchs - and the patriarchs, the fathers in the Old Testament, are struggling against unbelieving kings. Remember the kings that attacked, the King of Sodom and his allies, and Abraham had to come with all his men to defeat them. After he defeats them in battle, Genesis 15 verse 1: 'The word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward'. He saying: 'I'm able, I'm able for all the kings, I'm able for all your enemies. And the struggle that you've just seen in chapter 14, Abram, if you were frightened going into the battle, Abram, don't be afraid because God is your shield and you need not fear a man, or a demon, or a devil, or hell, or anything!'.

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The second mention is of Moses in his song of praise for God's majesty and excellency, in Deuteronomy 33 and verse 27 to 29 - I wish we had time to read it, but you know that passage: 'Underneath, underneath are the everlasting arms'. And then God reveals himself to Moses as his shield of protection, the shield of his people. Now, that's what the faith is here: it is a firm confidence in the Lord, in who He is! It's not us working up a faith, it's a firm standing in the Lord and what the Lord has said! And when temptations burn, and circumstances are adverse, when doubts assail our minds and heart, when shipwreck threatens our spiritual lives - if faith would look up to God, and just say: 'I believe God!', that's it! It's not 'I believe', it's 'I believe God'. It's not the faith once delivered to the saints in Jude, I don't believe that's what is meant here. It's not the system of doctrine and belief, but as Harry Ironside says: 'It's not so much what you believe, but how you believe' - how you appropriate, in your living, what God has granted to you. It is confidence in God, it's nothing mystical - that's not what faith is. Romans 10:17: 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God' - that's what faith is!

Standing on the promises of Christ my King through eternal ages - that's what faith is! To stand on God's character, and what God has said - and you can defeat everything with that. You can defeat the world: is the world causing you a problem tonight? Is it? Its temptations, its sins, perhaps its opposition as you try to reach people for the lost? Listen: this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. That's the victory, and John goes on to say in that same chapter, 1 John 5 verse 18: 'And that wicked one toucheth him not' - he can't touch you! What a statement.

Isn't it amazing that he says this about the shield of faith: 'ye shall be able to quench the fiery darts' - all of them - 'of the devil'. You're able - it doesn't say you might be able, or you may be able if you get to this standard - you are able, certainty. But there's a condition, a condition: take hold of it! I believe, today more than ever, that our sovereign eternal God is there, but we need to take hold of Him by faith, and that's why this is a shield of faith. Incidentally, these shields were made in such a way that they could link together, and interlock with all the other soldiers - and I believe this: that the greatest barrier to Satanic opposition and the work of the kingdom of darkness here, is the church of Jesus Christ when they link together by faith. The people that know their God shall be strong and do exploits!

Are you prepared? Are you standing where you ought to be in this battle? Listen, this thrills me: we have everything we need, everything, but - if I can say it - like the carrot dangling in front of the donkey, we haven't appropriated it. Let's finish on this note, as we go into the battle:

'We rest on Thee, our Shield and our Defender.
We go not forth alone against the foe.
Strong in Thy strength, safe in Thy keeping tender.
We rest on Thee and in Thy name we go'.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - February 2001
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Now let me welcome you to our Monday evening Bible Reading here in the Iron Hall. It's great to see you all with us, making an effort in the bad weather to come around the word of God, to hear what God has to say to us. Especially if you're visiting, we welcome you and trust that the Lord speaks to you through His eternal word.

We're turning again to Ephesians and chapter 6 once more, this is our thirty-first study and it is our fourth study in The Christian Warrior's Armour - looking at the armour of God that has been given to every believer who is in Christ. So let's turn again to Ephesians 6, Ephesians chapter 6 - and I would advise you (there is some notepaper on the back of this little sheet, and if you have a pen with you, or if you can borrow a pen very quickly) I would advise you to take down the truths that you will hear tonight. They're not well-known in the sense that - well, I'll explain as I go through, perhaps, why they're not well-known - there are reasons for this. But everything I have to say - let me say at the outset of our meeting - is from the word of God, you will not find anything I'm saying tonight that is not found within our text.

So as we come, let's come again and read about the whole armour of God so that we get the flow of the weeks that have gone behind. We are now on the last two parts of the physical armour of God - we've dealt with four already. Verse 10 of chapter 6: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked" - and this is our verse tonight - "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of God, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak".

We've been going through the book of Ephesians now for 31 weeks, [this is] our thirty-first study, and our fourth study in a sub-series on the armour of God. I have entitled this sub-series: 'The Holy War'. Many are not aware that John Bunyan, who wrote Pilgrim's Progress, also wrote another great book that was an allegory of the Christian life and, indeed, the Christian battle - and he entitled it: 'The Holy War'. If you're not aware of that, you most definitely are not aware of the full title of that book - that's a shortened version of it. The full title is this - now listen carefully: 'The Holy War Made by King Shaddai upon Diabolus For the Regaining of the Metropolis of the World; or The Losing and Taking Again of the Town of Mansoul'. Now let's go over that again, listen: 'The Holy War' - that we've been talking about in this week - 'Made by King Shaddai'. Now who is King Shaddai? El-Shaddai, God! This war made by our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of
kings and Lord of lords - '...upon Diabolus' - which is Latin for devil - 'For the Regaining of the Metropolis' - the city - 'of the World; or The Losing and Taking Again of the Town of Mansoul'.

You see the picture that Bunyan was trying to paint. He was bringing to us what we've been learning in weeks gone by, of this great spiritual battle that all those who are Christians have entered into in their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We have learnt, and we will learn again this evening, that this is no picnic - that this battle is a bloody, gruesome, horrible sight. It is hand-to-hand warfare, face-to-face as we stand glaring against the enemy of our souls, it's a breathless wrestling to the horrible cries and deadly moans of a great spiritual war. That is why we need the armour of God. It is not enough to be saved and to enter into this battle by ourselves, we must be fitted out and kitted with an armour - not of ourselves, but an armour that God has given to us so that we might win the battle that we are entering into as believers.

That is why, in the weeks that have gone by, we have learnt about buckling in the belt of truth around our loins, that all of the armour must be held up by God's truth. That in turn should flow out within our lives, in the truthfulness of God in the way we walk, and the manner in which we live. Secondly, we saw that we are to adorn the breastplate of God's righteousness in our Lord Jesus Christ. That is an imputed righteousness - in other words a righteousness that He has given to us. We saw that God gave to Christ our sin on the cross, for Him to suffer for - and in turn, because of that imputation of our sin to Him, He can now, when we have faith in Him, impute His righteousness, the righteousness of God, to us. So, we are to adorn by faith the breastplate of God's righteousness, and we also saw that there's a twin part to that, that that is to be seen in our walk of righteousness, day by day as we testify that the life of God is within us.

Thirdly, we were to fasten tightly the shoes of the gospel of peace, those sandals upon our feet. We are to stand firm, and let those studs on the sole of those shoes dig deep into the victory ground that we have in our Lord Jesus Christ. We're not to retreat, we're not to run away, we're not even to go forward, but we're to stand on the victory ground that we have in our Lord Jesus Christ. At that point of standing we're to take up the shield of faith, whereby we can quench the fiery darts of the devil. We saw the many wiles and methods that the devil has to try and shoot down the soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ. But we also saw that this great shield of faith, which is not our faith, but the shield is God - and it is a shield of faith because we are to put our dependence in the character and in the word of God. If we hold up the word of God as our shield, it will never fail to protect us.

So, tonight we're looking at the last two parts of the physical armour. There is the helmet of salvation, and we are to unsheathe the sword of the Spirit. Now let's look at the first little statement at the beginning of our verse 17: 'And take the helmet of salvation'. 'And take the helmet of salvation' - now that Greek phrase is a different phrase than you find in verse 13 and verse 16. Look at verse 13: 'Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God' - verse 16: 'Above all, taking the shield of faith'. Verse 17: 'take the helmet' - that's a different Greek word. This word means to receive, it means to accept, it means that this thing is offered into your very hands, and you're just to accept it. Now, the other words for 'take' meant that this whole armour is laid out before you, and all you have to do is bend down and take it for yourself. But this is speaking of this piece of armour, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, actually being handed into your hands by someone else.

Now this is actually the way it would have been. Remember Paul is in prison and he's been chained to a Roman soldier and he can look at this Roman armour, as the soldier is wearing it - and that is exactly what happened. You see, they put on all the armour that we have been studying in the weeks gone by, and if you can imagine it: when their arm is in the shield of faith, well they can't really pick anything off the ground, they can't bend down because they're laden with their armour. What happens is an armour-bearer gives them their helmet, which they probably put on before the shield of faith, and then when they've everything on, finally the armour-bearer hands him his sword. There is this sense that these two things, the helmet of
salvation and the sword of the Spirit, are not something that we lift up, but something that is given to us by
the armour-bearer - and of course the armour-bearer is the Lord, for this is the armour of God, isn't it?

The book of Jonah testifies many things to us, but one of the greatest things it tells us is this: salvation is of
the Lord. I believe, in this sense, this phrase 'take the helmet of salvation' is speaking of the giftedness of
salvation. It is not something that we can lift up in a moral sense within our life, it's not something we can
achieve through our birth, or through our character make-up, or the way we live, or the religious persuasion
that we are, but it is a gift from God that we must receive, we must accept it from God. Now that's very
important to note, not only about salvation, that if you're not saved you need to realise it is a gift of God
which is eternal life, and you must receive it by faith - that's it! We saw last night, He is the door: 'By me if
any man enter in, he shall be saved'. There's nothing required of you, but to enter through the door: the Lord
Jesus Christ.

But as we go to these next two pieces of armour, I believe this giftedness that we find in it being given to us
as a gift, handed by the armour-bearer - the Lord Jesus Christ - there is this sense that we are not going into
the battle in our own confidence. We're not standing in our own strength, we have not adorned our self in this
armour, but it is God's armour - and we go not alone against the foe:

'Strong in Thy strength,
Safe in Thy keeping tender'.

Isn't that right? I want to lay as the foundation, before we go any further - for I will say a lot of things tonight
that empower us as believers - we must always remember, and we hear it so often in prayer: 'Without Thee,
Lord Jesus, we can do nothing'. But sometimes we labour that too much, because we can do all things
through Christ - never forget that! He has lavished upon us every single thing that we need, and we are not
simply poor, redundant sinners now, we are rich! We are heirs, with Christ Jesus, of the grace of God. We
must also remember though, that it is in His strength: 'Wherefore', verse 10, 'be strong in the Lord, and in the
power of his might'. Remember the book of Jude, chapter 1 verse 9: 'Michael the archangel, when contending
with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a railing accusation, but
said, The Lord rebuke thee'. So, before we go any further, we're not getting any fancy ideas that we are great
spiritual warriors without God on our own - no! But we are standing in the strength of the Lord, and if we
stand in His strength the rest of what we're going to study tonight is ours!

So, let's look first all at our first piece of armour tonight: the helmet of salvation - 'Take the helmet of
salvation'. Now the helmet, literally, of that Roman soldier that Paul was looking at, was made of bronze and
it had leather attachments whereby he fastened it onto his head. It had a band to protect his forehead, and it
had plates that come down like sideburns to protect his cheeks. It also extended down the back of his neck,
so that no one could come round the back and crack him on the neck with anything. So you can see that this
helmet is protecting the whole of the head, and about all that can be seen are the eyes and the nose and the
mouth, so that he can communicate, and so that he can see. A very heavy piece of armour it was, so heavy
that they had to line the inside of it with felt, or with a sponge of some kind, so that it was comfortable. The
history books tell us that the only weapons that could probably penetrate a helmet like this, was a hammer or
an axe.

Now why is it that we need such a strong instrument of armour upon our heads? Well, it's quite obvious in
the physical, military sense, that the head of the soldier is among one of the most important parts to be
defended - isn't that right? Even when we get on a motorbike, we put a helmet on, because so many
important faculties that many of us have - maybe not all of us! - but many of us have, are found within our
head. They need to be defended! The deadliest wounds that the enemy can inflict were on the head. They
head was the part that commanded the whole body, and if the enemy wanted to wipe out that soldier he
would aim for the head. Cut an arm off, and he could still resist a wee bit. Cut another limb off, perhaps he could still go on resisting - but if you cut his head off there's nothing much he can do about it, is there? He can't fight on in that battle. If he loses his head, he's in trouble!

Now what is the sense of the spiritual truth that Paul is wanting to convey to us this evening? Well first all, we must be fundamental with this. The helmet is salvation - let's not miss that - it is salvation, and salvation is simply the deliverance of you from sin by God. In Isaiah 59 we saw that this was the armour of God - it's actually God's armour! It's the armour that God wears, and God is giving us that armour, verse 17 he says: 'For he put on', God, 'righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak'. So, this is the helmet of God's salvation. Now, this is important, it's not just our heads being protected by a message, but it is our head being protected by God! For God is our salvation, not a message, God is our salvation, the message of the Gospel is that God is our salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. So we must see that, that this is the helmet of God's salvation. Our deliverance is offered in a person, the person of God Himself incarnate in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is His presence, it is His promise that covers the head.

If you imagine this: as the soldier faces the fight, imagine the effectiveness of facing the fight knowing that God is on your side. No matter how hot the battle gets, you can never be daunted if God is on your side. If God is for you, the word of God says nothing can be against you - why? Why can you not be daunted if you're wearing the helmet of salvation? Can I repeat it: because the ultimate victory has been secured! It is victory ground, it is victory armour, and this helmet of our salvation: it preserves us from surrender and retreat! If God be for us, who can stand against us?

So, it is the helmet of salvation - but secondly there is the sense that it is knowledge and assurance of salvation. You see, it's important for us to understand, and especially if you're not saved, that salvation is not an emotion. It is not without emotion, but it is not in essence an emotion. It is a rational knowledge, whereby you rationalise that you must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to have your sins forgiven and to be saved. We dare not, in our circles, minimise the intellectual sense of the Gospel. You must think to believe. Therefore this helmet of salvation is protecting that thinking process, whereby you realised you were a sinner, you realised Christ died for you, you realised you needed to repent, and you believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and you were born-again.

Now, let me say this: if there's any doubt in your head that you're saved - let me repeat that - if there is any doubt in your head that you are saved, you can never fight this battle. You have to have the helmet of assurance and knowledge of your salvation - and let me say to you tonight: if you've never ever accepted that, if you reach your arms out by faith, God will give you that helmet of salvation tonight! You can be assured that it is well with your soul. So, there is that knowledge and that assurance. Now believers, if you think about this for just a moment, what is the first thing that people begin to do when they're in a spiritual conflict? I'm not talking about mediocre temptation, I'm talking about a real spiritual war - sometimes we doubt our salvation, don't we? If you're honest, at least, you'll maybe say that. We think to ourselves: 'See that thought that just came into my head? Could a Christian think a thought like that?' - and then the devil perhaps comes along and says: 'No, a Christian couldn't think a thought like that, that must mean you're not a Christian! You've been kidding yourself! You're kidding your wife, you're kidding your family - you see what you're thinking, the things that you are starting to feel, and those temptations desires that come upon you in a moment? You can't be saved!'.

Now, let me say this: Satan may disrupt your daily victory, but he can do nothing to disrupt your position and your identity in the Lord Jesus - and never you forget that! No matter what he says, no matter what he does, he cannot change the fact that Christ has died, and you have died with Him; and Christ has risen, and you have risen with Him - and if you have put your trust and faith in Him, He is able to save to the uttermost
all who come onto God by Him! Just as well He's a Saviour like that, otherwise we'd all be in trouble. But if he can get you to believe for one moment that you're not strong in Christ, to believe for one moment that you're not on victory ground, he has got you over a barrel! This is very important for us to note everything that is being said tonight - but if you have this helmet of salvation, in the sense of a knowledge and an assurance that it is well with your soul - you are persuaded and know that He is able to keep what you've committed unto Him against that day - you have the hope, the sure certain hope, of eternal life.

Now there's a few conclusions that emanate from that. The first is this: you'll not accept false doctrine. If you have a knowledge of what salvation is in the word of God, you'll not accept anything that is apart from that, any false teaching that tells you have to work for you salvation, or the cross was good but it wasn't enough and you have to do a wee bit more, or you have to belong to this church, or you have to wear these clothes. If you believe and imbibe that, you haven't got this assurance on your head, you haven't really got to grips rationally and intellectually with what this great gospel of God's grace is. If you have this helmet on, you'll never despair. You will never despair - never! You will never ever panic about the state of your soul, because this helmet of salvation lifts up the believer's head. Psalm 3:3: 'But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head'. Luke 21:28 says, speaking of the end times that we are probably in today: 'And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up', don't despair, 'and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh'. It's hope, not despair, not pessimism that we hear so much of today - but it is an assurance and knowledge that God is our salvation!

Now, what we tend to do is: we relegate salvation to the past, don't we? 'My salvation happened on the 3rd of November 1984, that's when I had salvation' - now, that's not biblical. Now yes, when you're saved, if you're truly saved and there is evidence of that salvation in your life, you are saved for eternity, you'll never be lost! But salvation in a sense is a process - the book of Ephesians, we've learnt in weeks gone by, teaches that you were saved, you are being saved, and in a later date you will be saved, for the redemption of the body still has to take place when we all go to heaven and we are like Him, because we see Him as He is. So there is a process here, and we need to be careful that we don't relegate this to the past in some way. Now here, I believe, is not a relegation to the past, but it means a strength now! A strength for the fight at this very moment to deal with Satan, to deal with the world, and to deal with the sins that attack us day by day - God is giving us a salvation that is able to cope now! It is able to overcome now and in the future!

Now I believe this is the third thing. First of all it was: helmet is salvation. Secondly, it's a knowledge and an assurance of our salvation. But thirdly it is a sure hope of the consummation in the future - the consummation of our salvation! What the devil would love us to believe is that 'You're never going to get to the end! You're never going to be able to see this Christian thing through! You're falling at every hurdle, you haven't even got through the first stage of the race, you're nowhere near the prize!' - but if you could just, by faith, take this helmet of salvation, you would realise that there is a hope! A hope in a biblical sense doesn't mean an airy-fairy, 'I hope it'll happen' - it is a sure faith upon the word of God that it will happen! In 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 8 this is exactly what you get, listen: 'But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation'.

What is the hope of salvation? Is your head cast down? Is it? Do you feel: 'I don't deserve to be here tonight. If you knew what I did today, if you knew the things that I'm grappling with...'? Listen: there is a hope that one day God will come through, God will consummate it. Philippians 1:6: 'Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ'. So many Christians, Satan trods them down, Satan accuses them, Satan whispers in their ear: 'You're useless, you'll never make anything of this Christian life. Who ever told you to be Christian, did they not know what you were like? Did they not know you'd be a failure?'. But when you have this helmet of salvation upon your head:
'When Satan tempts me to despair,  
Upward I look and see Him there,  
Who made an end of all my sin'.

That's what it's all about. The point behind this helmet is that a good helmet is a confidence builder. Now, how's your confidence tonight in the Lord Jesus? You need the helmet. In 1988 there was a heavyweight championship fight between Mike Tyson and Michael Simms, and there were two things that were said about that fight. The first was the calm demeanour of Tyson before the fight - that's not strange, sure it's not! When you look at his muscles, the massive muscles that he had, and still has - those muscles gave him lethal confidence. It made him calm before the fight, that's the first thing. The second thing about the fight is his punching power, that Simms was down after 91 seconds. Two things notable: his confidence in his muscular power, and secondly the quickness of the defeat. Now that's a very fleshly example, but it is true, isn't it? If you're confident in God, you will be confident of a quick victory.

The shield of faith that we studied last week was a confidence, wasn't it? A dependence on God - but it was more of a general confidence, generally speaking, in all of God's promises and God's word. But this confidence that I'm talking about in the helmet of salvation is a bold, joyful, consciousness of what you have in Christ. It's that knowledge of what you have in God going down to your heart, and thrilling you to enthuse you and to go through your veins to strengthen you to stand. Now, let's expand this: what is the mind? That's where the helmet is, on the head where the mind is found. Well, the head is the seat of the mind, isn't it? The seat of our thought, and our reasons, and our intellect - and that is where Satan wants to attack. Satan's objective is to shift us off the victory ground that we have in Christ. He wants to convince us that we are not on it, he wants to undermine God's word that tells us we're on it, and he wants to rob us of the joy of knowing we're on it.

Now how many of us here tonight has he done that for? How many of us have heads that look down, and Satan has pushed us off our victory ground that is our own? He plants a certain thought in your mind, and it stays there. You get involved in a certain sin, and you can't get untangled from it, and Satan convinces you that you're done for - that's the end. That's why Peter says in 1 Peter 1:13: 'Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ'. 2 Corinthians 10:5 Paul says: 'Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ'. There is a battle for the mind, a battle! Christian, you are in that battle, and if the devil gets into your mind he'll take off your head!

It's a fact, isn't it, that the spiritual battle will either be won in the mind, or lost in the mind? Sin doesn't start in your hands, or in your feet, or in your eyes, it starts in your head. It starts when you conceive of a thought, or conceive of an action, and that conceiving stems in an action, and is brought forth in fruit of a deed that is done and a transgression that is committed. That's the way that Eve was defeated in the garden in Genesis 3, and Paul uses it as an example of our temptation in 2 Corinthians 11:3, he says: 'But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ'. Now, what we do is we live thinking that our salvation depends on our success or our failure - we don't really believe that, we subscribe to eternal security, but in our hearts we feel that: 'You know, am I really saved, or am I really going to get to heaven the way I'm living?'. Now let me say this: that is not an excuse for you to be living in sin, and if you're living in sin you need to shake yourself and get out of it now. But when the devil tells you things that are not true, and accuses you of lies - things that don't even remotely resemble the truth - and we believe it, Satan gains a victory! When he tells us that we have to gain the victory, he's gaining, for we've got it - and the helmet of salvation works when we realise that, no matter what the world, no matter what the flesh or the devil do to us, nothing can alter our standing in God! You are a child of God, and nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord! Nothing!
Now this is important, and I want you to note this because I want to be as practical as possible in the realm of this that we're talking about in the mind. There are channels through which the devil pumps all his rubbish through. There are ways in which the devil communicates thoughts - and at times, as believers, we're shaken by the thoughts that come into our minds. They're so disconcerting, the images that appear upon the walls of our thoughts, and they appal us at times. You know what I'm talking about, the filth that suddenly, out of nowhere, just floods into your head. Now, the problem comes when those thoughts are permitted for one moment to remain in your mind, and the next step from remaining is for them to fester, and the next step after that is that it threatens the health of your soul. It's as if there's a television screen in your head, in the mind of every believer, and when the devil switches it on the most detestable pictures that you can imagine appear. Now if you begin, for one moment, to entertain such a sight you will lose your grip on reality! And let me tell you this: you'll lose your grip on the victory that you have in Christ - and that is exactly what the devil wants you to do, believer! He's not that concerned whether you sin or whether you don't sin, he just wants to get you off your ground!

If you continue to watch, you continue to think about those evil thoughts, the battle is over and you become a slave to your carnal nature. Let me say: it's not always the devil's fault, it's not always his fault. Sometimes it's not the television in our head, it's the television in our living room that's the problem. Pictures being flooded into our minds - and let's ask the question: if I fill my mind with garbage and end up that I have no victory in Christ, what do we expect? As Ivor Powell said: 'When the mind' - this is the alternative - 'when the mind of the believer is filled with thoughts of God's amazing grace, and the soul is tuned to God's broadcasting station, it becomes increasingly difficult for any pirate station to silence God's broadcast from heaven'. That's why Paul says: 'Finally brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, pure, lovely, good report - if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things'. Now just before we go on to our next piece of armour: is there anyone here tonight, including me, that needs to pray: 'Lord, restore unto me the joy of my salvation'? You'll not lose your salvation, but if he can take away your joy, he'll be happy.

Secondly there's the sword of the Spirit. Verse 17, second half: 'Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God'. Now the Roman soldier that Paul was looking at, the sword that he had was a little short, two-edged, 'cut and thrust' sword that was wielded by the heavily armoured legionary. It wasn't the big broad sword that you sometimes see drawn, it was a short sword. It was a short sword made for the heat of the battle. Now this sword that Paul is talking about, he says it is the word of God - it's been made by the Spirit of God. It has been wrought and edged by the Holy Spirit - it is like Goliath's sword, there is none like it! He - the Holy Spirit - whose sword it is, inspired it, and you find that in 2 Peter 1 and verse 21: 'For the prophecy', the words that we have been reading tonight, 'came not in old time by the will of man' - it wasn't some boy like Peter or Paul said: 'I think I'll write a letter to the Ephesians today' - 'but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost'. This is the word of God!

Now the method of our defence is the sword of the Spirit. But it's not just a method of defence like the other parts of the armour, it's also a method of attack. The history books tell us that Cromwell's Ironside soldiers fought with a sword in one hand and a Bible in the other hand - now we don't go to that extreme, because we wrestle not against flesh and blood. But in a sense that is what our battle is to be, with the sword of the Spirit, with the word of God - and we will never win the battle, we will never defend our souls, without the word of God, the sword of the Spirit. Peter tried to defend the Lord, remember, with the sword in the garden - but he found out later, on the day of Pentecost, that the sword of the Spirit does a better job than the metal sword does, isn't that right? The sword of the Spirit - the physical sword pierces the body, but the Spirit's sword pierces the heart. The physical sword wears with use, and wears down and goes blunt - but the Spirit's sword gets sharper and sharper the more it's used.
It is a two-edged sword, cuts both ways. Some with conviction, some with conversion, some with condemnation. You can read about it when you go home - we don't have time to read it - in Isaiah 11 verse 4, in Revelation 19 and verse 5, you can read about it right throughout the word of God. It's coming out of the mouth of Christ, Isaiah 49:2: 'He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me'. But the miracle about this sword is this: yes, it is the word of God, but it is put into the hand of the believer as an offensive weapon to the devil! Psalm 149:6 says: 'Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand'. What a privilege it is, isn't it? There's not one bit of armour that's for retreating - and this is a bit of armour that's not just for protection, but for going forward. Our safety is not in running away from the devil, believer, for there's no protection for the soldier's back. Our only safety is resisting the devil on redemption ground with the word of God that 'is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart'.

Now what is this sword? Well, I've already said it's the word of God, but it's the sword of the Spirit - look at verse 17: 'Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God'. Now that 'which is the word of God' can be translated like this: 'which is God's utterance', which is God's utterance. Now the word of God that you find in the Greek language in John chapter 1 is the word 'logos' - 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' - 'logos' right throughout that chapter. The 'logos' is the personified Christ in flesh, the word, the description of God and who He is. But the word that's used here is the word 'rema' (sp?), and it speaks not of the word of God in flesh, but it speaks of the spoken word, a divine utterance, literally 'a saying of God' - the words that come from the very mouth of God. It's not the usual expression used in the word of God for the word of God 'logos', now why is that?

We must ask the question: why is that so? I'll tell you why it's so - and you note this now, believers, because you're going to need this - in the midst of battle it is the spoken word of God that does the trick. You've got to utter God's words. We defeat the devil when we speak aloud God's truth - and if the devil comes to you and you pick up your Bible and you throw it at him, that's going to do no good, sure it's not? It's the spoken word of God, it's speaking what God has said - there's a difference. When you say: 'Now, here is what God says', when you have a definite saying of God for that definite situation, you'll defeat him! But don't forget this: that the greatest sword in the world is useless if you don't use it. It's here, but we've got to use it - now, it's not the whole Bible, that's not what it is. It's not Genesis to Revelation, that's not what the Holy Spirit is saying here - as Harry Ironside says: 'This Bible is not the sword of the Spirit, it is the armoury and there are thousands of swords in here, and every one of them is powerful and two-edged'. What this 'rema' is, the word of God, is an appropriate word of the scripture for your specific situation to drive away Satan. Now, please note that, it's not the whole word of God. If the devil comes and tempts you tomorrow and you say: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth', that's not going to do anything. You'll need a specific verse that will deal with your specific situation.

Now here's the second thing to note - we'll come back to that if we've time - the second thing to note is: why it is important to speak the word of God. Why it's important to utter it aloudly, and not just believe it in your heart or to think it in your head. Now let me please labour on this for a moment - this is so so important: never forget that Satan is a created being. He is a creature, and he doesn't perfectly know what you are thinking. Now let me say this: he can, by observing you, get a bit of a gist - because he's been observing humanity for thousands of years - I could look at you and say that you're worried, couldn't I? Well, he can do it to - but he can't read your mind. He doesn't know what you're about to do before you do it. Yes, he can put thoughts in your mind, and he can see by your reaction to those thoughts the way you behave, and he can tell whether you're buying his lie or not - just like I'm trying to influence you with this message, I can't read your mind, but I'm trying to influence you, I'm putting thoughts into your mind - he can do that. But if you're
going to resist the devil successfully, listen: you must speak God's word outwardly! He can't read your
thoughts, he can't see what's in your heart, if you're going to put him to flight you'll have to tell him.

That's the two most common misconceptions about the devil - people believe he can read your mind, he
can't! People believe he knows the future, he can't! Those are divine attributes! Those belong to God alone!
Yes, you can communicate to God through your spirit, because He resides within your spirit and He reads
the hearts and intents of men - yes! But you can't communicate to Satan that way! Oh, this is so important,
and I'm quite sure it's not long since I had this revealed to me - and it's in the word of God: rema, rema, the
spoken word, it's all here. It's amazing to me to think that if we command Satan upon the authority of the
spoken word, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, he goes! If we, in our own hearts at that moment of
battle, commit ourselves to God and outwardly, verbally, resist the devil - he will flee from us! What a
victory!

Now let me say this: this is nothing to do with our strength. Corinthians says: 'For the weapons of our
warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds' - and if you go home
tonight please, and look at the Lord Jesus Christ, look at His example in temptation in Luke chapter 4 verses
1 to 13. Three times He quoted the word of God, not just random, but He quoted the appropriate verse for
that appropriate situation. When the devil tempted Him, when He was hungry, to turn stones into bread, the
Lord Jesus said: 'It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word' - incidentally 'rema',
the spoken word - 'of God'. Satan suggested an easy way for Him to get the world - bow down to me and I'll
give You everything - but the Lord said: 'Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship
the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve'. Satan can get religious you know, he tempted the Lord to
exercise His faith and throw Himself off the pinnacle of the temple, and he even quoted the word of God to
Him! He says: 'God will not suffer Thy foot to be dashed against a stone, He gives His angels charge over
Thee' - but he only quoted part of the scripture, because the word of God says: 'He'll keep thee in all thy
ways', and it wasn't one of Christ's ways to throw Himself off the temple to test the devil. The Lord said:
'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God'. And the miracle of grace is this: that that resisting of temptation is
ours, because the armour that He wore, He has given to us. Three times He resisted him, and then it says -
glory to His name! - the devil leaves him, and he'll leave you to if you follow His way.

Every talented swordsman has to acquaint himself with the weapon. Are you acquainting yourself with the
word of God? Are you assimilating the word of God? Bunyan, in Pilgrim's Progress this time, speaks of
Apollyon who is the devil - it's a name for the devil. He says this with regard to Apollyon attacking
Christian, listen to this: 'Then Apollyon espying his opportunity, began to gather up close to Christian, and
wrestling with him, gave him a dreadful fall; and with that Christian's Sword flew out of his hand. Then said
Apollyon, I am sure of thee now; and with that he had almost pressed him to death; so that Christian began to
despair of life. But, as God would have it, while Apollyon was fetching of his last blow, thereby to make a
full end of this good man, Christian nimbly reached out his hand for his Sword, and caught it, saying,
Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy! When I fall I shall arise; and with that gave him a deadly thrust,
which made him give back, as one that had received his mortal wound. Christian perceiving that, made at
him again; saying, Nay, in all these things we are more than Conquerors, through him that loved us. And
with that Apollyon spread forth his Dragon's wings, and sped him away, and Christian saw him no more'.
Hallelujah!

He'd got it right, Bunyan, hadn't he? Valiant-for-truth, that we find in that great masterpiece, said this at the
end of his days - please listen to this: 'I fought till my Sword did cleave to my hand, and then they were
joined together as if a Sword grew out of my arm. And when the blood run through my fingers, then I fought
with most courage'. He had resisted unto blood against sin. As we close let me say this: this whole armour of
God is putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, putting off the clothes and works of the flesh and putting on Him.
The belt of truth: 'I am the way the truth and the life'. The breastplate of righteousness: 'We are made the
righteousness of God in him'. The shoes of peace: 'He is our peace, who has broken down every wall of partition'. His faithfulness makes our faith possible. 'The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me' - He is our salvation! He is the word of God made flesh to dwell among us. Paul told the Romans in chapter 13: 'It's time to waken up, put off the flesh, and put on the Lord Jesus Christ'.

Let's bow our heads, and you see if you're here tonight and you're not saved, well you can have the victory through the Lord Jesus. Victory over sin, temptation, and you can know Him as your Saviour and your Lord - speak to me afterwards if you want to trust the Lord. Christian, how mighty it is that we have a Saviour who has overcome, and if we stand in His armour and on His victory we will know the joy of our salvation. Lord Jesus, we thank Thee, we worship Thee and bless Thee, for Thou art a great Saviour - the Victor, the Lord Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords. Lord, we pray that we will know more of Thee in these days, more of the victory that was won at Calvary, in Thy name, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - March 2001
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Ephesians - Chapter 32: The Holy War Pt 5

"Constant Prayer"

We're turning to Ephesians and chapter 6. If you're warm, I'm feeling quite warm - I think the temperature has gone up slightly in last 24 hours, so if you're warm just take your jacket off, or make yourself comfortable in some way so that you can concentrate. We don't want anybody falling asleep in the meeting! Get comfortable so that we can hear the word of God. This is our fifth study in the armour of God that we've been going through in Ephesians chapter 6. It is our thirty-second study in the book of Ephesians itself, and we're beginning, as it were, another little series around verse 18 of chapter 6. We've been looking at the many items of the armour of God that we find here, that God gives us as His children to fight the battle of faith.

We're going to read the verses to begin with, from verse 10, the whole of the armour of God. Verse 10 of chapter 6: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God". Here is our verse, and we'll be spending perhaps three or four weeks on this verse: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints".

Now I want simply this evening, just to deal with those first few words in verse 18: 'Praying always'. I've entitled this study: 'Constant Prayer' - praying always. Now, we're dealing tonight with the seventh piece of armour within the armour of God - and you might have thought last week as we looked at the sixth piece, the sword of the Spirit, that we were finished looking at the armour of God. But that, I believe, is not the case - for in this passage prayer is given as the energy that enables the Christian soldier to wear the armour of God, and effectively to wield those weapons that he has been given, specifically the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. Therefore as we come to verse 18 in the context of all these verses, we see that prayer is the necessity of every soldier in the battle of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's necessary for a soldier to be in constant communication with his great Captain and Commander, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have learnt in weeks gone by that this battle is the Lord's, it is not our battle, but the battle belongs to the Lord. That is why we stand in the confidence, and stand in the victory that we have in the Lord - it's not in our own strength that we fight against the enemy. So, with that as a backdrop we realise that if we are clothed with the armour of God, given by God to fight and to take on the enemy, it's important that we always keep in communication with our Captain, with the High Command. This is the way, Paul says, that we stand in the strength of the Lord, this is the way that we equip ourselves in the power of His might. Now
some scholars link verse 18 with verse 19 and verse 20, and they don't believe that there is a link in the sense that this is part of the armour of God, they believe that the armour of God finishes in verse 17 at the end. They believe that verse 18, 19 and 20 are a section on their own - but I don't believe that. I believe that we're dealing with this evening, in verse 18, the seventh piece of the armour of God Almighty.

We are told: 'Watching', look at verse 18, 'Watching thereunto with all perseverance' - there is the call to battle, the call to be alert, and I believe that's in keeping with the theme of this chapter of the warrior of God, and the armour of God. The other pieces of equipment are important, but once they are adorned by the soldier of God, prayer is the energy with which to walk onto the battlefield. Prayer is the equipment by which the soldier breathes, prayer is the life flowing through his veins, enabling him to fight for God and for Christ. Without prayer, even the greatest Christian that you could ever, or do ever, know is absolutely ineffective and helpless within this holy war without prayer. Now please let me emphasise that: for we go into the battle, and we are to be going into the battle not in our own strength, but if we go into the battle with the girdle, the belt of truth, with the breastplate of righteousness, with our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel, with the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, we are useless! Can I repeat that? We are useless without prayer!

There's no use getting a statue of Montgomery, and putting him onto the battlefields of Europe, and dressing him up in all the armour that you can, and giving him all the medals along his breast that he won - he will do nothing in the battle because there's no blood running through his veins, there's no breath in his lungs, there's no life in him! You might as well push a statue onto a battlefield as go in with all the armour of God upon you, as a child of God, and be without prayer. Now this is so important, this is the climax of our studies. Prayer is the energy of the soldier, do you know why? Because it brings God onto the battlefield, it brings God into your situation, your life conflict, the spiritual warfare and battlefield that we are all engaged in, prayer is the mechanism to let God enter into the midst of it!

You remember in the Old Testament when Amalek attacked Israel, as the children of God were being attacked and all the army were on the battlefield - it was Moses, the man of God, who went up onto the mountaintop to pray. While Joshua used the sword on the ground, there was Moses up on the mountain - Joshua fighting, Moses praying. That is what I want you to get into your mind: that there is this dual-purpose of fighting, but if you don't pray as you're in the battle it's absolutely useless, because prayer is the power behind the victory. Now, prayer is obviously a very topical subject within the Christian church, it's very important. So much talk can go on about prayer, that we don't really define what it is, and that's why I'm taking a few weeks over verse 18 - for I believe that there are different aspects of prayer found in this verse, and if we skim over them we'll lose the whole point of it.

It's not just any kind of prayer that will do for this battle, there is a specific type of prayer found within verse 18. Let me say this before I go on any further: there are very few things that the enemy dreads more than this weapon of prayer, and because of that he would do all in his power to let you understand the first, the second, the third, right to the sixth piece of armour, if you could just forget about the seventh! I believe that is what he has done in our world, and within the church of Jesus Christ - he gets people to forget about prayer. Now you will note that prayer is the seventh piece of armour within this series of adornments for the soldier of God, and you will also know - I'm sure - that seven, within the scripture, is the number of perfection. I believe that is not without significance in our context here, that Paul is saying - the Holy Spirit through him - that this is the perfect, this is the ending, this is the icing, the crown on the head of the armour of God: you need prayer! Without prayer you're useless.

Bunyan called this weapon, and part of the armour, 'All-Prayer'. He says in his great work Pilgrim's Progress: 'So Christian was forced to put up his sword and betake himself to another weapon' - when all had failed he called upon All-Prayer - 'So he cried in my hearing, Oh Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver my soul', All-Prayer!
What are we saying? We're saying that prayer is the supreme weapon to be used by the soldier in God's army. Prayer is the weapon that God has given to us that we might wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against these principalities and powers, against rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. But if we make the mistake, as half the religious world does today, of thinking that we are just talking this evening about saying our prayers, you may forget about it! What I'm talking about this evening is a lot more than 'saying prayers', we're talking about a weapon of God, we're talking about a prayer, a type of prayer that prevails with God and prevails with men.

Now my question at the outset and at the introduction of our study is this: do your prayers prevail? I believe it was Montgomery, I think it was, Bishop Montgomery who was the grandfather of Montgomery that I've just mentioned, the great commander, who wrote that hymn, great hymn of prayer. One of the verses says: 'I often say my prayers, but do I ever pray?' - a very valid question. Do our prayers prevail with God? I sense, maybe I'm wrong, that some might say: 'Oh, here he goes again. Prayer again, we've heard it before. He gets it into some of his messages, and even when he's not doing a series on it he fits it in! He's talking about it again, about praying!'. Can I say this: that as long as I have breath in my body, and as long as I can preach or talk in any sense, I will preach upon prayer! And I'll not stop, no matter what anybody does or says! Do you know why? Because I am following my Lord Jesus Christ, and that's more important than pleasing men, or tickling ears.

He strove - if you read the Gospels - quite clearly you'll see that He strove to put the saints to prayer in His days of ministry, that was one of His purposes: to get His disciples onto their knees, seeking their heavenly Father! Our Lord Jesus Christ was moved by the laziness of His own disciples not to go into the harvest fields and to pluck, as brands from the burning, the ripened fruit of the harvest - and such lack of labours, such lack of prayers with His own people - He was wont to say: 'Pray ye therefore!'. That's the Lord - pray the Lord of harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest field. You see it was our Lord that said, it's recorded of Him that: 'He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint'.

I believe that the Gospel moves like a snail when the saints are not at prayer early, when the saints are not at prayer late, and when the saints are not at prayer long - and as long as I have the grace of God, and the ability, and the faithfulness given to me by His mercy, I will do all that I can to put the saints of God to prayer! We must have prayer, for it is the energy of God's battle, and if we don't have it we don't have the energy, and we will lose! To that end, let us look at what this prayer, praying always, really is. I've defined it in three ways. First of all: it is a way of life, prayer is a way of life. Secondly: prayer is a constant communion. Thirdly: prayerlessness, the antithesis of this always praying, is the cause of defeat, I believe, within the church.

Now, if you look at verse 18: 'Praying always', literally in the Greek it could be translated like this: 'Praying on all occasions'. Not just in the thick of battle, this is not just a weapon that can be used in the bloody, smoky mass of a warrior's battlefield, but this is a piece of weaponry that can be used in preparation for the battle. It is a thing to be worn so that we are ready to fight. Now, of course, it is critical in the hour of need, and in the hour when the enemy attacks, but this weapon itself must be used before you get into the heat of the war. In verse 13 we see this: 'Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand' - that's the future, isn't it? Take it now that you will be able to stand, so you're being prepared by all prayer for this great battle.

I'm sure that you've already gathered, but I want to really tease this out, that this prayer by necessity and definition in this word 'always praying' is not a sporadic thing. It's not out of the blue, but it's habitual. It's not an isolated act, literally it means 'in every season of life, always praying'. It implies opportunity - in other words, every opportunity you get to pray, you ought to pray! Now we've seen that Colossians is almost a
mirror image to parts of this book of Ephesians, and Paul again in Colossians 4:2 reflects this truth, listen: 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving'. Again the words are used, Luke 21:36: 'Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man' - watch ye therefore, and pray always!

Now what does this mean? Well, it means first of all that it's not just in emergencies. Isn't it true that sometimes the only word that the Lord hears from us, as His children, is 'Help'? When we need Him - now we need Him all the time, but when we are conscious of our need because of some calamity that has come upon us. You know that praying around the flag pole in America is banned, but I've been told that in a certain American school there's a sign on the wall, and it says this: 'In case of an earthquake the ban against prayer will be temporarily discontinued'. Isn't that the way we view prayer? We use it in an emergency when we need it! But that's not what Paul is talking about, the idea here is that it's a continual thing, a habitual thing, not reserved for special occasions, but - as our first point says - a way of life.

Ivor Powell says of this, let me say that I'll be quoting a great deal of writers tonight, because they say it in a better way than I can say it - and I want to encourage you to go away and read them on prayer. Ivor Powell says: 'Periods of anxious prayer are only known when a doctor suggests a visit to the hospital. When trouble looms on the horizon, or when people are about to lose something they eagerly desire to retain, then they besiege the throne of grace asking for divine intervention! Afterward they go on a vacation, blissfully forgetting that their heavenly Father would dearly love to see a little more of the people whose voices are heard only when the need becomes frightening' - he's right, isn't he? The truth of the matter is, when things are going well there is little use of prayer for many of us. But that is not what Paul's truth that he has had revealed to him is, his truth is: when the sun is shining, when the storm clouds are gathering, prayer is the constant practice of the believer's life - if he calls himself a Christian, and one of Christ's-ones, he is as he said to the Thessalonians: '[to] pray without ceasing'.

Now, let's face it, we're in the battle every day - if you're conscious of it, and if you're not just giving in to every temptation that comes along, you're in the battle everyday. If you're like a corpse every day in the battle, you're not going to get too far. You need that energy, that breath, that vein pulsing through your body, to face the enemy. So that necessitates that it must be a habitual, daily practice ingrained in your life - not something only when we face trouble. Arthur T. Pearson wrote a biography on that great Christian George Mueller. One day Arthur Pearson was sitting with him, talking to him about the great provision that God had brought for Mueller by his faith and his prayer. As they were talking together about God their provider, Mueller was writing a letter and Pearson noticed that he was having difficulty within the nib of his pen, it didn't seem to be working right. Right in the middle of their conversation together, Mueller bowed his head in prayer and prayed to God for a few moments. Then he began writing again, and Pearson asked: 'What were you praying about?' - and Mueller said: 'Well, perhaps you didn't notice I was having trouble with this pen point, and I haven't got another pen point, and this is an important letter, so I was asking the Lord to help me so that I could write it clearly'. 'Dear me', said Pearson, 'a man who trusts God for millions of pounds also prays about a scratchy pen point'.

That's what Paul's talking about here: a way of life. Not just praying about the big things, but praying about all things at all times - when things are going well, when things are not going well, we need strength for the battle. We can't think that we can just rush into the throne room of God when we're in trouble, push into His presence by some quiet time that's relegated in some part of our week - or even some part of our day, let me say! But in the midst of God's battle the soldier has a constant, every moment, need to fall on his knees, knee-deep in prayer - he fights on his knees! You may not have heard of Edward Payson (sp?), but he said this: 'Prayer is the first thing, the second thing, and the third thing necessary to ministry. Pray, therefore, my dear brother, pray, pray, pray!'. And the biographer of Payson said this: 'Prayer was pre-eminently the
business of his life'. That's what I'm talking about, and that's why those who have followed him called him 'Praying Payson of Portland'.

Let me tell you a story about him. When they were preparing his coffin, they were taking his clothes worn off him, and they found that his knees were calloused, like James the great apostle of prayer. They went into his bedroom and they noticed at the side of his bed - he had no carpet, none of the luxuries that we have - but at the side of his bed there were two grooves in the floorboards, six inches long. You know how they got there - a way of life, a way of living, to be in constant intercession, so much so that your life ploughs into creation by the very fact that you're crying to God right with every breath that you have. Now I want to say this: no man is greater than his prayer life. Listen: no man is greater than his prayer life, and that cuts us down to size, doesn't it? I don't care how well you preach, it doesn't matter how many books a man has written or a man has read, it doesn't matter how well he is in dispensational prophetic teaching, doesn't matter. All God wants to know is how much his heart follows after Him.

Now my friends, this is serious stuff, this is a life of prayer, this is learning it young - and I hope the young people learn this young, that they're never ever going to impress God by anything that they are, or anything that they have, but like Enoch if they would walk with God they would please God! Oh, that we would learn it as an assembly, that in the book of Acts they all continued - all of them - with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren. Acts 2:42: 'They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers'. You see, the reason why I labour this subject so much is because the Lord Jesus, as I've already said, was a man of prayer. He was a teacher of prayer. E.M. Bounds says this, listen: 'The Lord essentially was the teacher of prayer, it covered the whole of His life. He was the suppliant of all suppliants, He was the intercessor of all intercessors. On earth He knew no higher law, no holier business, no diviner life, than to plead to God for men. On earth He lived and prayed and died for men. In heaven He knows no more higher royal estate, no higher theme, than to intercede for men. His life, His death, and His exaltation, all plead for men. Is there any higher work for the disciple to do than that his Lord did? Is there any loftier employment?' - no there isn't!

Can you see Him going into the wilderness? Can you see Him climbing up the mountain to pray? Can you see Him kneeling in the garden? Can you see Him withdrawing from the crowd that press upon Him for attention? He must, He must needs pray. As the poet put it like this:

'How oft He sought the mountain top, and knelt upon its crest,  
To pray and lay His weary head upon His Father's breast.  
Before He called the twelve to Him, He prayed all night alone,  
And when the day began to dawn, He chose them for His own.

They saw Him lift up holy hands, and raise His tear-stained eyes,  
Again they saw Him on His knees, and with new strength arise.  
The awe of His appealing words grew greater day by day,  
Until they humbly said to Him: Lord, teach us how to pray!'.

S. D. Gordon, who has written many books on prayer, said this of our Lord: 'The Lord Jesus is still praying. Thirty years of living, three years of serving, one tremendous act of dying, 2000 years of prayer - what an emphasis on prayer!'. When men's lives are full of prayer in the quiet place, they don't need to waffle in the prayer meeting. When men are praying long at home, do you know all they need as they walk along their way? A little arrow to God and they have power with God, because their life is saturated with Him in presence of prayer - a life of prayer! What am I talking about? I'm talking about you and God! I'm talking about prayer, you and your wife, you and your family, you and your meal, you and your decisions - in all
your ways acknowledging Him! Och, I know the cry comes: 'I'm too busy'. Do you know what the tragedy is today? We are too busy! We are fatally too busy when we have no time for this great occupation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I want to bring a note of caution, because I don't want to create the impression to you this evening that long praying is always good praying, because it's not always good praying. But let me say this: if you're praying well you'll be spending a lot of time over it. We don't want to get the stage where we are measuring our prayer life by the quantity of time that we have God, looking at the clock: 'I've got by 10 minutes, or 20 minutes, or half an hour' - that's not the reason why I'm talking about always praying. But what I want to emphasise and impress upon your mind from the word of God is this: much time is needed with God in prayer! Much time! The great Spurgeon, I'm led to believe, said - and I've said this before - that he couldn't, at times, pray any more than 20 minutes long, but he said that 20 minutes never ever went by that he didn't pray to God. That is living by prayer, that's a life of prayer with God.

It's not a hasty decision that you run like a comer and a goer into the presence of God, but what I'm talking about is Jacob's victory - if Jacob hadn't wrestled with God all night he wouldn't have got the blessing! Don't dilute it! Don't doctor and mechanic the word of God! He had to wrestle with God! We have to wrestle too. I'm talking about what Daniel did, three times a day he set his face toward God to seek Him. I'm talking about the apostle Paul, he prayed day and night. David: 'Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice'! How do we measure up?

It's a way of life, but secondly: it is a constant communion. People look at this verse and they say: 'Well, what did he mean? You know, is this possible? Always praying?'. Well there's a dual answer to that: yes and no. No, it's not possible to carry on a running dialogue with God every moment of the day, that isn't possible for anyone to do throughout all of our business. We can't be continually saying our prayers in a sense, but that assumes that praying is a running dialogue with God. As far as I can understand from the word of God it's not, it's not just talking out loud to God, it's not just consciously talking to Him through your mind, that's not what prayer is within the word of God. There are various types of prayer, and some of them include those types of things, but more than that: prayer is an attitude of dependence, conscious dependence on God. It may not be a continual dialogue in your mind or out of your mouth, but it is conscious nevertheless. You are aware that you are in the presence of God, and it is possible - Yes! It is possible! - to know that all of the time.

We're not talking about much speaking, that the Lord talked about in Matthew 6, but we're talking about a constant communion with the Lord Jesus - in other words, as one man said: 'Keeping the receiver off the hook'. We should never have to say when we're coming into prayer: 'Lord, we come into Thy presence' - now I know it's a matter of form that we say that, but in a sense we should always as a child of God be in the presence of God. Let me say in relation to the armour of God: if that is our disposition, none of the devil's attacks will find us off our guard. That is Paul's point: if you continue in prayer as a way of life, if you continue always praying as a constant communion with God, he will never get a foothold!

Now, what does this mean, this constant communion? Thomas Kelly, in his book 'Testament of Devotion', says this: 'There is a way of ordering our mental life on more than one level at once. On one level we can be thinking, discussing, seeing, calculating, meeting all the demands of our external affairs - but deep within, behind the scenes, at a profounder level, we may also be in prayer and adoration, in song and in worship, and a gentle receptiveness to the divine breathings of God'. Oh, this is wonderful. This was the vision of the medieval monk that I keep mentioning to you, Brother Lawrence. Do you know what he said? 'The time of business does not differ with me from one time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in a great tranquillity as if I were on my knees'.
John Fletcher, whose whole life was a life of prayer, it is said of him that he wouldn't rise from his seat without rising his heart to God. Robert Murray McCheyne said: 'I ought to spend the best hours in communion with God, it is my noblest and most fruitful employment and is not to be thrust into a corner. The morning hours from 6 to 8 are most uninterrupted and should be thus employed. After tea is my best hour, and that should be solemnly dedicated to God. I ought not to give up the good old habit of prayer before going to bed, but guard must be kept against sleep. When I awake in the night I ought to rise and pray. A little time after breakfast might be given to intercession' - what a man! What a life of prayer! This was the man who also said: 'What a man is on his knees, he is, and no more'!

Now please don't get me wrong, I'm not suggesting that you go away and make the mistake that many men, including myself, have made, and try to imitate these great men of God - because you'll not do it. You will fail. Imitating Mueller, imitating Murray McCheyne - but what I do want you to do is get the vision that they had, get the desire to be men and women of prayer like they were. If you come to God with such a holy, righteous desire spawned by His Spirit in your soul, and ask Him: 'Lord, teach me to pray like these men prayed' - He'll lead you! Start off small now, don't be trying to do great things too fast, but come to God - but whatever you do, start somewhere! Don't do what most do and give a wink and a nod, and a casual approach to prayer, that in the eyes of God means nothing in heaven.

John Wesley had this experience of a constant communion with God, let me quote him: 'His heart', his biographer said this, 'Wesley's heart is ever lifted up to God, at all times, and in all places, in all this he is never hindered, much less interrupted, by any person or by anything. In retirement or in company, in leisure or in business, in conversation his heart is ever with the Lord. Whether he lie down or rise up God is in all of his thoughts. He walks with God continually, having the loving eye of his mind still fixed upon Him, and everywhere seeing Him that is invisible'. Now we asked this question: praying always, is it possible as a way of life? Yes! Praying always, is it possible as a constant communion with God, that is conscious in mind and heart? Yes! Oh, it's possible! It's possible for the housewife and the full-time mother, the businessman, the student - it's possible. As Watchman Nee said, this is the normal Christian life.

But thirdly, here's the antithesis of it: prayerlessness - not praying always, and that is the cause of defeat. Richard Sibbes said this: 'When we go to God by prayer, the devil knows we go to fetch strength against him, and therefore he opposeth us all that he can'. He knows the armour of God as well as you, he can read you know! In fact he can quote the word of God, and he knows that you will get power to fight him in prayer, always praying - and he will do all in his power to stop you praying! Now how's he doing it? It's right that:

'The devil trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees'.

And the devil, the enemy, is watching always for a breaking of contact between headquarters and the soldier on the battlefield - and he wants to take advantage of every interruption in communication. That means, to impress it upon you again, that we must be constantly in prayer, because we are constantly in danger! It is my fear that in the age in which we live, neither with preacher nor with people is much intent on God. Leonard Ravenhill, in his book 'Why Revival Tarries' which I have recommended so many times - it's in the bookstall - he says this: 'We have many organisers, but few agonisers; many players and payers, but few pray-ers; many singers, but few clingers; lots of pastors, but few wrestlers; many fears, but few tears; much fashion, little passion; many interferers, and few intercessors; many writers, but few fighters' - and I've added one of my own: a few less preachers on prophecy, and a few more prophets of prayer! We need to be in the battle now!
Bounds said: 'One of the crying evils of these times, maybe of all times, is little or no praying. Of these two evils, perhaps little praying is worse than no praying. Little praying', he says, 'is a kind of make-believe, a salve for the conscience, a farce and a delusion. The little estimate we put on prayer is evident from the little time we give to it'. Do we pray for a few moments before we run to the bus, or drive to the office, and think that that is prayer? That is not prayer, certainly not the prayer that Paul's talking about here - 'always praying'. There is a danger that the church can get occupied by peripheral things, by its mechanisms, by its organisations, even by its preaching - the Pastor can get so engrossed, losing himself in the sermon [so much] that he loses God in the sermon. There is this great danger, and we must beware that we do not let anything orientate us but God! As one man quipped it: 'When the church paid the place was taken, but in the book of Acts when they prayed the ground was shaken'.

My friends tonight, as we close in this last seven or so minutes let me say this: Sodom's sin in the Old Testament was not the sin of sodomy, homosexuality, but we read in Ezekiel that their sin, 'their iniquity', I quote, '[was] fullness of bread and abundance of idleness' - well-off and lazy. In the book of the Revelation the Lord Jesus Christ Himself says to the church at Ephesus: 'Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent' - what a terrible thing! The hymnwriter put it like this, I believe he was thinking of the same thing, and many of us could bring this from our hearts as a song to God:

'What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,
How sweet their memory still,
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill'.

Myers, the poet, put it like this, listen:

'O stars of heaven that fade and flame,
O whispering waves below,
Was earth, or heaven, or I, the same
A year, a year ago?

The stars have kept their home on high,
The waves their wanted flow,
But the love is lost that once was I
A year, a year ago!'

How is our prayer life? How is our love for God which is our prayer book, day by day in the daily life of the assembly, and the daily pilgrimage of the child of God that is in this place at this moment? How is it? Can you remember the day when you were a fire of prayer? Like Lord Baron could you say:

'I now have ashes where once I had fire,
The soul in my body is dead.
The thing I once loved I now merely admire,
My heart is as grey as my head'.

Our God is a consuming fire, and that is what we need - on the altar, the fire of God to fall on the kneel-altar of our hearts. We need to get to the place of prayer again, and if we were half as spiritual as we think we are there would be great things happening for God - but we need to get on our face before God and seek Him, always praying! You see, the danger of the Laodicean church is that they say: 'I have need of nothing' - and the result is we have not because we ask not. I know that there's a great need for people to get comfort today,
and I hope through the ministry of the word of God that there is comfort. There are a lot who are sad, and there are a lot who are sorrowing and they have great need in this day - but let me say this: it is not behoven of a child or a preacher of God's gospel to watch a friend's house burning down and let him sleep in his lethargy and his laziness, and let him be damned! We must awake, we must stir ourselves up again, we must be like old John Welsh, the Scotsman who kept a shawl at the side of his bed to wrap himself in when he arose to pray at night. On one occasion his wife complained when she found him lying on the floor weeping and crying, and he would reply: 'Oh woman, I have the souls of 3000 to answer for, and I know not how it is with many of them!'. Oh that God would give us that spirit, for that is His Holy Spirit.

Our prayer must be constant prayer. Constant prayer as a way of life, constant prayer as a consistent communion with God Almighty, and we must beware of prayerlessness for that is the cause of defeat. F.B. Meyer said: 'With the perpetual use of the weapon of All-Prayer, there is no enemy born of hell that shall be able to withstand us'.
Ephesians and chapter 6 again, Ephesians 6 - and just in case it is your first time here, and you're breaking into the thirty-third study in the book of Ephesians, then why did you leave this late to come? Now we're on number 33! I can't re-cap that whole book for you tonight I'm afraid! Let me just say that we are the study on the armour of God, and this is our sixth study in the armour of God. We've been looking at the six pieces of the armour that most of us are well acquainted with within chapter 6. We are looking, and have been looking last week, and we will be looking this week, and in the weeks that lie ahead when I return, we'll be looking at this seventh piece of the armour which is entitled: 'All Prayer'. We're doing our best not to rush over this verse 18, that depicts All Prayer, because there are many important facets of this weapon in God's armour that we must not neglect, or look over, or ignore.

So, last week we were looking at the first part of verse 18 which said: 'Praying always'. This week we're going to look at the second part: 'With all prayer'. Let us read - it's important, and I hope that as we read these verses together that you're beginning to memorise them, because I know that they're getting into my head as we read over them week after week. So we'll read from verse 10 again: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles", the methods, "of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high", or heavenly, "places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do" - and we'll leave it there.

Let's just take a moment to bow in prayer again, it's important that we ask the Lord's protection as we look at such a portion of Scripture. Father, we have been instructed that the devil is our enemy and is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. So we pray that You will shut his mouth tonight, Lord that You will bind him
and put him out of this place, and that Jesus the Lord Christ may reign in our gathering tonight - that He might have the pre-eminence, and that through Him we would know the victory ground tonight, to His glory. Amen.

The holy war, and the armour is such an important thing within that holy war. We've looked at constant prayer, and now we look at All-Prayer - and indeed that's how Bunyan depicted it within Pilgrim's Progress, this piece of armour, the seventh, the perfect piece of armour. The piece of armour - perhaps we could say - that is the most important piece of armour that we cannot do without. We know that it is not the armour that makes the warrior, it cannot be. It cannot be the weapons that win the fight, there must be something more - and it must be, as we looked at last week, the courage and the strength that is within that warrior, yes adorned with that great armour, but he must have courage and he must have energy. Verse 10 tells us that that energy, that strength, and that courage is not our own, but it is of the Lord. To stand in the strength of the Lord!

We know that if that strength is to be imputed into our lives, and if we are to come into the good of it within the battle that we may be in day by day, it has to be adorned by prayer. We know - and if you don't know this, I would question whether you're in the battle - that we need help within the battle. I needed help today in the battle. I need help every day in the battle. It is so important, as we've been learning, that the soldier on the bloody battlefield never ever loses contact with High Command and with the Captain of our salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian must have this divine energy, this force of courage and strength for the battle that he faces day by day. It must be a constant communication - it is not something that we can leave off at any time, for when we do so we give the enemy a foothold. We ought not for one moment to be ignorant of his devices.

But varied prayer, that we are looking at this evening, flows out of constant prayer that we looked at last Monday night. For if we are praying continually and if our prayer is, as we thought, a way of life and a constant communion with the Lord Jesus Christ, if we are living lives of constant, continual prayer we will face various situations. In those situations we will need various types of prayer. That is why God has given us those types of prayer, and when we constantly face differing deadly situations in the battle, we can - praise the Lord - take hold upon these parts of the armour of God, and fight the battle of faith with All-Prayer. It's wonderful, isn't it, to know that there is a type of prayer for every situation. All that life can throw at us, there is nothing that is immune from the prayer that God gives us to use. In the battle, if we are skilled in the art of All-Prayer, and all the types of prayer that God has given to us, we will constantly, day by day, have the victory over the enemy.

Now that is so important as we come to this study this evening. I want to be as practical as I possibly can as we come to this second phrase in verse 18, and to do so I'll be quoting from many writers and Christians of bygone days to show you this varied prayer that many of them used, and we find it within the word of God. Look at verse 18: 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication' - now that's what I want us to look at tonight - 'All prayer and supplication'. Two types of prayer: all prayer and supplication. I believe that Paul is differentiating [between] - as you see on your sheet from the first point and the second point - first of all general prayer, which is all prayer, and secondly specific, definite, direct prayer, which is described as supplication.

Now that's look at the first: all prayer, which is general prayer. You could say, as one man has put it, that this is all sorts of prayer at all sorts of times in all sorts of ways. Varied prayer, all sorts, at all times, in all ways. Now if you think about it for a moment, and you have a brainstorm about the different types of prayer that you can have, you will right away think that you can have public prayer - as we've had this evening, as we will have on Thursday evening. You can have private prayer also, in your home and - as the Bible calls it - the closet, where you shut yourself away with God and it is just you and God and no-one else - the hardest
place that we can pray. We find also that there is deliberate prayer, and there is spontaneous prayer. We have our prayer time, I hope, at home, or prayer times. A time we specifically set aside for God, to have communion with God, or as the old Christians called it: ‘the trysting place’ with God. We have agreed, we have covenanted with Him to meet at a certain time in a certain place day by day.

That is deliberate prayer, but there is also spontaneous prayer. The old divines called them 'spiritual ejaculations', or 'spiritual arrows' of prayer. When we are in need, day by day, when we face a need - that we can just, from our hearts or audibly, cry unto God a prayer, a little prayer from our hearts or from our lips. Day by day, wherever we are, whatever we are doing, these types of spontaneous or emergency prayers can ascend to God. We read of supplication that we will be looking at this evening, bringing definite specific needs to God on a long-term basis. We also read of intercession, where we covenant with God for a space of time to bring before Him others in great need, and we are determined - like Jacob of old - not to let go of God until He blesses us, an intercession with Him. We read of confession, where we confess our sins - if we are believers walking on to know God, we will know prayers of humiliation when our sins are brought before us, and when we lie low, surrendered and submitted to Almighty God. We find praise and thanksgiving.

We find different factors in prayer: there's family prayer - and this is something that has fallen away in recent days, the family altar, where father or mother brings together the whole family around the word of God, and around the throne of grace, and seeks God. There's all types of prayer: silent, audible, prayer around a meal, prayer in the assembly, arranged prayer, formal prayer, informal prayer - you see all the types of prayer, and it's all incorporated in that one statement: 'all prayer'. It's general, it's all encompassing, it's the panorama of all types of prayer that we can come to God with - and as we think of that this evening: if we are only praying and asking God for things, we lose out tremendously, for we're not using this weapon of All-Prayer.

This word 'prayer' in verse 18, it represents our approach to God in general. It encompasses the first seven points on your sheet, look down at it. All prayer: praise, confession, waiting on God, scripture praying, intercession, singing, and listening to God. Then the second part of this statement is 'and supplication', and that's your second point. Some translations put it 'requests', a special form of prayer called 'supplication' whereby we bring specific needs before God, and we hope and we cry to get specific answers from Him. Now let me say this: this is wonderful, it is all incorporated within this phrase 'all prayer and supplication'. Verse 18, there's so much in it, that's why I want to spend these weeks really digging deep into this verse to get out what God has put in it.

We need this, it's not an option, it's not for the holy men of old, we need all prayer, we need constant prayer, we need supplication, and we need these seven things written down on your sheet. You need them! If you're going to fight in the victory, if you're going to win with the Lord Jesus Christ, if you're going to stand when the smoke and the blood of battle and the smell is gone, that you're still standing after all the standing that you have been doing - if you want to do that, you need all prayer. Every avenue is to be thoroughly explored by the child of God, every item of prayer, and kind of prayer, and shade of prayer, is to be used on every occasion in every opportunity that faces us. Bishop Hanley Mole (sp?), the Greek scholar, put it like this: 'All prayer simply means this: using every variety of worshipping approach to God' - every variety.

So let us look at 'all prayer', this general prayer that we find within this verse. The first definition of it is: praise - that's what I have put down anyway, and I've left out thanksgiving along the way, so what I have done is put praise and thanksgiving together because they're quite similar. Now if you analyse, and we haven't time to do it this evening, but if you look at the Lord's prayer - or it would be better put 'the disciple's prayer' - the prayer that the Lord Jesus Christ gave us as an example, as a skeleton, for our daily prayer life with Him. If you look at it you find He said: 'After this manner therefore pray ye, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name' - He began by praise. Now this is very important: we must never ever miss this avenue in prayer - praise, adoration, and worship. The Westminster Divines put it right when they asked
the question: 'What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to obey, enjoy God and glorify Him forever'. We enjoy God and we obey God, when we worship God. It is our chief end, it is the chief purpose for which we have been created: to bring worship, adoration, and praise to the God who is our Creator, and now, in the Lord Jesus Christ, the God who is our Redeemer. This is the God who has said: 'Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me'.

Do we praise God in our prayers? I've mentioned in weeks gone by a monk called Brother Lawrence, who tried to live his life as a continual praise and worship to God. He says this on the subject of praising God: 'The end we ought to propose to ourselves, the end of our life, ought to [be to] become in this life the most perfect worshippers of God we can possibly be, as we hope to be through all eternity'. What is the chief end that we have? The best purpose that you can have, and goal in your life, is to be a worshipper of God - to worship God in spirit and in truth, to be satisfied in God, to enjoy God as you adore Him and praise His holy name. For let's face it: that is what our occupation will be in eternity, for the millions of years - if we can even say that - of the eternal sphere, we will worship God.

The word 'adoration' is derived from an ancient expression which means 'to kiss the hand'. You know what it is when you come into the presence of a lady, a dignitary, and her hand is kissed - it's a sign, yes, of affection, but more than that it's a capturing of dignity, that you are actually revering that person. It's a sign of deep respect and submission to them. I think that is a beautiful definition of adoration and praise - what is it? It is kissing the hand of the Almighty, a deep respect, submission and subjection, and worship of God. The word 'praise' has an old French meaning - its origin meant this: 'to prize' - to prize! Isn't that what we do when we praise our God? When we adore Him, and we worship Him, we prize Him. He is precious to us, He means everything to us, and that draws from our bosom, our soul and spirit, a worship and adoration to Him who alone is worthy to be praised.

Now, we're going to find as we go through these different facets of prayer, and as we have already done within the armour of God, that this is unselfish. The flesh cannot live the spiritual life. We cannot live it with ourselves on the throne of our lives, we cannot live selfish Christian lives, it is a contradiction in terms. As we look at prayer, and specifically praise and thanksgiving, we find that it is of all the elements of prayer the unselfish part. It is the part where you forget yourself, you concentrate on Him and you worship Him! Now that's difficult. 'Praise produces', as one man said, 'forgetfulness of self, and forgetfulness of self is health'. It's hard to do, but we must get to that place where we lay aside our ego, we lay aside all thought of sin and self, and we just come purely into the presence of God to praise God, to thank God, and to worship God. When we do that we will find that this is an indispensable part of the armour of God - All-Prayer.

Now if you activate this in your life - praise and thanksgiving to God - you will find that it is a great weapon against the evil one. Now let's pursue this for a moment, look at 2 Chronicles chapter 5 and we'll see an example of that here in the Old Testament. We have here the dedication of the temple by Solomon, and it was a great event of worship. In verse 13 of 2 Chronicles 5 we read this: 'It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God'.

Praise and thanksgiving bring God into the presence of His people. D.L. Moody, the evangelist, as he was preaching on that passage that we've just read, said this: 'Solomon prevailed much with God in prayer at the dedication of the temple, but it was the voice of praise which brought down the glory that filled house' - that's what brought God's glory down! When men, and indeed with their instruments, praised God and thanked Him, the glory of the Lord filled the place! Praise is a great weapon against the enemy. Satan hates
the prayer of praise. There's a little quip you often see: 'Prayer changes things' - well we could say: 'Praise changes things also'. We could say that praising God sends Satan running away. One man put it: 'Satan is allergic to praise, where there is massive triumphant praise Satan is paralysed, bound and banished!' Do you want to get rid of the devil? Praise God! Praise Him with your whole heart, with your soul and spirit, and mind and body! Praise Him as a whole person and the devil will flee! For God inhabits the praises of His people!

We've seen already that prayer is the weapon whereby we bring God onto the battlefield. Literally, isn't it, it's how we bring God into our life situation. One of the greatest ways of doing that, through prayer, is through praise. When God comes among His people all else is pushed out. It's said of the Israelites that there was the shout of a king among them. The shout of the king, sadly, has died down. As one man put it: 'Mr Hallelujah and Mrs Amen have all died' - they've all gone! But if we read the book of Psalms we read of great praise of God, prayers full of praise and thanks all pointing to their great God - and the miracle of the Psalms is this: most of them are coming from a position of answered prayer. Many a Psalm David, or another Psalmist, begins by trailing out all his sorrows before God, all his enemies, his sicknesses, his weaknesses, his sins - but then, just like a beautiful piece of music, that lower note comes to a change, and then there is a great crescendo as God comes in and answers. Then you find, in the second half of many of the Psalms, David's tune of despair and depression is changed to great praise in his God, for God is the God who answers prayer.

I have twinned thanksgiving with praise. Thanksgiving is quite similar. Many say that thanksgiving is gratitude, and that's true in a sense, but not so accurate in that gratitude is something that wells up within us at times involuntarily. It can stay within us, we find gratitude within us and many would not know - but thanksgiving is gratitude expressed. Thanksgiving is that gratitude voluntarily expressed, outwardly and orally, to the God whom we are thanking. It is giving out something to God, something positive, something active.

We have gratitude and thanksgiving when we meditate and contemplate the great things that God has done for us. Let me say: if you're not with the people of God, around the word of God, around the throne of grace of God, you will find trouble thanking God. For you must meditate upon the word of God, you must be in the presence of God with the people of God, and there, many a time, and mostly around the Lord's table, where we get an awful, great, terrible gratitude for what the Lord has done - for we are presented with the blood of the Lamb! If you're not there it'll be hard to be grateful for it, for I'm there many a day and I'm not grateful for it. We must come and meditate, and think, and contemplate, what the Lord has done for us. Psalm 126:3: 'The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad' - isn't that what it's about? The poet said:

'I love to think on mercies past,
And future good implore,
And all my cares and sorrows cast
On Him whom I adore'.

Do you praise Him? Do you thank Him? For if you praise Him and thank Him, do you know what will happen? You will grow to love Him more and more, for love is the child of thanksgiving. Love flows out of gratitude. In Psalm 6 we read this: 'I love the Lord' - why? 'Because He hath heard the voice of my weeping, and my supplication'. If you're not praying you love the Lord little - you need to see your prayers answered at times, and then you get gratitude for the Lord's answered prayer. It wells up within you, and out of your mouth and soul and spirit comes thanksgiving! Throughout the Psalms that's what we find: thanksgiving to answered prayer - so much so that we get so excited about prayer that we pray more and more to see more answered prayer. The more we see prayer answered, the more we have gratitude, and the more we thank God, and the more we love Christ!
Psalm 116 puts it into words: 'Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live'. Oh, it's lovely, isn't it? You know that was the basis for Paul's exhortation in Romans 12 and verse 1: 'I beseech you therefore', I implore you, 'by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God'. What did he implore them by? 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God' - it ought to be the mercies of God, the grace of God, the goodness of God to us! It ought to be from a heart filled with gratitude and thanksgiving to God that we lay our lives on the altar for Him out of love! It constrains us to give ourselves to Him. So prayer and thanksgiving, praise and consecration, all must go together.

Imagine if we constantly helped someone and they never ever thanked us. We wouldn't help them too much, sure we wouldn't? They're not grateful, no gratitude. Remember the ten lepers? The Lord asked: 'Where are the other nine?'. My friends, we must learn this lesson as we come into the presence of God, this is what will increase our faith. If you want your faith increased: thank Him! Count your blessings and it will surprise you, and it will encourage you, and enthuse you to go to God and ask more! Praise Him for who He is, ponder Him in thanksgiving, in love, and wonder, and praise, worship Him. You know the Lord said that Himself upon the earth: 'They that worship me, God seeks these type of worshippers who worship in spirit and in truth'. Old Tozer entitled a book: 'Whatever Happened To Worship?' - sometimes you'd wonder today, in my own life I wonder. I come straight into the presence of God and I've got the shopping list ready to go down, but do we worship Him?

Time is moving on - the second point we find is: confession. Let me say, this isn't an exhaustive list, there are maybe other things that you put within them. But then there is confession, and to put it bluntly: confession is simply an admission of sin. It is spiritually putting your hands up and saying: 'I'm guilty'. Andrew Murray said this: 'God cannot hear the prayers on our lips often, because the desires of our heart after the world cry out to Him much more strongly and loudly than our desires for Him'. Is God hearing your desire after the world more than your spiritual desire to follow after Him? You see, this is where Satan gains the victory in this spiritual battle so often, when he can throw - remember he is the great thrower, the accuser, throwing dirt at us - but if there is sin in our life, often the dirt, the mud sticks. This is where confession comes in.

First John 1 and verse 9, isn't it wonderful? There's many a time I've been on my knees, and I have felt the load of guilt of filthy sin - because I'm a filthy sinner - and my eyes have come to this: 'If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous...If we confess our sins', admit, hands up, 'he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness'. That Greek word 'confess' means this: 'to agree with God'. It's not coming to get your sins forgiven again, your sins have been forgiven when you came to Christ - past, present, future. The blood of Jesus Christ goes on cleansing us, but if we live with unconfessed sin it will hinder our fellowship and our power with God. It is a heart-felt recognition of what we are and what we have done.

The Psalmist - and we must be warned - in 66 verse 18 says: 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me'. Now I believe that He has laid down, the Holy Spirit there, the law of confession. It means that if my prayer life never rises above my personal life, there is sin in it. Do you know what I'm saying? I'm saying what Isaiah said in 59:2: 'Your iniquities can separate between you and your God, and your sins can hide his face from you, that he will not hear'. It is possible, the Bible teaches, that at times our prayers are not effective because our life is holding them, our life is binding them, crippling our prayers! Husbands and wives note this, 1 Peter 3:7: 'Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them', wives, 'according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered'! There are so many things that can hinder our prayers, small things and great things - but even if we're not on right terms with our husband or with our wife, or with our children, or we've fallen out with someone, or are holding a grudge, our prayers can be hindered!
Och, we can't bring everybody to be friends with us - and if we'd be doing that we'd be disobeying the Lord, for He said: 'Woe to you when all men think well of you'. But you know, what we can do is we can make it alright on our side. We can come to God - and this is painful - we can come to God and admit that we are wrong when we are wrong. It's the surgeon of the Holy Spirit, coming in as we confess, and He lances the boil of our sin to allow the infection to drain away that we might be healed from the inside. The man was right when he said: 'Before you pray for a change of circumstances, you should pray for a change in character'. Yes, prayer changes things, but you know what prayer changes most of all? You - for it brings us into line with who God is.

Thirdly: we praise, we confess, and we wait - waiting on God. Madame Guyon, who wrote many books on waiting on God, sought God in her early life. On one occasion she approached a devout monk - again, before the Reformation, before you burn me at the stake or anything like that! - and she explained her desire to know God and to grow closer to God. She admitted: 'I've grown shamefully weak before God'. After hearing her story the monk declared to her, listen: 'Your efforts have been unsuccessful because you have sought without, outside, only what you can find within. Accustom yourself to seek God in your heart and you will not fail to find Him'. For her that was the introduction to waiting on God, and when you look at all the great saints of God in the past, within the word and within church history, you find that all of them set aside time to wait silently in the presence of God.

People ask me: 'What is waiting on God?'. Well, first of all, let me say that it's scriptural. We find it in Psalm 52:9: 'I wait on thy name'. Psalm 62:1: 'My soul waiteth upon God'. Psalm 130: 'My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning' - and we all know: 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength', but what is waiting on God? Is it just sitting, like waiting on a bus? Do you know what it is? It is a silent surrender of the soul to God. It's not day-dreaming, looking out of a window, or drifting in your mind, but it is sitting silently loving God and allowing God to love you. If you don't know anything of this you are missing out.

Let me try and define it a little bit more. An elderly woman was asked the same question: 'What is it to wait on God?', and she was also asked: 'How do you spend your day?'. She said this: 'Well, I always begin my day with a good season of prayer. In fact, I pray until I cannot pray any more, and then I take my Bible and read until I can't read any more. After that I take my hymnbook from my shelf and sing until I can't sing any more, and then I just sit quietly and let God love me'. That's what this is, do you know it? Having your mind, by the Spirit of God, elevated to Him. Being wholly taken up with God, silently worshipping God. This isn't praying to get things, this is far beyond that! This is coming to the point of prayer where you're not looking to get answers, but you're looking to get God! That's what it's all about: to meditate upon Him, to think on Him, and to sit silently without mouthing, or talking, or preaching through your prayer - to just sit with God. It's like the little boy who went into his Daddy's office and bumped his head and fell over and made a noise, and he walked over to his Daddy's office gazing tenderly through his loving eyes and said: 'Daddy, I'll sit still all the time, if you will only let me be here with you'. That's what it is: sitting silently in God's presence, so that He'll just be with you.

I can't explain it - that silent, intimate love exchange between us and our Father that we are sharing in, that was the silent love exchange between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through all eternity - and we are in Christ, and Christ is in God, and we can enter into that fellowship. But friends, if you are not waiting on God, you will know nothing of it. If you rush into God's presence and open up a prayer book, and go down all the lists, and do your reading of two chapters a day and all the rest, and then go to work and forget all about it - that is not this life of communion with God we're talking about. We're talking about what Andrew Bonar wrote in his diary when he said this: 'Some have the beauty of the Rose of Sharon, and there are others who have the fragrance too. I spent two hours today in prayer, seeking that I might have the fragrance'. Do you have the
fragrance? Are you even like Him? - but, oh, to have the fragrance, to be seen to be with the Lord, to come down from the mount of meeting like Moses with our faces shining - that men and women, and boys and girls, and all that come into contact with us, can see that we have been with Jesus. Oh, it takes patience, it doesn't come to a busy life, a life that is laden down with service, that is just carnal, of the flesh - but it will take patience till our hearts are tuned to prayer, till we know that we are heard with God, and till we receive the answer. It'll take practice.

Fourthly, scripture. I feel we're not going to get through all of this tonight, but I don't want to rush over anything. You know, the Bible is our prayer book. The Bible is the book of prayer that we have, and it is the only place that we are taught to pray, and it is the time, when we pray to God, that the word of God will become part of us. You know that, don't you? That when you hear message like this tonight, or on a Sunday, or you read a spiritual book or something like that, or listen to a tape, that will not change your life unless you actually put that into your life by prayer. For you recognise before God, confess your need, and ask Him for the grace, through the Spirit, to do what He has told you to do. That's quite simple, it's spiritual basics, Romans 10 and verse 17, listen: 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God'. Now, reading books on prayer is good - do it! But reading books on prayer will only stir you to pray, hearing messages on prayer may stir you, but the word of God gives us faith - for faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word.

If we get into the word of God we will get faith to pray to God. George Mueller, that great man of faith, opened the Bible every day, and would never pray to God unless his Bible was open. He said that the secret of receiving answers to prayer lay in how the Christian applied the word of God in prayer. Spurgeon said: 'Every promise of Scripture is a writing of God which may be pleaded before God with the reasonable request: 'Do as Thou hast said'. The Creator will not cheat the creature who depends upon His truth, and far more the heavenly Father will not break His word to His own child. Wasn't it Spurgeon who wrote that book: 'The Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith'? To write the cheques from the promises of God's word, and to cash them in in heaven's bank, and God says He will supply - He will supply! There's a guarantee on that cheque, on that note, that God will give us what He has promised. We must use prayer in Scripture. Take a Psalm, that's what I often do, a Psalm during the morning, and go through verse by verse and just praise God through it.

Then fifthly: intercession. To put it bluntly, intercession is praying on behalf of others. It means to intercede, to mediate, to come in between. It's more than that, it's earnestly appealing for another. It's a good occupation, because it's our Lord's present occupation. It was His occupation in that great high prayer that we find in the book of John 17, where He prayed for His own. It is always Christ's occupation, and it ought to be ours, to intercede for others. We were all prayed for at some time, weren't we? Indeed, prayer was a part of bringing us to Christ - God saved us, but prayer was part of the mechanism that brought us to saving faith. All of us cannot preach, all of us cannot be missionaries or evangelists, but all of us can pray and intercede for others. As E.M. Bounds said: 'This is the soul of a man stirred to plead with God for men'. He said, didn't he: 'It's a good thing to talk to men about God, but it's a better thing to talk to God about men'. That's the key of freedom, it's the key of freeing others from bondage of sin - and if you want someone saved, my friend, and you're not praying, you may forget about it! Get on your knees! Pray, claim the promises of God.

Remember what God said to Abimelech about Abraham? 'He', Abraham, 'is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live'. A.J. Gordon said about this praying and interceding in the battle: 'We have authority to take from the enemy everything he is holding back' - isn't that wonderful? We are on the victory ground, he's not! We have authority in prayer, and through the Lord Jesus Christ and His blood, to claim back what is His. He says: 'The chief way of taking is by prayer'. Four times in his epistles Paul says: 'making mention of you in prayer' - now that's making mention, not just saying: 'Lord, bless all the churches'. Making mention of them as, indeed, he made mention within his epistles.
In the battle, intercession will bring victory to your life. You know, sometimes we're selfish, and I think this way: 'You know, I've so much to pray about me. I've so many problems and things to be done, and sometimes I never get time to pray for anybody else' - that's wrong! Do you know why? Because Job, you think of the situations that Job found himself in, health-wise, spiritually, and even his friends and his wife turning against him - but in Job 42 verse 10 it says this: 'The Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before' - when he prayed for others.

Sixthly, singing. This is a strange one, perhaps you think - but singing is a gift from God. As Luther said: 'The gift of language with the gift of song was given to man that he should proclaim the word of God through music'. Now here's the question: do you praise the Lord in singing? Do you? 'Oh, we did it tonight' - I'm not talking about tonight, I'm talking about at home. Do you praise the Lord in song at home? The Psalmist said in 100: 'Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing'. Remember Mary Slessor, that missionary to China? Do you know what she said? 'I sing the doxology, and I dismiss the devil'. Huh! That's the battle! Sing the doxology and dismiss the devil! Amy Carmichael, a missionary too, concerning song said: 'I believe truly that Satan cannot endure it, and so slips out of the room more or less when there is true song. Prayer rises more easily, more spontaneously, after one has let those wings, words and music carry one out of oneself into the upper air'. Do you sing in the presence of the Lord? In this book in chapter 5 and verse 19 we are told to admonish one another, and indeed praise, in Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. We find in 2 Chronicles chapter 20, King Jehoshaphat faced with all his enemies prayed to God, and brought the people together in prayer and fasting as the nation of Judah. They went to the front line of the battle and they found that the enemy was defeated - why? Verse 22: 'And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon'. It works, you know - Paul and Silas sang praises to God in jail, and there was an earthquake.

Finally, and with this we will finish: listening. We're all good at talking, aren't we? And I'm the best one! We all love to be heard, but the Lord gave us two ears - didn't He? - and one mouth. You know, this is part of prayer - Ecclesiastes 5:2: 'Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few'. Sometimes our prayers can be all one-way traffic, can't they? It's a speech, it's not a conversation, it's not a dialogue! But God, through Paul to Timothy, said: 'Study to be silent'. Can I ask you to do something? See the next time you pray - and I hope it'll be tonight - don't make it too noisy for God to speak, but be like Elijah and in the stillness, without uttering a word, listen for the still small voice of God, the voice of God in your spirit. The price will be silence and self, and maybe time to sit there for a while - but if F.W. Faber, the great poet, said this, listen as we close:

'Whenever the sounds of the world die out in the soul,  
Then we hear the whisperings of God.

He is always whispering to us, only we don't always hear because of the noise, hurried distractions, which life causes as it rushes on. Do we praise Him? Do we confess our sin? Do we thank Him, and wait upon Him, and take the word of God to Him and claim it, and intercede for others? Do we sing and praise Him? And do we be still and know that He is God? The next time I see you we'll look at 'Specific Prayer', and the rest that the Lord has for us.
Ephesians - Chapter 34: The Holy War Pt 7
"Spirit-Led Supplication"

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Ephesians 6:18c
1. What Is Supplication?
2. What Is Praying In The Spirit?

Now let me welcome you to our Bible Reading tonight in the Iron Hall. It's great to see you all with us, I think this is one of the biggest turnouts that I've ever seen. Perhaps it's a fallout from me being away, and all the good speakers that you've been having - maybe you didn't think it was me tonight. Well, I'm back, I'm sorry about that, but it's good to see you all with us this evening. Do come, maybe it's not your practice to come regularly to the Bible Reading, perhaps this is a one-off for you - but please do take our welcome, and come along and hear the word of God. We trust that you will be blessed and built up in your most holy faith through the word of God.

We turn to Ephesians again, and chapter 6 - Ephesians chapter 6 and we'll just read verse 18. I think you're familiar enough with the whole passage, we've spent that long on it - but if you haven't read it before please do read it. It is an account of the armour of God that we have learnt - and this is a very important thing to remember - that it is God's armour, it's not something the Christian works into, or the Christian makes himself. It is God's armour, and we've seen from the prophet Isaiah that God literally wore that armour - and we have been given it to fight the good fight of faith ourselves. This is so important to realise, that every single thing in the Christian life is of grace. The sooner we learn that, the richer we will be.

Everything is from the hand of God, and here tonight we find something else that is from the hand of God. We've been looking at prayer, and in our first study we looked at the first phrase of verse 18: 'Praying always'. We looked at constant prayer, we looked at how constant prayer is a way of life, praying daily, praying throughout the day. Then we looked at how constant prayer is a continual communion, it's something that you can do all the time - it doesn't mean that you're having your quiet time every moment of the day, but you can have your spirit in contact with God every moment of your life. We learnt of how prayerlessness hinders the church.

Then we looked at the second phrase: 'With all prayer'. We spent some time looking at the many facets of prayer, I can't recall them off the top of my head but you know what they are: intercession, confession, singing, listening, praising, adoring, worshipping - all those things: waiting on God, praying scripture, that we learnt about in our last study. Now we come to the next part of this verse: 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints'.

The reason why we're taking so much time over this verse is because it's packed full of wealth that God wants us to know. It would be wrong of me to skip over it and miss out everything that God would have us know. What we are looking at this evening is this: supplication in the Spirit. We're looking at 'Spirit-Led Supplication'. It is a part of the armour of God that we all need. We sang in our first hymn: 'I often say my prayers, but do I ever pray?'. Now, that conjures up a wealth of questions in our mind that we need to answer as believers. It's so true, isn't it: we often say prayers, but do we really actively pray? Are we engaged in what the Bible reveals as true prayer? That begs the question: what is prayer? I've been attempting to answer
that in weeks gone by, and I believe that verse 18 is a very important part of the whole of God's revelation to define for us what is true prayer.

Now, if the truth were told, our prayers are often simply expressions of what we want. Perhaps, if you want to go onto another plain, a better motive of our prayers may be even desires that are good, and maybe we could push it far enough to say they may even be desires that are spiritual. But if we are honest, many Christians are disillusioned with the subject of prayer. I've heard many people say: 'Why are my prayers never answered? I pray for good things, I pray for things that I think God would have me possess, and it seems that they're never answered. My prayer life is probably a failure. If anything in my Christian life is a failure, my prayer life is a failure'. That sense of failure and defeat is further cemented by some of the books that we read, and some of the teachers that we hear, that make prayer look like some kind of a magic spell whereby, when you pray to God, you get anything that you want.

To address these very real questions we must learn what true asking is, and what it is to pray in the Spirit. For those two things that we'll look at tonight are part of the great mechanics of what prayer is. So, let's look at our first question on your sheet this evening: 'Supplication in the Spirit' - what is supplication? What does this word literally mean? The Greek word is 'daiases' (sp?), and it simply means - one of many Greek words defining prayer within the New Testament, but it simply means: 'to pray requesting, beseeching, begging, supplicating'. To pray requesting, beseeching, begging, supplicating - primarily it is a prayer for a wanting need. You need something from God, so you come to God and you 'daiases', you plead God to give you what you need.

But we need to define it further than that, we need to go into the Old Testament - and you will know that the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, not Greek, but there is a translation of the Old Testament from the Hebrew to the Greek for Greek speakers, so that they could understand the Old Testament, and we get a little bit of light about Greek words from that Old Testament Greek translation - the way that some of the words are used. In that translation, in the book of Esther, if you were to turn to it, and chapter 8 and verse 3 you find that word 'beseech', the word 'to supplicate', with regards to Esther beseeching the King. You read in that verse: 'And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews'. Haman wanted to exterminate - another holocaust of the Jews - and Esther came in before the King, and it says 'besought him with tears'. That is this word 'to supplicate'.

If you go to Hosea and chapter 12 and verse 4 you find the word used, again in the Old Testament, of Jacob the father of Israel. It's used in relation to his wrestling with the angel, and it says this of him: 'Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed' - listen - 'he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us'. The nation of Israel is saying: 'The reason that God has come to us, the reason that Jehovah has spoken to us, is because our father Jacob, in the desert, wrestled with God - he wept and made supplication unto Him, and he found Him in Bethel'. That's this word 'supplication'.

Now, if you go into the New Testament, you find that in the Revised Version it's always rendered 'supplication', or 'supplications'. In the Authorised Version that we have it's translated 'supplication', and also 'prayer', and 'prayers' - a general translation. There are two ways in which it is defined in the New Testament. The first way is requesting and beseeching for oneself, for your needs - if you like, your petitions, the things that you need in your life. In Luke 1 and verse 13 we find that in the life of Zacharias, we read this: 'But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer', thy supplication, 'is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John' - John the Baptist. A specific petition that Zacharias had, Elisabeth conceived, the angel said: 'Thy supplication is heard, thy wife shall bear a son'.

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Then there is a definition within the New Testament - the second - that is not petition for oneself, but petition on behalf, or in the behalf, of others. If you turn to Luke chapter 2 and verse 37 this time, Anna, we read of her: 'And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers', supplications, 'night and day'. For others, for the nation of Israel, for Messiah, for salvation to be seen in the nation, she supplicated the throne of grace. Then, perhaps one of the greatest and most poignant in the New Testament - and I want you to turn to this one, Romans chapter 10, the apostle Paul. Romans 10 and verse 1, the hearts cry of Paul for the nation he loved: 'Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer', supplication, 'to God for Israel is, that they might be saved'. On behalf of Israel he was supplicating God, in fact in chapter 9 you can see on behalf of Israel he was willing - verse 1 - to go through hell that they might be saved!

Now what can we say about this word 'supplication'? Well we can say, as we've seen, that it is begging, beseeching, even at times with tears, for oneself and can be on behalf or in behalf of others - but also it is always addressed to God. This word is always addressed to God, it's not in the sense of coming before a King and beseeching, it's the sense of coming before God and crying unto God that your prayers may be answered. Now I hope that you can see, already, the importance of such a phrase as this in the great battle that we are in. The importance of a piece of armour like this, of being able to come into the very presence of God, before God's throne of grace and getting what we need because we ask of Him.

Now generally the word is used for any prayer, but you see specifically this word 'supplication', in the Greek whenever the verb isn't used it always seems to mean prayer for others. So all that illustration about prayers for yourself, push that away, that's not what this word means now in the verse where Paul is speaking. He is specifically talking about prayer for others, so he's talking of begging God, beseeching God in the Spirit, for other people. You find the word used in that sense in 2 Corinthians 9:14 where Paul says: 'And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you' - 'That is my prayer for you, longing after you that God's grace would be seen in your life'. In 2 Timothy 1 verse 3 he says: 'I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of you in my prayers night and day' - that's the sense. Coming before God incessantly, persistently, continually, supplicating, begging, beseeching God for other people.

Paul and the other apostles, if you read the New Testament, highly valued such prayer. They expected great things of such prayer. James tells us that there is great gain when such beseeching God takes place, especially when such beseeching and supplicating is combined and entwined with a life of dynamic faith and holiness. Isn't that what he said in [James] 5 and 16? 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much'. If this type of prayer, supplication, is combined with a holy, righteous life, God will hear you and mighty things are possible! The proof of that is in verse 17, he uses the illustration of Elijah who 'was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed', supplicated, 'earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months'. In the same vein the apostle Peter, in his first epistle chapter 3 and verse 12, quoting Psalm 34:16 says the prayer of the righteous is always heard of God - always. He says: 'The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers'.

I think prayer is the most important weapon in the holy warfare that we have been studying. If we neglect it, we neglect everything. But you know I believe something more than its importance in the warfare, I believe that it is one of the most important evidences of true Christian faith in the life of a human being. Now, we were studying last evening of the marks of the sheep of the Lord Jesus Christ - it's not just believing, but there has to be a changed, repentant life that hears His voice, that follows Him and that knows that it has eternal life. But, you know, the word of God also testifies that if you are to be sure that you're saved there must be a life of prayer within your soul. Paul said that to Timothy, 1 Timothy 2:1: 'I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men' - first of all! Before you think about anything else you've got to be doing this!
Ultimately the supplicant, what is it? I mean, let's think about this for a moment: the Lord Jesus Christ died, was buried, rose again, went to heaven, sits at the right hand of God - why? To intercede. That is why the word of God says there's one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. Now this supplication is almost identical, but it is we who are the mediators, we who are interceding between men and God! If you think about that, that's an awesome responsibility - to be there for God for the needs of others, to express a deep desire that God would take action on the behalf and in the lives of other people. We have been given that responsibility to pray. If you think about it, all of the subject of prayer - whether it is personal prayer, or prayer for others - all the types of prayer, adoration, confession, every single one of them is an act of declaration and confession of dependence upon God. Do you notice that? Everything in prayer expresses: 'Of myself I can do nothing, and I need Thee - and with God I can do everything'. It is again bringing us to that brick wall of realising that in my flesh their dwelleth no good thing.

That is why we need to come, as Paul said in Philippians 4: 'Be careful', anxious, worried, 'for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus'. Isn't it wonderful to know that there is no difficulty, there is no problem in your life that is too small, that is too insignificant, that you can't bring before God? God will never say: 'Take that away from Me, I'm running a universe you know, I haven't time for little things like that' - that is not the God that we have! The God that we have is concerned for the sparrow, the God that we have knows the hairs of our head, and they are numbered. I heard someone saying recently that they thought that verse meant that every single hair was numbered, and they thought to themselves: 'What would God want to number my hairs for? I mean, I don't know how many are there, and I don't really care how many are there until there are so few that I can't see them any more!'. What does that verse mean? Do you know what it means? You can't tell how many hairs are numbered there, and God knows more about you than you know about yourself. God cares so much about you, that things that don't even concern you He knows inside out.

Is that not an inspiration to pray? I don't know, I tell you what it is practically - let me apply this practically to you: what can we do when we are supposed to supplicate in this way? It means this: that definite needs are meant to be requested. You're meant to come to God with definite, specific needs - and when you do that definite, specific benefits will be granted! Pray specifically and God will answer specifically. Now, if you're going to pray specifically, you're going to have to get acquainted with facts. It's no use coming before God and saying: 'Lord, bless the missionaries, bless the pastors, bless every Christian that there is in every country of the world, bless every church today'. We need to pray specifically! We need to get the needs that there are within our fellowship, within our lives, within the lives of others, and we need to spread them before God and supplicate God for concrete situations.

It might be - and I would say that you would have to do this: set aside specific time in your life, in the life of a church, to supplicate God for specific needs. Perhaps today is to stress prayer for your family, tomorrow for the fellowship, tomorrow for the preachers of the Gospel, the next day for missionaries - whatever it may be, to supplicate God. To supplicate Him one: for the universal needs - to pray, as the Lord Jesus instructed us, that He might send labourers into the harvest. We need to pray for that! We need to pray for our national needs, for kings and for all those who are in authority over us. And of course there are our personal needs, and we haven't even time to list all of them - you know them, and I know my own. Look: if our prayers are not being answered, and we are not adhering to the mechanics of prayer, the theology of prayer within the New Testament, what do we expect? We need to do what God tells us to do and put these things into action. As one author said: 'Some things God will not give until we want them enough to ask'.

Do you remember in the Gospels that the Lord Jesus came and faced the blind man in Mark 10 - do you remember what He said to him? 'What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?' - that's supplication. The Lord
Jesus Christ who is omnipotent, for He is God, says to us today as believers: 'Look, here I am, I am at your disposal - what would you have that I do for you?' - and we don't come. That's what supplication is, I hope it's been made clear enough for you. But it's not just supplication, if you supplicate the throne of grace that's not enough because look at what it says, verse 18: 'supplication in the Spirit'. It's a specific supplication.

So, what is praying or supplicating in the Spirit? You will know, if you have read and are familiar with the New Testament, that we are instructed to pray to the Father, through Jesus Christ the Son, in the Holy Spirit. To the Father, our Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ the intercessor, the great intercessor of all men - but it's in the Spirit. We find through Paul's epistles and the whole of the word of God that there is a great stress and emphasis, a special importance to that fact: that true prayer, like all of true Christian life, is wrought in the Spirit of God. But what does that mean? Well, to put it in antithesis: it is the opposite of praying in the flesh. Sometimes it's good to define something by what it is not - it's not praying in the flesh. To pray in the flesh, therefore, has the inference to pray without power. So, if to pray in the Spirit is the opposite of praying in the flesh without power, to pray in the Spirit is to pray with power.

We have learnt that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual - therefore in this supplication, and in all prayer, we must rely on the Spirit of God - why? 'For we know not what we should ask', isn't that what Paul says in Romans? We don't know what to ask for, and we don't know how to pray as we ought to pray. Now, I want you to turn with me to Romans chapter 8, because this is the defining chapter, if you like, concerning what praying in the Spirit really is. If you look at verse 26 you'll see that verse that I've just quoted: 'We know not what we should pray for as we ought'. Now, the implication of everything that we're laying down here as a foundation is this: that if we are not praying in the Spirit, we might as well not be praying at all! Now that's so important, I hear people say: 'Well, as long as you pray, that's all that matters' - that is not all that matters! There are only certain types of prayer that God answers, and if I can define it further: there are only certain types of intercourse and communication with God that are prayer!

Therefore we see within the word of God that prayer is not our 'wish list'. When you come into the presence of God with a shopping list of things that you would like, or things that you think would be good for you, or good for the church of Christ, or good for the glory of God - that's not prayer. In the Old Testament, in the book of Exodus and chapter 30, there is the picture of God's tabernacle, the place where God dwelt upon the earth in the desert with Israel. If you went into the tabernacle you would find there a small golden altar standing before the veil into the Holy of Holies. There there would be burnt incense rising up to God - do you know what that is? In the book of Hebrews it's a picture of worship and prayer - that incense burning up to God was to show us that God's prayer is God's prayer, it's not instrumented by man, it doesn't start in man, but it must be according to God's plan. It can't be counterfeited by man - you remember in the book of Numbers what happened to men who tried to counterfeit the incense of God. God struck them down, God opened the ground and swallowed them up - it had to be God's way, or no way at all.

There is the incense as a picture of prayer, but what had to happen to the incense? Well, fire had to come into contact with the incense, didn't it? Fire is a picture of the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit of God is the One who takes our prayers and sets them alight. We must not miss that. He is the one who ignites them with the will of Almighty God, and if we don't pray that way we don't pray at all! What is praying in the Spirit? Octavius Winslow, and I would encourage you to read his writings, said this: 'Prayer is the breathing of God's own Spirit in the heart'. Isn't that beautiful? The breathing of God's own Spirit in the heart - the Greek word for the Holy Spirit, spirit, is 'neuma', it is the same word for breath, and the same word for wind. It is God's breath, God's 'neuma', His Spirit in the heart of a man, for a man to come before God and pray.

So what must we do to pray in the Spirit? Now these points are not down on your sheet, but I want you to write them down as we go through them. There are three ways in which we pray in the Spirit. To pray in the Spirit you must first of all be born of the Spirit. Look at Romans 8 and verse 15, Paul says: 'For ye have not
received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father'. Now if you keep your finger in Romans and turn to Galatians 4 and verse 6, you find a similar verse talking about adoption. Paul, again, says to the Galatians: 'And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father'.

Now in both verses Paul uses the Greek word 'cradso' (sp?), which means 'to cry', to express the relationship that we have as children and sons to our Father God. That cry 'Abba, Father', what is it expressing? It's expressing great freedom, great joy, great confidence, as we come to God - that we're not coming to some almighty despot, or angry, wrathful God that is going to strike us down, but we're coming to gracious, loving heavenly Father. Now why is that? Why does Paul use 'cradso', 'a cry', as we come to our Father? Why is there that freedom, joy, and confidence? What does it spring from? Do you know what it springs from? Our awareness that we are the sons of God - a realisation that I'm God's son! I belong to God! If I can put it in other words: such prayer doesn't originate in any power or any thought that's possessed in man, therefore prayer - the dear Roman Catholics, they think it's meritorious that the more they pray, the quicker they'll get into heaven - it's nothing to do with that! For prayer doesn't even come from you in a sense, prayer is from the grace of God because it's only through the grace of God that we become sons, and it's only as sons that we can 'cradso' to God: 'Abba, Father'!

To Paul prayer is ultimately the indwelling, the energising, Spirit of God. It is the Holy Spirit within us speaking to God by Himself. Now, it's important that you understand this: that God the Spirit in us, is speaking to God Himself, who is the Spirit. Second Corinthians 3 and verse 17, turn with me to that quickly for it's important that we understand these truths, 2 Corinthians 3:17: 'Now the Lord is that Spirit', now mark that, 'the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty'. Now, if you want liberty in prayer - and what greater liberty in prayer is there than to be able to cry 'Abba, Father!'. Now how do you get that? The Spirit of God! In John 4 and verse 23 it says this, the Lord Jesus said: 'The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth'. You see, John understood it, Paul understood it, James understood it, Timothy understood it through the mouth of Paul - that praying is nothing to do with you specifically, in a sense, and if it wasn't for the grace of God, and it wasn't for the Spirit of God implanted into your soul at conversion, you wouldn't be able to pray! The Lord Jesus acknowledged to that woman, in John 4, at the well that this is a new thing!

This is something that the Old Testament saints did not experience, this is a new creation in Christ Jesus, originating only in Christ and only from Christianity. Look at Romans 8, and this proves it, Romans 8 and verse 14 - if you want to pray in the Spirit, you've got to be born of the Spirit: 'For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God'. 'Abba, Father!', the Spirit of God leads them to say that - for no man confesses Jesus as Lord except by the Spirit of God. Thus prayer isn't dependent on your eloquence, on how many verses you can memorise, on how loud you can pray or how softly you can pray - but prayer is dependent upon the efficacy of our Lord Jesus Christ, upon the assurance that He has died, He has risen, He has ascended, He is there in glory for us interceding. Because He has sent His Spirit into our hearts, we have the spirit that cries: 'Abba, Father'. I believe that the assurance of our salvation is evidenced, and indeed increased, by the Spirit producing prayer within us. If you're saved, that means that your prayer life ought to be getting better. In Romans 8 verse 16 we see that: 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God'.

Secondly, to pray in the Spirit you must be born of the Spirit but also you must be living in the Spirit. I could put it like this: being in communion with the Spirit, living in the power of the Spirit. One man defined it like this: 'Let the Spirit be the atmosphere in which you pray'. If you like, this is the 'where' of prayer, the 'place' of prayer. What I mean by that is that you don't pray in a certain temple, you don't need to pray any more in Jerusalem at the temple, or in a tabernacle, you don't need to pray on this mountain or the other mountain,
you don't need to pray in church or in a chapel. The 'where' of prayer, the 'place' of prayer, the 'atmosphere' of prayer, is living in the Holy Spirit of God. That's what the Lord Jesus said in John 4 to that same woman, verses 20, 21 and 23. She said to Him: 'Lord, our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship' - now, He didn't say that - 'Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit' - that is with the Spirit's help. Your spirit with the Spirit's help, in harmony with the Spirit's will, as revealed in the Spirit's word in the Scriptures.

Now let's apply this, it's important that we lay this down in our lives. What does it mean, what are the implications of a verse like this? That we must be praying in the Spirit, and in order to pray in the Spirit we need to live in the Spirit - do you know what it means? A fleshly believer can't pray! Now, don't try and twist out of that, that's what the teaching of the word of God is. It means this: if you have a grudge against somebody your prayers will only hit the ceiling - they mightn't even hit the ceiling! If you don't love your brother and sister in Christ, if there's a problem between you and your wife or husband, your prayers are hindered! The word of God says it. It means if you have a grudge and can't forgive another person that you are not - and in fact cannot - pray in the Spirit. It means if you have a selfish motive as you come to God, whether it's for your own glory - this is a thing I grapple with! Am I wanting souls saved so that everybody thinks David Legge's great? For God will not answer that prayer! What is my motive, what is the reason? Is it for my glory? Is it for my luxury, so that my life will be better? The message is this: you cannot pray in the Spirit if you are not walking in the Spirit! Yes, prayer changes things, but the message of this verse is that - more than that - prayer changes the man who prays, because it's the Spirit who works within him!

Prayer, therefore, is more than a means for me to see God doing miracles on my behalf because I pray - but more than that, it's seeing God doing a miracle in me, wrought by the Spirit! Now let me tease that out a little bit as we look at the third thing it is to pray in the Spirit. Thirdly, to pray in the Spirit - one: you must be born of the Spirit; two: you must be living in the Spirit; three: you must be in agreement with the Spirit. Can two walk together except they be agreed? Now some commentators say that means praying from the heart, it doesn't. Neither does it mean praying inwardly, without using words. It means this: praying under the influence of the Holy Spirit, praying in agreement with Him. You remember in chapter 5 of Ephesians, you don't need to turn to it, verse 18: 'Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled', in other words translated, 'be continually under the control [of the Spirit]'. You're under the control wine when you're intoxicated, aren't you? That's the comparison: as you're under control of wine, be under the continual control of the Holy Spirit.

That's what we're talking about here: to pray in the Holy Spirit is to be continually under His control in your prayers, with His assistance. In fact it is His office, revealed in the word of God, it's His role to reveal truth to us, to teach us and to show us how to pray day by day. Now here's the key, Romans 8 - turn to Romans 8. Now, that clock says ten to nine, and my watch says five to nine - so I'm going to believe the clock, if you don't mind! Romans chapter 8 (it'll probably be fixed by the next service!) and verse 26, now look at this: 'In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness: for we do not know how to pray as we should: but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words'. Isn't that beautiful? By the way, never call the Spirit 'it' - 'Himself', He is the Person of the Trinity. Now, that's important, for that verse tells you and I that it is the Spirit who prays. He is the one who prays, we do not pray alone, we pray connected with the Spirit of God. The Spirit prays for us, but more than that: the Spirit prays as He is joined to us - the Spirit is in us, and He therefore is praying in us for us! Literally He is infusing His prayers into our prayers, so that we pray in the Spirit.

Now folks, for that to happen there are two supernatural things that take place to make us pray in the Spirit. One: first of all He tells us how to pray, He tells us what to pray for. If He didn't assist us in prayer, do you
know what we would be doing, perhaps what we are doing? Our prayers would be left to our own whims, our own desires, our human reason and our intuition. But when He is praying in us and for us, He moves us to a higher level. He leads us - how does He lead us? Through the sword of the Spirit! Through the word of God. He inspired it, didn't He? I mean how do we miss this sometimes? How do the charismatics miss it, and they have to have a revelation or a prophecy, or somebody speaking in tongues? He has inspired His will that we might pray by His will, and His will is found in His word. When we look into His word we find there how to pray, the Spirit leads us into all truth, we find the mind of God. Praying in the Spirit is according to the will of God, look at verse 27 of Romans 8. Now look: 'He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints' - look - 'according to the will of God'.

Now I think this is, perhaps, one of the greatest fruits that is in the life of a believer by grace. Do you know what it is? A sinful, depraved, sinful-willed man on his knees saying: 'Thy will be done'. If that's not a miracle, I don't know what is. That's praying in the Spirit, but the second thing that has to happen is this: it provides an energy, it provides a power for prayer, the Spirit provides a real sense of energy for tired bones and muscles, for a weak heart, for a depressed mind, because the Spirit elevates a person up to praying. Verse 26, look at it again: 'In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness: for we do not know how to pray' - you know those times when you can't pray? In fact, you know those times when you've run out of words because your heart is so broken, and you're maybe lying on the ground crying your heart out to God? Well, when that happens the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words - things too deep to be expressed in mortal language, the desires, the groans, the yearnings of our hearts. Even those unintelligible longings that may not be defined, can be understood by the Spirit because He has, perhaps, inspired them! He is winging those home to God as prayers, as motions of the Spirit.

In Genesis 21 and verse 17, you remember Ishmael was left by his mother sitting in the wilderness - and this isn't a direct equivalence, but I think it illustrates it. The word of God says that the Lord heard the voice of the lad. You notice it doesn't say He heard what he was saying, or He heard what he asked for - no. He probably didn't ask for anything, he probably was only crying - but the Lord heard the voice. In Psalm 28 and verse 2 it says this, the Psalmist cries: 'Hear the voice of my supplications' - the voice of my supplications, not just what I am saying in my supplication, but the Spirit is able to convey to the Father the very holy desire that, perhaps, we can't even put into words. Why? Because the Spirit of God is interacting with our spirit in prayer! As Guy King put it well: 'Praying in Him, praying in the Spirit, means having Him praying in us'. Do you get it? It's being born of the Spirit, living in the Spirit, and being in agreement with the Spirit - and that will lead, do you know what? To unselfish prayer, praying according to the will of God - not your will, but God's will.

There's a lot of selfish prayer, and it's very fervent and very spirited, but perhaps it's never answered - maybe it's not answered in your life. Is this answering the questions that we began with? Is it? Why our prayers, perhaps, are not answered? As James said: 'Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not' - why? 'Because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts'. Do you want to get your prayers answered? Pray in the will of God! Pray according to the Spirit of God! Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh, you're born of the Spirit - and, if you want, you can pray in the Spirit!

Bunyan said this, and anybody who wants to take this quotation, I think this is a marvellous quotation of what true prayer is. Listen: 'Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate, pouring out of the heart or soul to God through Christ' - note that, one: 'through Christ'; two: 'in the strength and assurance, assistance, of the Holy Spirit'; three: 'for such things as God has promised, and according to the word of God'; four: 'for the good of the church'; five: 'with submission in faith to the will of God'. The Psalmist said in Psalm 37 and verse 4: 'Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart'. Do you know what that means? If you lose yourself in God, His desires will become your desires, and when you pray for His desires you'll get them.
Jude said, and I say to you in closing, build up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost. Let us pray, and let me ask you: are you sure that you're born of the Spirit? Are you sure? Please be sure! Are you living by the Spirit, Christian? Forget about prayer if you're not! Are we in agreement, praying according to the word of God? Father, help us - oh, help us - to supplicate Your throne in the Holy Ghost, and thus to see Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - April 2001
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Ephesians - Chapter 35: The Holy War Pt 8
"The Strategy For Prayer"

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Ephesians 6:18d
1. A Watchful Disposition
2. A Persistent Determination
3. A Sanctified Direction

That was good singing, let me welcome you to our Bible Reading tonight. It's great to see you all gathered with us to meet around God's word. It's great to be in a place like this, isn't it, tonight? When the world is in turmoil, and our country is beside itself to know what to do. In the 21st century, such a thing as Foot and Mouth [disease] to stop them all in their paths and ask them: 'What is the meaning of all this?'. Isn't it wonderful for us to be able to gather around the word of God, the truth of God, and to have a hope within us - not to be like this world that has no hope, but to have hope in Christ. To know the way ahead, and to know the purpose of all things in this world.

Let me welcome you, and we pray that the Lord may speak to you through the word tonight as you gather with us. Let us turn to Ephesians chapter 6 again, Ephesians chapter 6, and I want you to turn also to Luke chapter 11 and Luke chapter 18 - so if you want to turn to those to get a head start. This is our last study in the armour of God, in the Christian warrior's armour, and indeed our last study on this subject of prayer that we have been taking as a sub-series these last four or so weeks from verse 18. It does say on your study sheet that we're looking at verse 18d, but we're looking at more than that tonight - hopefully, God willing, we want to get right through to verse 20. I apologise that that's not down on your study sheet, but let's read verse 18 together to refresh our memory of the mechanics of prayer that we find within the verse.

Paul says - remember this is a piece of the armour of God, it is the seventh, seven being the number of perfection, the seventh and most needed item of armour: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto", that's our subject tonight, "watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints". Now Paul speaks of himself: "And for me", pray for me, "that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak".

Then Luke chapter 11, and we'll be referring to these passages to illustrate these truths in our message later on, verse 5. The Lord, first of all, in verses 1 to 4 has given us what is commonly known as the Lord's Prayer - more correctly the Disciples Prayer - 'In this way pray', He says. Then in verse 5 He gives a parable, as it were, an illustration to tell us what it means to really pray to God. "He said", verse 5, "unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?". 
Then Luke again and chapter 18, Luke chapter 18, and the Lord gives another parable concerning prayer. Luke records: "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint", now please keep that in your mind - that that is the purpose, the reason, why the Saviour was giving this parable. Not just to pray, but that men ought to pray and not faint. "Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?".

If you turn with me back to Ephesians chapter 6, we find within it in verse 18 - especially verse 18 part 'd', if you like, the fourth part of the verse - the strategy for prayer. I believe the saying is true: 'Power without control is chaos' - power without control is chaos. In other words, it's one thing to have something, but it's another thing to know how to use it. If I can illustrate it for you: if you can imagine in a war scenario, what use would a tank be if you allocated a Red Cross nurse to drive it? It would be idiotic! Or what purpose has an F-16 fighter jet if you assign a military cook to fly it? It's simply not the right strategy, and it strikes us as elementary - it seems like common sense not to make that mistake. It is not good strategy, generally, to have power and not know how to use it, or how to control it.

In a war scene, if you can imagine the first day of war and the first battle, it is not good strategy to expend and empty all your armour and all your armoury upon the enemy in that first hour, or that first day, of battle. There is to be a strategy, there is to be a plan. You ought to pace yourself, and you ought to think about how you're going to exercise and execute the power that you have. There needs to be planning, there needs to be strategy - so much so that military men, some of them coming on now, study to degree level and higher. They are called military strategists. It's not all about fighting, but it's about how you fight and about the strategy of it.

In one sense, what is important is not the power that you have, not the skill that you have been gifted in, that specifically gives you the victory that you seek - but it is how you use it. It's important that we have all gifts and all blessings in spiritual places with Christ, it's important that we are blessed with all these things - and we have been realising in Ephesians what we are really blessed with in Christ. But if we do not know how to use them they're useless! So you can see in one sense, it's not the power that we have that is important, but what gives us victory is the execution of that power - how we use it to the glory of God. What is our control of it? It is the discipline of the faculties that God has given us - powerful they may be - we must know how to use that power that God has given to us.

It's very simple isn't it? I mean, what use is electricity to a man who doesn't realise that unless he puts the plug in the socket he'll not get any of the power? The power is sitting there, but it must be used. The thought within our passage tonight is exactly that: what good is prayer if you don't know how to use it? What good is prayer if you don't follow the blueprint for prayer, God's divinely given strategy within verse 18? We must follow it if prayer is to do us any good! What flows from that is the implication that if you have all prayer, look at verse 18, all kinds of prayer; if you always pray, you're constantly praying; if you're praying in the Spirit of God (and we learnt last week what it means to do that), the implication is: that is not enough! We may have thought last week: 'Well, if I could do that I'd be flying!' - well, you wouldn't! Not according to this verse, because after that - that's the equipment, that is the armoury of prayer: all prayer, constant prayer, praying in the Spirit and all that that means from the word of God, taking the promises, walking in the Spirit, being born of the Spirit, having the spirit of adoption and crying: 'Abba, Father', all of that - if you have it and don't have the plan, or the strategy, it's useless!
Now, let's cement that into our minds now: the equipment without the strategy will not do anything! Therefore, for that reason, in verse 18 you have that little word 'and' - 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and...'. I believe that could be better translated, because what it really means is 'and with this in view'. Look at it again: 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit and with this in view', or 'in regard to this', or 'to the end that you may watch thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints'. In other words, get these three things: all kinds of prayer, constant prayer, learn to pray in the Spirit - and when you do that, then do this! Connect this equipment with God's given plan and then the dynamite will go off!

Now what is the strategy that Paul gives us for prayer? Well, it's outlined on your sheet. First of all there is a watchful disposition: 'and watching thereunto' - secondly, a persistent determination: 'with all perseverance' - and thirdly, a sanctified direction: 'praying for all the saints'. Now let's look at the first step of strategy: a watchful disposition. Watching, watching thereunto! Now, the Greek word for 'watching' literally means 'to be sleepless', to not sleep, to keep awake! Now, that's what it literally means, but spiritually in this particular verse it means 'a watchful attention to spiritual matters'. It means an alertness, a sober alertness giving heed and taking heed to what is going on around you, turning your attention to things spiritual within the world, within the church, and beware of the things that are going on - a spiritual sleeplessness, a spiritual alertness.

Vines says: 'It is not mere wakefulness, but the watchfulness of those intent upon a thing'.

OK, so you want to pray, you want to pray about something? It's not just getting on your knees and lifting your eyes to God and asking God for the thing, but there is a watchfulness, there is a spiritual sleeplessness, where you come before God and you take heed, you give great attention, you're sober, you're absolutely alert, you're taking heed of everything around you, you're giving attention to all spiritual things, you're bewaring of the attack of the devil, and you're coming before the throne of grace and supplicating His throne. Now I want to flesh this out a little for our understanding this evening. In the Old Testament Scriptures - and I told you last week that there is a translation of the Old Testament in Greek and that embellishes for us a little bit some of the meanings of the Greek words that we find in the New Testament, how they were used in the Old Testament Greek translation. We find that in Psalm 127 and verse 1, a very well known verse: 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city', so the picture is the Lord standing in the watchtower, 'the watchman waketh but in vain'. Unless the Lord's in the watchtower with the watchman, it doesn't matter whether he's asleep or awake. Isn't that right? But you can see the use of the word, it's a sleeplessness, it's staying sober - what good is a watchman if he dozes off on duty?

That's a wonderful illustration of this watchfulness. There is a city, and the walls around the city, and there's a tower beside the gate. There is the watchman, you read about it extensively in the book of Ezekiel, he's standing on the watchtower looking for the enemy. Here you have it in the Psalm: 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city', so the picture is the Lord standing in the watchtower, 'the watchman waketh but in vain'. Unless the Lord's in the watchtower with the watchman, it doesn't matter whether he's asleep or awake. Isn't that right? But you can see the use of the word, it's a sleeplessness, it's staying sober - what good is a watchman if he dozes off on duty?

We turn to the New Testament and look at Mark 13, if you wish to turn to it, Mark chapter 13 and verse 33. The Lord Jesus is speaking of the end times, ultimately of the time of His return, and in Mark 13 and verse 33 He says this: 'Take ye heed', take heed, be alert, 'watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is'. Isn't that what we're meant to do? It is a watchfulness, not to be asleep for the coming of the Lord. Then in Luke 21, in a similar passage, and verse 36 He says again concerning His coming: 'Watch ye therefore, and pray always', watch and pray always, 'that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man'. Watch and pray! Keep awake! Be alert! Take account of the times around you, the signs of the times, what is going on, look for My coming, wait and watch for it. That's the sense of the word: an alertness!

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If you turn to Hebrews chapter 13, quickly, and verse 17 - you find there a depiction of accountability within the church. You have the oversight and you have the members, members who are accountable. Let me just say quickly that accountability doesn't come from above, it's not the elders saying to you: 'You have to do what we say', accountability comes the other way when the members put themselves underneath the authority of the oversight: 'We want to do what you say'. Now, there is a difference, for it makes life a lot easier. In Hebrews 13:17 the word is used: 'Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you'. They watch! Do you realise what it entails to be an overseer and watching? Watching that false doctrine does not enter in, watching that wolves do not come in, watching for the conversation and manner of life of the believers, that they are walking in the ways of the Lord. If you're sleeping you can't do that! There has to be this alertness.

Now, that is a verb used there, but the noun, the word used as a noun occurs in 2 Corinthians 6:5, and you read this - Paul: 'In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings'. In chapter 11 and verse 27 of 2 Corinthians, again a description of Paul's life: 'In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness'. What's it talking about? It's talking about the great apostle Paul in sleeplessness, sleepless nights, midnight watchings - why? For the church of Jesus Christ he endured watchings, sleeplessness, for the sake of Christ and for the sake of the Gospel. If you go to Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 14, Paul has already given us this sentiment in the epistle: 'Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light'. Waken up! Do you remember the Lord in Gethsemane? Do you remember Him seeing the cup? Do you remember the account that is given? The Lord says to the disciples: 'Watch with me', He goes, He confronts what He must confront. He comes back, He finds His disciples asleep. He goes again, He comes back, they're asleep. He goes a third time, and comes back, and what does He say? 'Could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation, for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak' - watch!

We read of Anna, there was a perpetual watch in the temple because God orders us to watch - and there that widow of 84 years of age never departed from the temple, watching day and night, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. Why? Because this is what is required. This is the first strategy for prayer, and if we exempt ourselves out of it we're going to lose out. It's a must, this watchfulness, this perpetual prayer, this spiritual keenness, alertness and concentration on the thing at hand. I believe that's what James means when he says: 'The effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much'. I hope I didn't mislead you last week, that if you use all prayer, and if you constantly pray and if you learn what it is to pray in the Spirit, that that's all that matters and your prayers will be answered - it is not! There is a strategy, and that is watchfulness - fervent prayer is effectual!

Is that not in keeping with our passage - verse 13 - where we are told to stand firm? It's in keeping with the whole - I don't know why people can't see that verse 18 is part of the armour of God! There is that war-like expression of watchfulness, vigilance, stand firm in the strength of the Lord! You can't doze off in battle, you can't have forty-winks in the midst of a full-scale war! There has to be a watchful disposition, it's needed, you can't afford to be off guard for one moment. Therefore in our prayer life, you know as well as I do, that when you get down on your knees you have to watch against drowsiness. You'll doze off if you're tired, or if the room is to warm - all kinds of circumstances come in, and we're all human. I believe, incidentally, that one of the reasons the Lord may have went up a Mount was because of the cool air. Don't forget that He was a man, and He became tired - that's why His head was down in the boat when the storm came. We are all affected with these things, but we have to be on alert toward them - our mind wandering onto unsavoury things. Because we are in a battle it seems that prayer is the very time when those arrows from the devil come, and when we think upon things that we wouldn't even dream of thinking about normally, and we would never ever savour to commit.
Therefore in this exercise of prayer we must be aware of a preoccupation on other things, we cannot let those enter in to that moment of holiness. How do we apply this practically? That's the negative sense: not letting wandering thoughts come in, but in a positive sense: what can we actually do to cultivate a watchfulness in prayer? Well, one thing we can do is be alert to things that are going on around us. Not to have our eyes closed to what's going on in the church, not to be naive and novices and ignorant of the influences that are coming in, the threats - not see the world being poured, bit by bit, by the devil into the bowels of the church. We're not to be ignorant of what's going on in the world, and being ignorant - as the word of God says - of his devices; of his wiles; 'methodias', his methods - we can't be ignorant! That is what it is to be watchful, to be in the battle, to have your eyes open and go in caring - knowing that you can see what's going on.

If you going to do that you've got to be aware of problems around you, you've got to be aware of the problems of the saints in your assembly. You've got to realise the needs of the assembly, the things that we don't have, because we don't have everything! There's great need, but to be watchful is to realise the need, but also to realise the promises of God. You can be very negative at times, and I can fall into that trap, and not see the promises of God. For it's not watchfulness if you only see the negative things, it's only watchfulness when you see the negative and you see that God counteracts the negative with His positive word - and if you put the two together, get on your knees and pray, then things happen! You need a watchful disposition.

Secondly: you need a persistent determination. 'Watching thereunto with all perseverance', the two are connected. The watching cannot go on without perseverance, the perseverance cannot take place without the watching. Watching in perseverance. Now what does that word 'perseverance' mean? It means 'persistence', it means keeping on, an earnestness toward a thing. If it's toward a place it's an earnest attendance. If the word is used towards a person it's an earnest and continual, persistent adherence closely to that person. If it's a thing it's to wait continually, to endure, to give yourself to that thing. Used as a verb it means 'to be steadfast towards, to continue giving unremitting care to that particular item'.

Paul uses it in Romans 13 and verse 6 - and people in Ulster would do well to read that passage and study it. I don't agree with everything that goes on in our government, but we are told that the government is ordained of God - never forget that. In verse 6 of that passage, Paul says, using the word for perseverance: 'For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing'. He's talking about taxes - what an illustration! Your tax, do you like paying it? You pay it, you have to pay it, and you pay it often - you maybe think you pay it too often. Paul is saying: 'The government is appointed by God, therefore you pay tax to the government because the government is the servant of God and they are attending continually upon that very thing'. You're always doing it, that thing is continual - that's the word 'perseverance', continually doing.

In Mark chapter 3 and verse 9 you find: '[the Lord Jesus] spake to his disciples, that a small ship should wait on him because of the multitude, lest they should throng him'. He's saying to His disciples: 'Do you see that wee boat? Keep that boat for me, keep it there' - that's the exact same word as Paul uses in Ephesians. To wait on that boat, let that boat wait on me! Persevere: to draw it out, to continue, to be earnest towards, that persistency, to be there constantly for the Master's use. It's used in Acts 10 and verse 7 of Cornelius' soldiers who waited on him continually. Now, the question is: is our prayer like that? Waiting on God continually? Waiting on God for the Master's use, continually day by day? Paul talks of it in Romans 12 and verse 12: 'Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer', Colossians 4:2: 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving'. What is it doing? Paul is echoing the teaching of the Lord Jesus: 'If you come to your heavenly Father, and you pray, ask, seek, knock, and you shall find'.

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The wicked judge didn't fear God, didn't fear men, but because of this little woman annoying him to the point of distraction, he comes and he answers her. Why? Because of her insistency. Is that the way we pray? Do we pray like the stranger coming to the door and knocking, and knocking, and knocking - and because of our importunity God comes down and answers us. But the Lord Jesus says it's not negative like that: 'How much more shall your heavenly Father avenge the cry of the elect, who cry unto him day and night without ceasing', there it is. There must be a persistent determination - oh, I wish we had time to look at it tonight.

It's all through the book of Acts, in Acts chapter 1 and verse 14 you find the disciples on their knees waiting for the promise from on high of the Holy Spirit - the word is used there: they are continually seeking, seeking. You see after Pentecost, after the Holy Ghost comes in chapter 2 and verse 42? They're still seeking! The Holy Ghost has come, and this is why it's persistent: before He came they were seeking, after He came they were still seeking - they're persisting - then in verse 46 you find them continuing steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers - continuing steadfastly! It's a personal thing, it's a corporate thing, you must be at the assembly prayer meeting! That's why the apostles, in chapter 6 of Acts and verse 4, devoted themselves to the ministry of the word and prayer - devoted themselves. A persistence, a continuance toward that specific thing. The Lord Jesus said it in Luke 11:9 that we read: 'Ask, seek, knock and you will find', He ended His Sermon on the Mount with that, Matthew 7 verse 7: 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you'. All those statements are in what is called 'the present imperative', which means this: keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking, and you will have!

There is an increasing intensity, an increasing seeking, and it's very difficult to apply this to our lives - do you know why? Because it seems, I don't know about you, but it seems for me that I give up - and I wonder if there was a video played in eternity of my prayer life, and of the Lord with His answer just there ready to give me on a certain date, how many times I've just given up a few days too soon? That's our make-up, isn't it? The spirit is willing, you're listening - I know you're listening - to everything tonight, as I am, and you're thinking: 'That's what I want!'. It's a different thing doing it, isn't it? It's a different thing continuing when it seems that the answer's not coming, there's no sign that the answer's coming - and the flesh gets weak, we get tired, we get bored with the same old petition, so we give up and we lose out on the blessing!

We must, when we look at this, we must see what the Lord is saying: if we do that, if we give up, if our prayers are listless and indifferent to what is happening in our home, to the needs that are there, if we're not seeing the things that are going on in the district, if we're not watchful in our perseverance, seeing what's going on in the nation and in the church - we will have a restricted prayer life! If you don't study the word of God you'll never be a persistent prayer, you'll not know the will of God, you'll not know what God wants, you'll not be enthused enough to seek persistently and continually for what God would have.

There is a watchful disposition and a persistent determination, and thirdly there is a sanctified direction: 'for all the saints'. Do you know that every day is 'all saints day'? Every day. In Luke 11, if we read the first few verses, when the Lord taught the disciples to pray, as you well know He said: 'Our Father', not 'My Father' - for we are all a body. The Lord Jesus, in all of His teaching upon prayer, impressed the importance of praying for others - and He showed it in His own life, that He did pray for others. The miracle of the Gospel is that He came, He died, He was buried, He rose, He ascended, and the very ministry that He has now - the word of God says - He is living to intercede for others. You remember Samuel, after the people cried for a King and he gave them a King - Saul. The old prophet came to the people and he said: 'Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you'.

A gentleman said to me this week: 'It's a sin to say the wrong thing, isn't it? It's also a sin not to say the right thing'. There is a sin of silence, and it is no greater a sin than in the very presence of God, when we do not pray for all the saints. The Jews had a saying that went: 'Let a man unite himself with the community in his
prayers' - unite yourself with your community in your prayers. Grip onto the church, onto all the saints - and we said last week that often our prayers are too much for ourselves, and too little for others - they're introspective, they're selfish. But what the Lord Jesus wants us to do, and what Paul is teaching here, it is that we would become world-class Christians. We take in the world: do you pray for Africa? Do you pray for Asia and Europe, the Americas and India? Do you pray for them? Do you pray for missionaries specifically, and have a world vision of what God can do and what your prayers can do if you seek God with watchfulness, taking account of what's going on in our world, and persevering with God and not letting go - like Jacob - until He blesses you? Your prayers are instrumental in the lives other believers - that's an awesome responsibility. To realise that there are yet 7000 that have not bowed the knee to Baal, and we're not the only ones left, and we need to pray for all the saints.

Verses 19 and 20 are, perhaps, some of the most beautiful verses in the book of Ephesians, because here you have Paul's private request, his personal request. Just as he started the epistle in chapter 1 with praying for the saints of Ephesus, and praying for the believers and all their needs, he now requests prayers of them - he's asking them now to pray for him. 'For me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel'. Now, there are other letters if you had a moment - we don't - if you looked at his other epistles you find that he asks them to remember him in prayer. He does it at the end of Romans, he does it at the end of Colossians, at the end of first and second Thessalonians. He asks them, personally, for prayer - and every single occasion, except perhaps for one, he asks that he may be prayed for - not for his needs, not for his personal benefits, but for the advancement and the spread of the Gospel and the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

I think the chief element within those truths is simply this: the great apostle Paul recognised his total and absolute dependence upon God. Paul needed his friends, and we need each other. Paul wasn't a great priest who had all the grace in his fingertips to lay hands on someone and give them all they needed, for Paul was coming to the people of God and pleading with the people of God that they pray for him. Paul didn't have a store of endless grace for the Ephesians, he needed their prayers. There was only one store of grace that Paul recognised, and that is the throne of grace! He knew, as an apostle, that it was only through what God Himself supplied to him that he would be enabled to fulfil his role as the apostle to the Gentiles.

Now this staggered me, because if you remember our introductory message, many moons ago, on Ephesians chapter 1: Paul is in prison! I mean, what would your prayer request be if you were in prison? 'Get me out of here! Or if I can't get out of here, at least get me a mattress or something, or a pillow I can put my head on, or a decent meal!' - but not Paul! He didn't ask that God would free him, or make him more comfortable, or make him safe, but what does he ask for? Look at it: rather that utterance, boldness, may be given to him, and faithfulness in opening his mouth to declare the mystery of the Gospel - no matter what the cost! Whatever happens to me this is the chief prayer, this is the request that I have: that I may be given the strength to open my mouth, and to speak what God wants me to preach! It literally is translated: 'that the words may be given to me' - what a prayer! If you're a preacher, you pray that prayer: that the words may be given to me - it reflects, literally in the Greek, a formal language of diplomatic procedure - and you're going to see in verse 20 that he speaks of himself as an ambassador. This is a formal language that he wants to be given, it means that he wants permission to speak, and when he is given permission to speak, he wants the right words to speak.

You see it in Acts 26 and verse 1 when Agrippa said to Paul: 'Thou art permitted to speak for thyself'. That's what Paul is saying: 'I want to be permitted to speak for myself, and when I'm given that opportunity to speak, that I may speak faithfully to the Gospel, that I may be bold and not miss the mark'. Look at it, he says, literally, 'that I may open the mouth and fearlessly make known the Gospel'. That was a favourite expression of Paul's: 'to make known, to reveal' - do you know what it is? It speaks of frankness, it speaks of being uninhibited - in other words, he's saying it's like being a free man: 'Look, I'm in prison, I'm chained to
a Roman soldier, I'm under execution possibly - but when I go into whoever I'm going into for trial, I want to make sure that I speak like a free man who's under no threat'. That's what he's saying. In reality, spiritually speaking, that's the kind of man he was - he was under no threat until God said so.

He said, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, that he did it - in the book of Acts - with all confidence, no man forbidding him. Is that not what the sentiment was behind his great statement in Romans? 'I am not ashamed of the Gospel! I am uninhibited!' - this is this great man, not ashamed, whether it be by death upon his head, he will preach the Gospel! I believe he was possibly looking for an opportunity to speak in the Imperial Court, or perhaps to the Emperor himself, or maybe to a Roman tribunal that was going to try him - or it may have only been those Roman soldiers that would change night after night to be chained to him. He wanted, while he was in prison - if he could do nothing else - to faithfully present the Gospel, why? Because he was a chosen vessel onto God to bring the Gospel before the Gentiles and their kings.

This was the great man Paul on his knees praying that he'll do it right - that's the thing that staggers me. He asks in verse 20, he says that he is an ambassador - and you know that an ambassador is a diplomat and they're granted diplomatic immunity, they're not allowed to be arrested, they're are not allowed to be imprisoned. This is the paradox here, in fact in the Greek it's a title given to the Legate of the Emperor - an ambassador and diplomat of the Roman Emperor, he's using these words! They're not allowed to be imprisoned, they're not allowed to be harmed - but the irony is that the great ambassador of the King of the universe is in chains! There seems to be a bit of a play on words on that word 'chained', because an ambassador in those days would have worn a big gold chain, and I believe Paul is saying: 'And look at the chain I have'.

This great man who was an ambassador for Christ, as though Paul were pleading these people in Christ's behalf to be reconciled to God - and there he is, with his long beard; with his back scarred from those whips, those beatings; with his feet bleeding; bearing on his body the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ. A man who stood before Agrippa, a man who stood before Felix, the great apostle of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and to kings, the representative of Jesus Christ upon the earth as an apostle - and he is praying for faithfulness! He is! He is praying that he'll not buckle down, that he'll not bottle it when the chance is given, that he'll give it and tell it as it is, that he'll not accentuate the preaching of the cross and confuse it with wisdom of words - but that he will preach it plainly that men may understand.

He was depending on the prayer of the saints to enable him to preach the Gospel - and do you know what the inference is? That he couldn't do it without them! Can I just say that there are none of us who have got it all, none of us. There are none of us who have reached it, there are none of us who have achieved - Paul even says: 'Not as if I have attained'. None of us! Not even the great apostle, there he is - can you see him in the armour of God? Can you see him? Can you see him with the helmet of salvation on his head, dented and scraped from all the battles he was in? Can you see him with the shield of faith, with all the fiery darts in it at the end of his life? - and look how many there are! Can you see him with the breastplate of righteousness that the devil has tried to pull and strip off him many times, reminding him of the Christians that he chased and fed to the lions, and of Stephen the martyr? Can you see the girdle of truth that the false prophets, the Judaisers, tried to rip off him and let all the rest of the armour fall down? Can you see the shoes of the Gospel of peace that are worn out as he goes to and fro around all of Europe with the Gospel? Can you see it all? Yet that great warrior needed prayer, and I need your prayer, and you need my prayer - and we all need each other's prayer. We need to pray for everything, we need to pray for the right thing, we need to pray at the right time, and we must have this great strategy - we must have it!

So, let me ask you: do you have a watchful disposition? Do you have a persevering determination? Do you pray for the saints? I leave you with the words of Paul the apostle in the book of Romans, listen: 'The night is
far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light'.

Let us pray: Our Father, we have heard You teaching us to pray, but who is sufficient for these things? But yet, we must submit that this is the truth of God, and the God who commands also enables. We pray that, by Thy Spirit, we will have a watchful disposition, that we will persevere, and that we will pray for one another - for oh Lord we need it. So Lord help us, as we conclude, to put on all of this armour, and in the days that lie ahead to taste that sweet victory that the Lord Jesus Christ has purchased through His blood. Bless us now, we pray in His lovely name. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - April 2001
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Let me welcome you to our Bible reading tonight, here in the Iron Hall. It's great to see you out with us, especially if you're visiting us this evening - we hope that the Lord will bless you in a very rich way as we meet around the Word of God tonight, to learn from Him.

Ephesians for the last time, and you remember last week we concentrated on Paul's prayer. In the final moments of our message we looked at verses 19 and 20. Paul said, 'For me - I'm asking you to pray for me, that utterance may be given unto me; that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.' What I didn't have time to intimate to you last week was the fact that Paul is often spoken of as being rude in speech. Some of the accusers, and the false teachers and the false prophets of Judaism, were saying that about Paul - and we, some of us, have interpreted that wrongly, as thinking that Paul wasn't much of a speaker. But, in fact, when he was in Greece itself as he stood and spoke, the public thought that he was Mercury who is the god of oratory, the god of eloquence. Here was Paul, a very eloquent man, the most learned apostle, the one whom Peter said wrote many things that are difficult to understand, and he is on his knees before God asking that God would give him the right words to say. It's remarkable, isn't it?

We're going to look, tonight, at verse 21 through to the end of the book. Verse 21, and continuing on in his prayer request he says: "But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts. Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen".

Now, those words we've just read are almost in complete parallel to Colossians chapter 4 and verses 7 to 8. We've learnt as we've been going through this book that there are great parallels between the two books, but as you look at Colossians 4 you can see it's almost a word-for-word parallel in those things that Paul has said. If you cast your mind back to the book of Acts, you will know that Paul had visited the church at Ephesus for the very last time. Then later on, we find that after that last visit to Ephesus, briefly on a beach near Miletus, Paul met the elders of the church at Ephesus for the very last time. If you look at chapter 20 of the book of Acts and verse 22 you read these words: 'And now, behold', he said to them, 'I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there...and now, behold, I know that ye shall see my face no more'. There Paul, as he stands on that beach with those beloved elders of Ephesus, looks them face to face, he realises he will never visit the church at Ephesus again, he will never see these elders again. He prays, and says to them: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" - and Luke records that 'they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him'.

The book of Ephesians is the last time that Paul would build them up in their most holy faith, the last time that he would be an instrument used of God for their sanctification. It's amazing, in the last words of this
epistle Paul hardly mentions himself at all. He doesn't enter into personal matters but rather, as he comes to the end, he mentions a personal friend of his - Tychicus - and he mentions a few requests with regards to his preaching and his mission of the gospel. But here Paul, the great apostle, as he sits bound in prison, not knowing his future - his greatest prayer request is for the people of God, for the church of Jesus Christ.

You will know that along the way, in these six chapters of this book, Paul has been bringing these Christians - and the Holy Spirit has been bringing us, as we have followed Paul in these studies - into a realisation of what we have, the wealth that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Chapter 1 and verse 3: that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. That is the theme of the book: the wealth that we have in the Son of God. Now, in these final verses Paul not only gives a summary of the blessings that we have in the Lord Jesus in the benediction that he gives in verses 23 and 24, but I believe Paul gives to the church at Ephesus a personification of every single thing that they have been learning over these chapters. He gives to them Tychicus, his 'beloved brother', his 'faithful servant in the Lord'! He presents this personal individual, who has meant so much to the apostle, as a gift to the church of Jesus Christ at Ephesus.

If you look at the verse it says that he sent Tychicus to tell the anxious Ephesians how he was doing. They were anxious, concerned about his well-being as he was in prison in Rome, and he was sending Tychicus to show them and to tell them the things that he didn't write about - personal things that are not found within this book. But we also see that he says, if you look at it in verse 22 at the end, that he was sent to comfort their hearts. The Amplified Version says this: 'He was sent to console and to cheer and to encourage and to strengthen their hearts'. He was sent to exhort them through the epistle of the Ephesians. Now, I have been richly blessed as I've studied the life of this man Tychicus. To think that Paul, at the very end of this unbelievable epistle, actually gives the gift of a personified version of every single thing that you find in this epistle to the church, so that they might see in the flesh what he has been speaking about. Therefore we have 'The Man With The Message'. He gave the church that he loved one of his best men, and one of God's best blessings - Tychicus. Sent to exhort them, sent to encourage them, sent to push them and press them, to implement all of the blessings that they would read about in this book - and perhaps Tychicus would read to them from the very hand of Paul.

How does that apply to us tonight? I believe that we are in a church - and I speak of the church of Jesus Christ in the West specifically - that desperately needs to appropriate what we find within the book of Ephesians. I believe that we live in a world that desperately needs to see a church that is appropriating what we find in the book of Ephesians. Therefore we are going to meet a man tonight who, himself, has appropriated these very truths and who has been given to the church at Ephesus as a gift - and I believe his life is given to us as a gift, to show us what it is to put into practice what we find within this book. The question, as we begin, is this - as we close and conclude this chapter of Ephesians and the whole of this book, the great question of the Holy Spirit of God is: Will we implement this book? Will we put it into practice? Will we receive God's best from God's hand?

How will we do it? Well, we can learn a little bit more about it from this man - the beloved messenger. Your first point: the beloved messenger, Tychicus. Look at verse 21 and 22 - read it again: "But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister", faithful servant, "in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts". There are only five references in the New Testament to this man Tychicus. We read, from the book of Acts, that he was one of the party that travelled with Paul from Greece to Asia - you find that in Acts chapter 20 and verse 4. We find that, as he journeyed with Paul and his friends from Greece to Asia, that he actually travelled with Paul right to the end of his missionary work in the city of Ephesus. He was a native of the province of Asia, which today is modern Turkey, and we have learnt in recent days that Ephesus was the major city within the province of Asia, and it is likely that Tychicus was a member of that province - a member even of that city, Ephesus. In fact
probability says, I believe, that he was probably a convert of Paul himself, from Paul's long missionary service in the city of Ephesus. If that is so it's likely that, in Acts chapter 19 right through to Acts chapter 20, that the Ephesians riots of the coppersmiths - you remember, Paul was preaching the gospel and they were being done out of a living because the god of Diana and the god of the temple that they worshipped; they couldn't worship anymore because the coppersmiths were getting converted. There was a great riot against Paul, and Tychicus probably witnessed all of that going on in the city of Ephesus. That was the riot that prompted Paul to leave Ephesus and to go to Macedonia - Acts 19 through to 20.

At that point, Tychicus was converted. Tychicus was an ardent supporter of the apostle Paul and there's no doubt in my mind, as we look through these historical facts especially in the book of Acts, that this man Tychicus shared the danger, the bravery and the adventure of the apostle Paul with him. We read in the book of Acts that a short time later Paul decided to return to Jerusalem where he would ultimately be arrested, and we learn that Tychicus was one of the seven who accompanied him as travelling companions: Acts 20 and verse 4. In fact, he was probably also one of the individuals that carried the offering for the poor in the church of Jerusalem. When Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, then he was imprisoned in Caesarea, and all of those dramatic appearances that he had before kings and before governors, all of his miserable experiences, his terrible voyage across the sea, the shipwreck en route to Rome, his residence in the Roman house arrest, and all of those trials that Paul faced, all of the dangers - the likelihood is, and the word of God would lead us to believe, that this man Tychicus went through all of it with Paul. If that is the case, we can say he experienced a great deal!

In 2 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 26 and 27 Paul says of himself these words, and I believe that they can be equally applied to this man, Tychicus: "In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren: In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness". We often see Paul, don't we, in those situations? But Tychicus was in them as well. Not only did Tychicus go with Paul as an ardent supporter right throughout all of those experiences with him, but we believe that just as he was the messenger for this particular letter, he was also the apostle's messenger at Colossae - you can find that in the book of Colossians chapter 4 and verse 7. The likelihood is that he took the letter of Philemon from the little prison where Paul was, and he took it to Philemon and probably stood and verified the conversion of his slave Onesimus, as he gave the letter over to Philemon. We're led to believe also that he went to minister to Titus in Crete, from Titus 3 and verse 12. Assuming, as we did at the very first study of the book of Ephesians, that the book of Ephesians is a circular letter - in other words, it wasn't just specifically for the church at Ephesus, but it was going to go around all the churches of Asia - Tychicus was the postman that took it round all of those churches.

We're speaking of a mighty man tonight. We're speaking of a man who stood with Paul through thick and thin, through dangers, through storms, through shipwrecks, through trials, through prisons, through whippings, through satanic attack in battle, and everything that you could imagine that was thrown against the apostle Paul - here was a man who stood with the apostle to the Gentiles and supported him. If you look at verse 21, the fact that he was entrusted with the important commission of bringing this book and telling the Ephesian Christians how Paul was doing is a great reflection about the reliability of this man. Paul describes him - look at this description in verse 21 - he describes him as 'a loyal, Christian servant and a dearly beloved brother'. He describes him as that, and the word of God leads us to believe that Paul was not the only one who held Tychicus in such high esteem, but the Roman Christians did also, and many of the other Christians that he visited and took messages to from the great apostle. He was the one that Paul chose to pass on the news of how Paul was doing. He was the one who Paul chose to go to Ephesus to tell them what was happening to Paul, how he was feeling, and literally to put fresh heart - in the Greek it says - into them to encourage them.
To that end he had a two-fold mission. First: to inform the saints concerning Paul's welfare in prison. But secondly: to encourage their hearts through the truth that we have found in the book of the Ephesians. Now, let's think about this. Paul has just finished writing about a new society, a society where there's no more Jew or Greek, where the wall of partition has been broken down through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, and fighting factions can be united through the redemption that is in the Lord Jesus. He then goes on to great lengths to talk about this mystery of the gospel - how this has been in the mind of God throughout all eternity, but now it is only being revealed in the new covenant where there is one man, one new creation in Christ Jesus, where all tribes and nations and peoples and all kinds of individuals can be brought and united in one church in Christ.

Chapters 1 to 3: he takes great length in laying down the fundamental theological truths of Christianity. Chapters 4 through to 6: he then goes into the practical implications of what that means as a Christian, to implement those great truths practically in our everyday walk before men and before God. Think of him writing, being inspired with all these great truths of the blessings that we have in heavenly places in Christ...and the time runs out, and he puts down his pen, and Tychoicus puts down his pen as Paul has been dictating to him. What was Paul's habit was that he that he took the pen off Tychoicus and he finished the final words in the benediction that we find before us. We find that in 2 Thessalonians 3 and verse 17, he said there: 'The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write". At the end of epistle he takes the pen off Tychoicus and he writes these final words that you have before you.

I can see Paul. I can imagine him looking into the eyes of Tychoicus and smiling as he says in verse 21: 'I'm sending you this brother, this faithful servant in the Lord, this beloved brother'. Imagine if the great apostle said of you that you were his beloved brother! Imagine if that great apostle, that I suspect expected a great deal of many people, categorised you as a faithful servant! If you remember, right at the very beginning of the book of Ephesians he talks about the Ephesians as being faithful, and here at the end he returns to the subject of faithfulness, talking about Tychoicus.

Now, you think of these two things: a beloved brother and a faithful servant in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a very rare thing to find those two things in one person, isn't it? There are some people who are beloved brothers, and they're very gracious, they're very gentle brothers. They're easy going and everyone seems to like them because they don't find fault in anyone and they don't call a sin a sin, and many people say of them: 'Well, isn't he nice?'. They're beloved by many people, but they're perhaps not so faithful.

Then there are faithful brothers, and some of them are just faithful brothers. They're not beloved brothers and they're too rigid - many of them err on the legalistic side and they go around hammering everyone with their faithful hammer because, they say: 'I'm going to be faithful no matter what it costs me'. Some of those people can be the most obnoxious, arrogant people that you will ever meet, even outside the church of Jesus Christ. But imagine a man in whom there is the loveliness of a pastor looking after the flock, yet there is the rigid faithfulness to the word of God where this man can be called by Paul the apostle: 'My beloved brother and faithful servant'. It's amazing, isn't it? Well, not really, because all it does is reflect the spirit of Christ that was in that man, because was it not John that said: 'We beheld his glory, even the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth'? Here was a man who reflected that in his life, and if you read right throughout the New Testament and indeed the references to Tychoicus in the pastoral epistles - especially 2 Timothy 4:11 and 12 - do you know what you find? That at the very end of Paul's ministry, when he talks about 'I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith', and he is looking up at the executioner who is just about to take his head off with an axe - that Tychoicus, to that moment, was standing with Paul!

He wasn't a 'somebody' in the world's terms. He won't find any great fame in the annals of history, but here was a man who stood with Paul. Luke doesn't record any great mighty miracles and works that he did on his part, but ask the question of yourself tonight: where would we be without this man, Tychoicus? We certainly
wouldn't have the letter of the Ephesians that we have been studying in the weeks that have gone by without this faithful brother, without this beloved servant of the Lord Jesus Christ and Paul the apostle. When you take the faithfulness of this man and look at the lack of commitment, the lack of self-sacrifice in the world and in the church in which we live today, it is beyond the pale! It is foreign! It is unheard of, of a man who will lay his life down for the brethren! What a contrast it is to Demas, who Paul said: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world".

My friend, if we get to the end of this epistle - and this has blessed me immensely, especially today as I've been studying it - if we get to the end of this and ignore this man Tychicus, and ignore that Paul gave him as a gift to the church at Ephesus to be a personification - he gave a beloved servant, his best man he gave to the church to show them: 'Everything I am writing about: you can see it in him!'. There are many things that we can see in Paul's relationship to this man. Do you know what you can see? You can see how Paul had care for his Christian friends. You can see how he loved them, how he had a deep care for this particular man. You can see his view of his friends and the concern that he had. You can see the concern and the love that we ought to have for one another in the light of this scripture. Do you see the desire that Paul has? That these Christians would have these gifts that are implemented within the word of God? Is that not a true statement: that the ones that we love the most, we will only want the best for them?

What do we want for the ones that we love? What do we want for our children? What do we want for our friends and our brothers and sisters in Christ? Do we want a good education? Do we want them to have a good career, to have a good profession, to have wealth, to have success, to have prestige? What do we really want? Do we want these spiritual blessings in heavenly places to be implemented into our lives? This is what I want to encourage you to do tonight, at the very end of this epistle - exactly what Paul was doing sending Tychicus. I want to encourage you to take what is yours in Christ. This man was an encouragement to Paul, and Paul was going to send him to the Ephesians to be an encouragement to them. This man who was the personification of peace, of love, of faith, of grace, would bless them with all those things.

It's very hard to say this at times but we need each other. We need one another! There is no such a thing as an isolated individual, a maverick Christian in the New Testament. You'll not find it. But the mystery of God is the church - His new man, His bride, the body of Christ. The church is the army that's going through the spiritual battle that we've been learning about; and that same church, just like any fleshly army, must stick together! They must encourage one another in love, in peace, in faith and with grace. That brought Paul to the message that this man was bringing: the message of peace, the message of love, faith and grace - the bountiful message. Your second point, verses 23 and 24 - look at it: "Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity". We've said it before: whatever Paul's wish was for the church of Jesus Christ in the book of Ephesians is God's Holy Spirit's wish for us. He wants these things in our lives. We've said it: there is nothing more revealing about us than what we wish for those we love the most. What He wishes for us are the major themes right throughout the whole epistle of the book of Ephesians.

Let's look at the first one: peace - if you want to take that down - peace. If you look at chapter 6 and verse 15 - the armour of God. Look at it: your feet are to be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Look at chapter 1 and verse 2: "Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ". Chapter 2 and verse 14: "He is our peace who hath made both one and hath broken down the middle wall of partition". Verse 15: "Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances...so making peace". Verse 17: "And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh". Chapter 4 and verse 3: "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". What is the message of Ephesians? It is that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places - where? Where? Let me hear it! In Christ! So where do we get peace? In Christ! This is the message of this epistle.
I read a humorous story - it's maybe not so humorous - but [it was] about this couple and they were alarmed during the 80's about the prospect of nuclear war. The Russians had the big red button, and the Americans had the big red button, and it was: 'Who was going to press the big red button first?'. They wanted to move to the safest place on earth. They wanted to go to the least likely affected place on the globe for nuclear war. Therefore, the next Christmas, they sent their Christmas cards from the Falkland Islands, and a few months later - what happened? There was a war broke out between Britain and Argentina [in the Falklands]. That is a very simple story to tell us this: the Lord Jesus said, 'My peace I leave with you', not 'the peace of the world leave I with you', 'Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid'. You cannot get peace in this world no matter where you go, no matter what you try. Peace is where? Where? In Christ! "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ".

Jeremiah said in [chapter] 29, in a beautiful verse: "I know the plans I have for you", literally translated, "plans for peace" - it's 'shalom' - "plans for shalom, and not for calamity, to give you a future and to give you a hope". Now, what was Paul saying here? Do you know what he was saying? 'You as a church, need to be reconciled to one another, need to be joined together in the bond of peace, Jews and Gentiles, all sorts of backgrounds and creeds - united in Christ!'. That was his prayer for the church. That is the first thing that he wished for: peace among brothers. You know, if you go into the book of Proverbs you find many abominations to the Lord, but do you know what you find one of them is? Those that sow discord among brethren, those who are always bickering, fighting, arguing. My friend, in case you didn't notice, there are people around us going to hell! We need to be united in the bond of peace. That was Paul's prayer for us, and that ought to be our prayer for one another - that we will be a united force for God and for good. Peace!

The second thing is love. If you turn to chapter 1 and verse 15 you find love there. He says: "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints". Chapter 4 and verse 2: "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing" - putting up with - "one another in love". Verse 15: "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ". Verse 16: "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love". Chapter 5 verse 25 - in the home: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it". Verse 28: "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself". Verse 33: "Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband".

It's used - the word 'love' is used some fourteen times in the book of Ephesians. Do you know something? Seven - that's half of fourteen! - seven times it's used in relation to the relationship between a brother and another brother, between a sister and a sister, and between everybody in the church of Jesus Christ. It is brotherly love! That's what he said in chapter 1 and verse 15, that's the way you stand out - yes, for your faithfulness, but you stand out as a church for your love one with another. It's easy to love some saints, isn't it? It's not easy to love them all, but that's what we're called to do. That's what the word of God teaches us - that although they did this and they did that, and they said this and they said that. Although these Christians were faithful in that very thing - they were faithful in loving one another - Paul had to remind them of it, and we continually need to be reminded that we are to love the brethren, we are to love one another, we are to care for one another in the bond of peace. We are to be enabled to do that because we love Him, because He first loved us. He loved us with an unconditional love - unconditional! For while we were yet sinners He died for us! We didn't have to do anything, and that must mean that we must show an unconditional love to those around us, even if at times they are unlovely. To the Colossians he said, "And above all things, put on charity with the bond of perfectness".
Thirdly, he told them that they needed faith: "Peace be to the brethren and love with faith" - love with faith. There are seven other appearances - eight in total - of the word 'faith' in the book of Ephesians. If you look at chapter 6 and verse 16 again, in the armour of God, you have the shield of faith. In chapter 1 verse 15: their faithfulness that we read about. In chapter 2 and verse 8 if you look at it - chapter 2 and verse 8: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God". Chapter 3 and verse 12: "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him". Verse 17: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith". Chapter 4 and verse 5: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism". Verse 13: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith". Here in these last verses of Ephesians, Paul is talking about both saving faith and practical day-to-day faith. Do you know what he's saying? 'You see this book that I've just read out before you? You've got to believe the truth of the word of God that you have just heard, but you have got to rest on it!'. You have got to stake your life upon it. You've got to conduct your life according to this truth. This is more than intellectual assent of theological points of view, but it is putting your full weight and life down upon the truth of God. Now, my friend, there is only one way you can do that, and that is through Christ. You can only have peace through Christ. You can only love other Christians when you realise we love Him because He first loved us, and you can only have true faith when you realise that we have confidence and boldness to come before God - chapter 3 and verse 12 - 'by the faith of Him'.

Then, fourthly, he prays that they might have grace - verse 24: "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity". If you turn back to chapter 1 you find that in the opening greeting in verse 2, the very very first word is grace, and almost the last word is the same idea. It's the twelfth occurrence in the whole letter. Do you know what Paul is telling us at the very end? 'Look, do you see this peace, the theme of this letter? Do you see love that has been right through it like a red thread? Do you see faith that I have been encouraging you to exercise in the great promises and the blessings that God has given you? None of those things are earned, none of those things are deserved, but all of those things are of God!' "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast". As it is in salvation, it is in sanctification - it is totally of God. But even after we receive that faith and grace to be saved, there's a condition to maintain it, and he says to love the Lord Jesus Christ 'with sincerity'. Do you know something? There is nothing more important than loving the Lord Jesus Christ! Do you know that? We neglect that sometimes. We think it's a bit like 'works' or something. We talk about 'faith alone' and 'Christ alone', and that's right. But you remember the Pharisees came to the Lord and said: 'What is the greatest commandment?'. 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And the second is like unto it: love your neighbour as yourself. And on this hangs all of the law and the prophets' - and let me say this: on this hangs all of the book of the Ephesians, that grace may be with all those 'who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity'.

Grace! 'Grace upon grace', as John 1 verse 16 says - 'Grace following grace, grace heaped upon grace'. Do you want grace? Do you want grace to save? Do you want grace that is sufficient for every need? Do you want grace to live your Christian life? Do you want grace to implement the truths and the blessings that we have in heavenly places in Christ? Do you want grace to be the Christian that you want to be? Well then, love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity! This is a wonderful phrase. Do you know what it literally means, to love the Lord in sincerity? The literal meaning of the Greek means 'incorruptible love'. 'Loving the Lord' - look at the verse - 'with an incorruptible love'. If verse 23 is talking about love and peace among believers, this love in verse 24 is exclusively for the Lord. Do you know what Paul is saying? The true Christian love of a servant for his master, and of a saved person for their Saviour, and of a disciple for their Lord, is a permanent love! Permanent! Its flame may flicker and grow low at times, but it will never ever be extinguished. The word can also mean 'imperishable'. It will never dull. It will never go out. Literally, a love which once present can never ever perish!
"All those who love the Lord Jesus Christ". Can we just still ourselves for one moment here tonight, and ask yourself: 'Do I love the Lord Jesus Christ with an incorruptible, an imperishable, a sincere, a love which once present can never die, can never perish, can never dull?'. Do you love Him like that? For the opposite's not worth thinking about, which is where Paul says 'if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema'. What more can we want than 'Jesus loves me and I know I love Him'? I mean, is there anything better than that? What a note for him to finish at the very end of this epistle! What is he doing? He's bringing it to a great crescendo at the very end where he is focussing, at the end, the focus of the whole letter. The focus is on God. The focus is on Christ as the source of peace, the source of love, faithfulness, grace. He wants the readers to see that your life is in God - your prosperity, your blessing, your maturity, your growth. Your salvation is in God through Christ! If you want all of those blessings you're going to have to learn to love the Lord.

Harold Kuschner related a saying from the Jewish Talmud, which is a Jewish religious book. It goes like this, listen: "In the world to come each of us will be called to account for all the good things God put on the earth which we refuse to enjoy". That will not happen in Glory with regard to the good things on the earth but, believers, will it happen with regards to the blessings that we have in heavenly places that we have failed to implement in our lives? Will we give an account? Or will we come now, at the end of this series, and ask for God's best blessings from Him? Will we decide from this moment that we are going to be one of those beloved brethren, we are going to be a faithful servant in love to Christ? Will we receive the blessings that Paul has invoked and prayed for us?

Paul has long since left his cell and seen the face of his Beloved, and in the 21st century we are left with his great work of the book of the Ephesians. I want to close this message and close this series by quoting what H.W. Webb-Peblo (sp?) said at the end of the commentary of William McDonald. Listen to this, and this is my finishing remarks: "There is perhaps no writing in the book of God so majestic and so wonderful, and therefore how impossible it is for any man, as a messenger even from God Himself, to do justice to it in the space allotted to us". But he says - and this is my prayer: "I hope that we may draw nigh to it, simply seeking for teachings upon holiness; teachings by which we may be sent forth to live a nobler and a higher life than hitherto, and by which we may be enabled to glorify God".

Let us go and love Him with an undying love!

Let us pray. Lord, we are humbled by a man called Tychicus who stood by Thy servant Paul. When all forsook him there was a servant going round Asia taking the book of the Ephesians, telling of Paul and encouraging them in their most holy faith. Paul told Timothy: 'Commit these truths to faithful men'. Lord, we pray that You will raise up faithful men in this place; and those men that are faithful, that You will strengthen them in these days. But Lord, we pray most of all that You will give us a love for Christ that is an undying, incorruptible, imperishable love - a love that will say: 'For me to live is Christ and to die is gain'. We thank Thee for this book, and we thank Thee for all Thy blessings. We pray that in our own individual lives and in the life of this church in the days that lie ahead, that we will be given grace to implement these things to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

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