

A SERIES OF NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE STUDY GUIDES

EPHESIANS
READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINAL MESSAGE

By Bob Young

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PREFACE TO THE SERIES

A number of factors have converged in my life as influences on my method of Bible study and Bible teaching. My undergraduate training in Bible and biblical languages served as the basic foundation for 25 years of full-time preaching ministry. During those years in ministry, I took some graduate coursework in an effort to stay fresh.

When I decided to pursue graduate education, I already loved teaching from an exegetical viewpoint while paying special attention to the historical-cultural context and the grammatical-syntactical features of the text. I had seen the healthy way in which people respond to thoughtful efforts to explain and apply the message of the text. I had developed the habit of using the same kind of Bible study in my sermon preparation. For those reasons, I focused my graduate training in ministry dynamics and the integration of academic studies with practical applications. Because I did graduate work while continuing my full-time work in ministry, I was blessed by have a laboratory to apply and test what I was learning.

My years of teaching and administration in Christian higher education coupled with involvement in the world of missions have made me even more aware of the need to view the text, insofar as possible, outside one's own social, cultural, experiential, and religious backgrounds. My interpretative efforts today are influenced by my training and experience as I try to understand the biblical context, the historical-cultural context, and the literary context—vocabulary, genres, grammar, and syntax. I try to understand the original message of the author and the purpose of the text as first steps toward understanding the message of the text in today's world. I want to know what the text said and what it meant, so that I can know what it says and what it means today.

As I have prepared these study guides, I have constantly asked myself, "What would I want in a study guide to the biblical text?" I have been guided by this question, at times excluding technical details and academic questions, other times including such items because of their value in understanding and communicating the text. Above all, I have tried to provide a practical guide to put in clear relief what the text says as a first step toward valid interpretation of what the text means and how it should be applied in the world today.

I wrote these guides with multiple readers in mind. Preachers and Bible class teachers will find the detailed study of the text helpful, and Christians in the pews with an interest in the message of the Bible will also be helped by the textual jewels and the textual summaries that are included. May God bless you in your desire and your efforts to understand and apply the Bible!

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The Purpose of These Guides

To describe the publications included in this series as “Bible study guides” says something about their intended purpose. As guides, these books do not attempt to answer every biblical question that may arise in your study of the biblical text. They are not commentaries in the strictest sense of the word. The focus of these guides is distinct.

I have as a primary goal to encourage you to do your own study of the biblical text. This series of study guides is designed to assist the Bible student with preliminary and basic exegetical work, and to suggest some study methods that will enrich your study and help you identify the message of the text—whether in a specific verse or paragraph, a larger context, or an entire book of the New Testament. A primary goal of these guides is to help you maintain a focus on the purpose and message of the original author. The message of the original writer should inform our understanding of the text and its application today. One should not think that the message and meaning of the text today would be significantly different than the message and meaning of the original document.

The title also says that these guides are “helps.” I have tried to provide resources to guide and enrich your study, keeping the purpose of the original author in view. This desire has informed the content of these study guides. Many study guides exist and there is no need to write more books that basically have the same content. Generally, the information included in these guides is designed to help identify the purpose of the original document. In some passages, the information included in these guides is not readily available in other resources.

What Kinds of “Helps” Are Included in These Guides?

These study guides reflect how I organize and understand the biblical text, taking into account various exegetical factors such as syntax, grammar, and vocabulary. Along the way, I share some observations that may help clarify passages that are difficult to understand. I have not tried to write about every passage where potential problems or differences in understanding exist. I have not noted every textual variant in the original text. At times my notes may seem to be unnecessary comments on passages where the meaning is clear; that probably means I am trying to share insights to deepen understanding and appreciation of the text. In other passages, some may ask why I have not included more comments or explanation. Such is the individualized nature of Bible study. While I try to explain some difficulties, the overall goal of my comments is to help maintain a focus on the original author’s message and purpose for writing—the “what it said and what it meant” of the original author in the original context.

For each chapter, there is a “Content” section that usually includes a brief outline, followed by notes (“Study Helps”) about the biblical text. The content sections of the guides (including how the text is divided and how subsections are described) are drawn from my own reading and analysis of the text, and from a comparison of several translations. In only a very few cases does the outline provided in this guide vary from the majority opinion, and those cases are noted and the reasons given. In some chapters, there are a few introductory comments to help orient the student to the overall content of the chapter. The textual notes at times provide a periphrastic summary, but as noted above they are not intended to answer

every question. In several cases, I have tried to address topics that are not treated in detail in other resources. Texts that are easily understood and matters that are usually included in other resources are, for the most part, not treated in detail here.

A Useful Tool for Understanding the Message of the Bible

While the primary purpose of these guides is to assist in personal study of the biblical text, these guides will also serve the casual reader who wants to understand the basic message of Scripture. The guides are written in such a way that the reader can understand the general message of the text, along with some helpful details, simply by reading the guide. One might describe these guides as a kind of “CliffsNotes” to the Bible, but they are intended as helps and should not be thought of as taking the place of Bible reading and Bible study.

How to Use This Bible Study Guide in Personal Bible Study

This guide is not intended to take the place of your own Bible reading and study but is intended to provide insights and suggestions as you read the Bible, and to be a resource that will help you check your understanding. **No specific translation of the biblical text is included in this guide.** Two goals influenced the decision not to include a translation of the biblical text. First, it is hoped that the student will be encouraged to use his or her own study Bible. Second, these notes are designed to be helpful in biblical study, regardless of the version the reader may prefer for personal Bible study.

My primary purpose is to make it easier for you the reader or student to analyze and understand the text. Ultimately, you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible and you cannot simply follow what a favorite preacher or commentator says. Often the study of a chapter (or subsection of a chapter) contains a brief summary of the content, focusing on the message.

The suggested process for effectively using these Bible study guides involves five steps. First, you should first read the introduction to the book you wish to study. The introductions provided in these guides are for the most part briefer than normal and do not cover every detail. In some cases, one introduction is provided to cover several books, as in the case of the Thessalonian correspondence or the Pastoral Letters.

The second step in your study is to read the book through to understand the overall content. It will be helpful if this can be done at a single sitting. The student facing time constraints may have time for only one reading, but multiple readings will reveal additional details of the text being studied along with the opportunity to observe repeated words and phrases, the message of the book, how the book develops its message, and how various parts of the book are connected. You will find reading helps in the outlines of the books and the lists of themes that are provided in the introductions.

Now you are ready to begin your study of individual chapters or sections. The process is this: read a section of the text (probably a chapter) until you have a good understanding of it. This is not an in-depth reading to resolve every question but is a general reading to understand the content of the passage.

The fourth step is for you to write your own outline of the section or chapter, with paragraphing that reflects major thought patterns, divisions, and topics. The study guide for each chapter has a section with suggested paragraphing based on a comparison of various

translations. While it is possible to skip this step in which you do your own analysis and paragraphing, thereby moving directly to the paragraphing provided in the study guide, this is not the recommended approach. You will benefit from taking the time and investing the energy to do this work in initial reading and understanding.

Finally, the study guides have a section of study helps that will help you understand the text and keep the intent of the original author in mind as you do more focused study. In many chapters, a final section that summarizes the message of the chapter is included.

Initial Reading and Paragraphing

In other articles and publications, I have explained the importance of preparatory reading and personal study of the text. In the five-step process described above, initial reading and paragraphing occur in the second, third, and fourth steps. When the Bible student carefully works through these steps, it becomes clear that this is a “Bible” study and not just reading more background and commentary from a human author who is trying to explain the Bible. Although many students jump immediately from reading an introduction to the commentary, it is important that the student learn to do this part of the Bible study for herself or himself. Once the text is familiar, I suggest the student think about the themes that can be identified and how one would mark the paragraph divisions, based on the content of the passage and the subjects treated. Once this work is complete, it is good to compare the resulting paragraphing with that of several versions (or with the outlines in the content sections of these guides).

A Note About Paragraphing

Paragraph divisions are the key to understanding and following the original author's message. Most modern translations are divided into paragraphs and provide a summary. Ideally, every paragraph has one central topic, truth, or thought. Often, there will be several ways to describe the subject of the paragraph. Only when we understand the original author's message by following his logic and presentation can we truly understand the Bible. Only the original author is inspired—readers must take care not to change or modify the message. A first step toward integrity with the text is to develop the ability to analyze it and establish paragraphs.

Note: This introductory information is not repeated for each chapter. Students will find it helpful to return to this introductory section again and again to guide their study, especially before beginning the study of a new chapter of the text.

READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINAL MESSAGE

A Word About Formatting

The format of the Study Helps in each chapter follows the outline that is provided for the chapter. The major points of the outline are used to begin new sections of the Study Helps. Biblical references that introduce sections or subsections of the Study Helps are placed in bold type to assist the student. These biblical references are placed in progressive order on the basis of the first verse cited (in the case of citations that cover multiple verses).

Standard abbreviations of biblical books are used. Verse citations that do not include a book (e.g. 2:14) refer to the book being studied. Other abbreviations that may not be familiar to some readers include the following: cf. = compare; e.g. = for example; v. = verse; vv. = verses.

The first time a translation is mentioned, the standard abbreviation is included. Subsequent references use only the abbreviation.

Greek words are placed in italics. Often, the corresponding Greek word, a literal meaning, and other translation possibilities are placed in parentheses immediately after an English word. Greek words are written as transliterations in English letters, using the basic lexical form of the word, to make it easier for the reader without a knowledge of Greek. Many readers will find these references interesting, especially in the repeated usage of the same Greek word. Readers can quickly pass over this inserted parenthetical information if desired. In a few cases, parentheses are used to indicate Greek verbal forms or noun forms, where this information would be significant to the student with some understanding of grammar. Again, the reader can pass over this information rapidly if desired. The Greek text used is the 27th edition of *Novum Testamentus Graece* which is identical with the 4th revised edition of *The Greek New Testament*.

Quotation marks are often used to call attention to special words or topics, and also to indicate citations or translations of the biblical text, many of which are my own. This is done to help the reader identify references to the biblical text, since no specific translation of the biblical text is not included in this Study Guide.

Parentheses are used liberally to enclose information and comments that would often be included in footnotes. It is hoped that readers will find this more convenient, both those who want to read the expanded explanation and those who wish to skip over the parenthetical material.

Comments concerning contemporary applications of the text are limited, but are included from time to time.

A summary of each chapter is provided at the end of the chapter. Some of these are written in first person, from the standpoint of the author, but the majority are written in third

person and are explanations of the content. These are not translations and are not paraphrases. They are an attempt to communicate the basic points and purpose of the original message.

READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINAL MESSAGE

Introduction to Ephesians

Summary

Ephesians has been called the "crowning jewel" of Paul's theology although the book is not primarily a theological treatise. Ephesians is typically Pauline, primarily designed for teaching and application. The book follows Paul's normal pattern of pedagogical materials followed by practical applications.

Ephesians was popular among the Reformers. John Calvin called it his favorite book of the Bible and John Knox asked that Calvin's sermons on Ephesians be read to him when he was on his deathbed. The message of unity in Christ remains popular in the contemporary church.

Author, Date, and Recipients

Author. That Paul is the author is stated in 1:1 and 3:1, and is reflected in an almost unanimous opinion of church tradition. Clement of Rome cited Eph. 4:4-6 in A.D. 95, and Ignatius (d. A.D. 107) quoted from the book. Polycarp, Irenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria all assert that Paul authored the book. It is among Paul's writings in the Muratorian Fragment. Paul's authorship has been questioned because of the lack of personal greetings (although see below under recipients). The book also contains very long sentences that are not characteristic of Paul's other writings, and has some unique vocabulary. However, the number of unique words (hapax legomena, "only written") in the book of Ephesians is the same as the number of unique words in the book of Romans. The purpose, subject matter, recipients and occasion easily explain the use of different words.

Date. The date of this letter is linked to one of Paul's imprisonments in Ephesus, Philippi, Caesarea, or Rome. A Roman imprisonment best fits the facts of Acts. The best educated guess for the writing of Ephesians is Paul's first imprisonment in Rome in the early 60s. Tychicus, along with Onesimus, probably took the letters of Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon to Asia Minor.

Here is a likely chronology of Paul's writings.

Book	Date	Place of Writing	Relationship to Acts
Galatians	48	Syrian Antioch	Acts 14:28; 15:2
1 Thessalonians	51	Corinth	Acts 18:5
2 Thessalonians	51	Corinth	Acts 18
1 Corinthians	55	Ephesus	Acts 19:20
2 Corinthians	56	Macedonia	Acts 20:2
Romans	57	Corinth	Acts 20:3
Colossians	early 60s	Rome	Acts 28
Philemon	early 60s	Rome	Acts 28
Ephesians	early 60s	Rome	Acts 28
Philippians	early 60s	Rome	Acts 28
1 Timothy	63 (or later)	Macedonia	
Titus	63 ??		
2 Timothy	64-68)	Rome	

Recipients. The question of who were the recipients hinges on a textual question in 1:1. Some manuscripts (Chester Beatty Papyri, P⁴⁶; Sinaiticus, \aleph ; Vaticanus, B; Origen's Greek text, and Tertullian's Greek text) omit "in Ephesus" in 1:1. This has led to the speculation that the letter may have originally been intended as a cyclical or circular letter. The Greek grammar of Eph. 1:1 can accommodate a place name. Perhaps the place name was left blank so it could be supplied when read aloud to the churches. This would explain the absence of a personal greeting. Other manuscripts have the phrase "in Ephesus," and the common name of the letter today reflects those manuscripts.

Beyond the textual question of 1:1, one can note that Ephesians was written to a church (or to churches) that had Gentiles among its members (2:1; 4:17).

The Literary Relationship between Ephesians and Colossians

The literary relationship between Ephesians and Colossians is best understood against the backdrop of the historical relationship between Colossians and Ephesians.

Epaphras (Col. 1:7; 4:12; Philemon 23) was apparently converted during Paul's Ephesian ministry (Acts 19). He may have been instrumental in starting three churches--in Hierapolis, Laodicea and Colossae. When difficulties arose in the Colossians church (relating to the emerging desire to integrate worldviews and religious systems), Epaphras sought the advice of Paul who was at that time in prison in Rome (in the early 60s).

When Paul received information about the problem in Colossae, a church which he had never personally visited, he wrote a letter focused on the lordship of Jesus. The letter is brief and is characterized by short sentences.

At about the same time, perhaps shortly thereafter, he wrote a more thoughtful treatise on the same theme—the lordship of Jesus and the importance of this concept for a proper understanding of the unity of the church. This is Ephesians, and may have been a circular letter intended to be distributed to several churches. Ephesians is characterized by long sentences and theological development.

Factors that are often cited in demonstrating a close relationship between Ephesians and Colossians include (1) related literary and theological structure, dealing with the same general topic, (2) similar salutations and similar closings, (3) similar words and phrases (as many as 75 of the verses in Ephesians have a parallel in Colossians), (4) Paul's authorship, and (5) both were delivered by Tychicus.

In summary, both Ephesians and Colossians are among Paul's four prison letters. The outlines of the books are similar. Colossians was written to combat a specific Christological problem. Ephesians was written (as a circular letter) to stabilize other churches.

Purpose of the Letter

The theme of Ephesians is found in Eph. 1:9-10, which says that the eternal purpose of God was to bring together everything in unity under the lordship of Jesus. This theme is supported in various ways throughout the book.

General Outline of the Letter

The book naturally divides into two parts (as do many of Paul's letters). These are variously described as teaching and application, pedagogy and practice, explanation and exhortation. More detailed outlines are provided at the beginning of each chapter. Remember that one purpose of this study guide is to help the student develop the ability to read and outline, first steps toward seeking the message and meaning of the text, then and now.

1-3, God's plan for unity in Christ (theology)

4-6, God's plan as it is to be practiced in the context of the church (application)

READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINAL MESSAGE

Ephesians 1

[Note: it is suggested that the student read the introductory materials on page 3-5 of this guide before beginning any individual preparatory reading and analysis.]

CONTENT

The paragraphing included in the Content section of each chapter are merely suggestions or guides. The student is encouraged to identify the paragraphs, and subsections within each paragraph, to assist in his or her own study. The division of the biblical text into paragraphs is usually fairly standard in modern translations. Note the brief salutation and the absence of typical elements of the Greek letter form. Paul immediately introduces the theme of the letter: God's saving work in Christ.

Outline of Chapter

1:1-2, salutation and greetings

1:3-14, God's saving work in Christ to accomplish his eternal purpose (vv. 9-10)

1:15-23, Paul's prayer that the readers understand the supremacy of Christ

STUDY HELPS

1:1-2. The salutation or greeting in the book is typically Paul. The description of Paul as an "apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" appeals to his authority as an apostle, reminds of his commission as an apostle to the Gentiles, indicates that he was personally sent by Christ Jesus just as were the other apostles, and that his apostleship is the fulfillment of God's will in his life. In those letters where Paul does not describe himself as an apostle (Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon), it seems that he desires a more personal touch, basing such letters more on personal relationship and less on apostolic authority.

Apostle is from the Greek verb *apostello* which means "to send." An apostle is, literally, one who is sent. The term is most familiar in Scripture with reference to the Twelve (plus Matthias, cf. Acts 1), but is also used in the New Testament to describe those who are official representatives but not part of the Twelve (see Gal. 1:19, 2 Cor. 8:23, the word is similar to ambassadors in 2 Cor. 5:20).

Christ Jesus combines the name Jesus (which means Savior; the name is Jesus in Greek, Joshua in Hebrew) and Christ, which is the Greek word used as the equivalent of the Hebrew Messiah. The Greek word means anointed or chosen. In Zech. 4:11-14, both the high priest and the king are described as anointed, indicating that the designation "Christ Jesus" combines royal and priestly functions. (This is precisely the point of the major teaching section of Hebrews.) In the Old Testament, prophets were also anointed. "Christ Jesus" combines prophetic, priestly, and royal functions (see Hebrews 1), but whether the use of the designation intentionally calls attention to this, or whether it came to be a usual description among the first century Christians is difficult to discern.

Saints (holy ones) is a common way to refer to first century Christians. The description of the recipients as faithful is less commonly used in New Testament letters. There is a

manuscript variant with regard to the phrase “in Ephesus.” It is omitted in some ancient Greek texts, P⁴⁶, κ*, B*, and the text used by Origen and Tertullian. It is included in uncial manuscripts xi², A, B², D, F, and G. As a result, Ephesians is often regarded as a circular letter, designed to be read in multiple churches, where the reader could insert the name of the local congregation during the public reading.

Grace and peace reflect a normal salutation. The normal greeting was “*charein*” meaning to be of good cheer. Paul used a similar word “*charis*” (grace). The use of peace would parallel the Hebrew use of “*shalom*.”

1:3-14. This is one long sentence in the original Greek. I have reflected this in the outline above and in choosing to treat the commentary over this section as a unit. Internal markers subdivide the section (the repetition of “to the praise of his glory” in vv. 6, 12, 14). Long sentences are characteristic of the book of Ephesians (1:3-14; 15-23; 2:1-10; 3:1-12, 14-19; 4:11-16; 6:13-20).

1:3. Blessed is from the Greek word that gives us eulogy. It is different from blessed (*makarios*) in the Beatitudes. The common letter form would open with a prayer, but here the blessing introduces a word of praise to God which describes the saving work that God has accomplished in Christ Jesus in order to fulfill God’s eternal purpose. The prayer for the recipients is delayed until 1:15-23.

The God whom Paul praises (blesses) has blessed believers “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ.” The concept of “the heavenlies” is not easy to understand. It is unique to this letter (1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). It is locative, neuter, plural, and is an adjective functioning as a noun. It is apparently a spiritual realm. Believers presently live in this realm so it should not be understood as heaven. Other forces also live in this realm (1:20, 6:12, see comments on those texts).

1:3-6. God is the subject of this section. What God has done has made a difference in the lives of the believers. He has blessed us, chosen us, predestined us, and favored us (made us acceptable). This is in accord with his will. Each of these verbs deserves some attention.

Blessed and blessings are both from *eulogeo*. The blessings are “in Christ.” This is a key concept through this section (v. 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13).

Choose is from *eklegomai*. God is the subject. God’s choice was made before the beginning of time (before the beginning of the world); God’s choice focused on the location and the result, not on the who—chosen in him (in Christ) to be holy and blameless. A good way to describe this is to say that God’s choice was covenantal, meaning that it extended as far as the covenant extends and no further. God calls all humanity in Christ. It is not possible for human beings to respond to God’s call and remain outside of Christ. God’s saving actions are in and through Jesus. (Remember that the subject of this section is God’s saving work in Christ.) However, the covenant is not unilateral. It is an agreement between two parties. God initiates (he chooses from before time), but his choice is specific “in Christ” and thus extends only to those who are “in Christ;” and his choice is for those who are holy and blameless which is only possible through Christ, thus for those who depend on Christ for salvation. God makes this choice to accomplish his will. His will is to bring everything together under the headship of Christ (1:9-10), but his will is also for the restoration of humanity to relationship with God. That is possible only by dealing with sin. Thus, God’s will is that we be again in his image (Gen. 1:26-

27; 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:28-30; and see also Gal. 4:19; Eph. 4:13; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:15.) Understanding these points will help clarify the next verb Paul uses.

“In love” can be understood as part of the preceding phrase or part of the phrase that follows it. The Greek text does not have the punctuation that would help us decide—it is a context question. Predestined is from *proorizo*. This verb can be translated as predestined, destined, chosen, marked out, predetermined, ordained, and limited in advance. The verb is a combination of “*pro*” which means before or in advance, and “*horizo*” which is the word from which we get the word horizon. When one considers that the horizon is a line of separation (between the earth and the sky), one gets a sense of the meaning of this word. To set a horizon is to mark off a line of separation or distinction. This word must be understood as part of the context, not as a separate concept. It is one of integrated truths in this section. Note that the object of the verb is corporate not individual. It does not say that God predetermined me, but that God predetermined his people (us, in the context of Ephesians 1). God chose a people who would agree to his covenant. As it were, God drew a line in the sand and gave human beings the opportunity to choose where to line up (free moral agency). Each person has to choose a side. God made his choice and predetermined in accord with two things— “in Christ” and “holy and blameless.” Human beings have a choice to make. Will I choose to be “in Christ”; will I choose to be “holy and blameless”?

God predetermined (with the line of separation he drew in advance) that his will would be accomplished by making possible “adoption as sons.” This is the “how” of God’s purpose. It is “through (*dia*) Jesus unto himself.” This is according to God’s pleasure (that which pleases him) and his purpose (plan). This phrase reflects God’s character and is paralleled in 1:7,9,11. God’s actions are not based on knowing in advance what you and I will do, but are based on who God is, what pleases him, and his purpose in this world. (To remind the student of some related verses, see John 3:16-17; 1 Tim. 2:4; Tit. 2:11; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:1-2.)

“To the praise of the glory of his grace” marks off this section as a refrain that is repeated at the end of each section of this long, extended Greek sentence (1:6,12,14). The refrain is followed by a connecting phrase that leads to the next section. This grace (*charis*) was granted (*charitoo*) to us in the Beloved, that is, in Jesus. *Charitoo* is translated as freely bestowed on us, made us accepted, as a free gift to us, especially honored us, highly favored us. The connection between the two words is powerful, but is difficult to maintain in the translation. That he grants us status as sons and makes us accepted indicates again that the basis of our salvation (and the basis of God’s actions to bless, choose, predetermine, and graciously favor us) is not in our actions, but in God’s character or nature. All of this is in Christ, in him, in the Beloved.

1:7-12. “In Him” we have blessings—redemption, forgiveness, grace, wisdom, insight, and knowledge. This is our present state (present tense verb) based on God’s past actions. Redemption is “to buy back” or to “be delivered” (see Rom. 3:24; Col. 1:14; plus Eph. 1:7,14; 4:30). Redemption is through his blood. Forgiveness is “sending away.” Here the Greek word for sin (*paraptoma*) is a “side slip”, either a lapse or a deviation from the standard. Paul does not use the more common word for sin, perhaps indicating the breadth of God’s forgiveness is due to the richness of the grace extended in Jesus Christ. This grace was overflowed to us (*perissueo*), thus lavished on us.

1:8-9. We receive knowledge, understanding, and wisdom as blessings from God. We understand the depth of the gospel. This knowledge is described as a mystery. In contemporary usage, a mystery is usually something unknown or inexplicable. In the New Testament, it is more often something previously unknown but now revealed (to see how this meaning is reflected in the context of Ephesians, compare 1:9; 3:3,4,9; 6:19). In Ephesians, the mystery is that everything and everyone—Jew and Gentile—can be united in Christ (1:9-10; 2:11-3:13), according to God’s eternal purpose and will (cf. 1:6). This truth was not previously grasped, but has been revealed in Christ (3:3-4).

1:10. God’s eternal has always been to unite everyone in Christ (*anakephalaiomai*, to bring together under a head). This is the central theme of the book—the teaching of chapters 1-3, and the application of chapters 4-6 (see esp. 4:1-6). While this has always been God’s purpose, it was not accomplished until the time was right (the fullness of the times).

1:11-14. In verses 11-14, one can note another listing of various blessings available only in Christ—inheritance, hope, word of truth, gospel, salvation, faith, Holy Spirit. Inheritance reminds that God has chosen us to be his people. Literally, the reading is “we were chosen as an inheritance.” This again is by God’s predetermination and is consistent with his eternal purpose. When God’s purpose (all things united in Christ) is understood, the line of separation he made as a predetermination is also clear (those who are in Christ).

God (1) made the determination in advance, (2) freely allows us to choose the covenant (or not) that makes it possible for us to be in Christ (or not), and (3) did not make the choice or the predetermination based on his foreknowledge of the works or actions of any individual or individuals. Thus, the predetermination is not merit-based. (Compare the previous sentence to the disclaimers of Eph. 2:8-9: not of your own initiative, not of yourselves; it is a gift of God; it is not based on works and thus avoids human boasting.)

1:12-13. It is likely that v. 12 refers to the Jews and v. 13 to the Gentiles (see 2:3, 11-14). An alternative understanding would see a reference to the apostles and subsequent believers, but the delay in Paul’s apostleship and coming to be a believer makes it less likely that it would include himself in those who were “the first to hope in Christ.” The refrain, “to the praise of his glory,” is repeated in v. 12.

Salvation comes from hearing and believing the word of God, the truth, the gospel. Salvation is impossible without the gospel (the gospel of your salvation), a message that must be personally received and acted upon (obeyed, Rom. 10:16-17; 2 Th. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:16-17).

1:13-14. This belief and obedience leads to receiving the promised Holy Spirit (compare Acts 2:38-39). Baptism is in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). The Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is a seal, a sign of security, authenticity, and ownership, and is given only within the covenant. A seal is also a pledge, down-payment, earnest money. In modern Greek, it is an engagement ring. The Holy Spirit was promised as a comforter and presence that would come when Jesus ascended (John 13:16, 26; 15:26). The presence of the Holy Spirit is the promise of future resurrection (Rom. 8:9-11). All of this is “in him.”

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer is the promise or pledge of God until the time when God’s choice of us as his inheritance is confirmed by the redemption of God’s own possession (see Exod. 19:5, cf. Tit. 2:14). The third use of the refrain closes the section.

1:15-23. As explained previously, in the book of Ephesians the prayer that is typically included in the Greek letter form immediately after the salutation, does not appear until after the theme section. This prayer and intercession is one long sentence in Greek.

1:15-18. The student should keep in mind the possibility that this is a circular letter, in which case Paul would be referring to several churches. Faith can refer to personal faith or trust, a faithful manner of life in Christ, or the body of teaching, the doctrine (when used with the definite article). All of these are possible in the context. The ASV catches the third meaning in the translation, “the faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you.” Since the article is used here, the third meaning is perhaps best.

“Your love” has textual variants and is not supported by some of the earliest Greek manuscripts. It may be the result of a desire to standardize Paul’s phrases (see parallels in Eph. 1:4 and Philemon 5). The variants do not change the overall impact or meaning of the text, but it may be helpful to the student to know of the variants since some translations may not include a reference to “love.” Saints is the typical way to describe Christians.

Paul often prayed for the churches. Paul’s prayer here includes thanksgiving and petition. The petition specifically mentions four things.

1:17-18. His prayer is that the recipients might be given the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God, and that the eyes of their hearts be enlightened. In the text, the word spirit is anarthrous (does not have the definite article). It may refer to the Holy Spirit, but is more likely a reference to the human spirit. A reference to the Holy Spirit makes this passage Trinitarian. The third person pronouns in vv. 17-18 refer to God the Father.

The knowledge Paul prays for the readers has three elements: hope, inheritance, and power. He prays that the recipients might know these three things. Hearts enlightened is parallel to 2 Cor. 4:4-6, and refers to receiving understanding. In this context, the heart is parallel to the mind (which can be enlightened, can receive information). Specifically, Paul’s prayer is that they may know “the hope of his calling, the riches of his glorious inheritance, and the greatness of his power.” His calling refers to God’s call to human beings. His glorious inheritance can be God’s inheritance, that we are his inheritance (1:11,14), although the “riches of the inheritance” seems to refer to our inheritance. The power God has made available to Christians was also demonstrated in Jesus’ resurrection.

1:19-23. The power is immeasurable, surpassing, or extraordinarily great. It is for believers. The conditional nature of the covenant makes it essential that human participate in the salvation God has powerfully initiated in Christ. Because God’s predetermination excludes no one, the gospel is inclusive. This does not lead to universalism. Because the covenant is conditional, some may be excluded. Christians are those who believe that God will be faithful to his covenant promises and thus submit to the covenant conditions.

God’s power is immense. Paul uses four words in this context (*dunameos, energeian, kratous, ischuos*). God’s power is exercised in Christ and through Christ. This power of God raised Jesus from the dead, seated him at God’s right hand, put all things under Christ’s feet, and made him head over all things to the church. The same power is at work in believers. (What God has done for Christ in raising him and seating him, Christ does for his followers, cf. 2:5-6, where the same actions are preceded by syn-, signifying joint participation.)

The resurrection of Jesus is an evidence of God’s power at work. Our resurrection spiritually and our future resurrection physically are by the same power. Those who are looking

for miraculous evidence of God's power at work have to look no further than the changed lives of those who have been raised to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:1-6). God seated Jesus at his right hand "in the heavenlies." This word appears five times in Ephesians (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). The explanation is reserved for the commentary at 6:12. Jesus was thus exalted over every other power and authority in every place and in every time.

God put everything in subjection to Jesus (under his feet). He is head over everything to the church. He is head of the church (Col. 1:18), but he has been exalted to a more expansive headship (Eph. 1:22; Col. 2:8). This metaphor is rich. The head gives life to the body; it controls, directs and guides the body.

The church (*ekklesia*) is an assembly called together for a specific purpose. The Greek word is used in the Septuagint (LXX) to translate the Hebrew *qahal*. Both terms refer to the people of God. In this text, the church is described as the fullness or completion of the one who fills everything in every way. What does this mean? It may mean that everything the church has it receives from Christ, Christ is filling the church. It may mean that the church is the final result, the completion, of God's saving work in Christ. It may mean that all of the saving work God has accomplished in Christ is exercised in the church since it was pointing toward the goal of unifying all things in Christ. To some extent, all of these are true. In the context, the last meaning is especially appealing. God's eternal purpose to unify all things in Christ is made possible through the saving work he has done in Christ and through Christ. The saving work of God is never exerted outside of Christ; it is always in Christ, the completion or fullness of Christ, so that the church reflects and responds to her head.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

God's Saving Work in Christ

God has blessed us, chosen us, predestined us, and favored us. All of this is "in Christ." In Christ we have redemption, forgiveness, grace, wisdom, insight, and knowledge. All of this is evidence of God's eternal plan and purpose to bring everything together in Christ. The beauty of God's plan is made clear when one considers that in Christ is inheritance, hope, the word of truth, the gospel of salvation, faith, the Holy Spirit as the seal of promise.

The Supremacy of Christ

I pray that you will have wisdom and knowledge to understand, to know the hope of your calling, to know the riches of the glorious inheritance, to know the power of God that works in you just as it resurrected Jesus and seated him as the ultimate authority and head over all things, head of the church, where the fullness of Christ is fully in view.

READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINAL MESSAGE

Ephesians 2

[Note: it is suggested that the student read the introductory materials on page 3-5 of this guide before beginning any individual preparatory reading and analysis.]

CONTENT

The paragraphing included in the Content section of each chapter are merely suggestions or guides. The student is encouraged to identify the paragraphs, and subsections within each paragraph, to assist in his or her own study. The division of the biblical text into paragraphs is usually fairly standard in modern translations.

Outline of Chapter

2:1-10, in Christ God saves us, moving us from death to life

2:1-3, humanity's fall into sin

2:4-7, God acted on behalf of humanity

2:8-10, the covenantal relationship made possible by God's initiative is reflected in human actions

2:11-22, reconciled and one in Christ

2:11-12, the need for Christ

2:13-18, the work of Christ

2:19-23, the result of Christ's work

Introductory Comments on the Chapter

2:1-22. The context of the chapter begins in Chapter 1 with Paul's description of God's saving actions in Christ, the blessings that comes to believers as a result, and God's eternal purpose which is made evident in the church. God initiated all of this by grace (2:1-10), to accomplish his redemptive plan in Christ (2:11-22, 3:1-13). The truths set forth in 2:11-3:13 are described as a mystery (see 1:9-10) that has now been revealed (3:3-4). The mystery is the desire of God to redeem all humanity in Christ. God has acted, human beings must respond. This is true because God's action in Christ is covenantal, just as was his relationship with human beings in the Old Testament.

Note the parallel structure of the two sections of the chapter, also reflected in the first chapter: God's saving work in Christ is needed, what God has done in Christ, the results of God's work in Christ.

STUDY HELPS

2:1-10. This section is one long sentence in Greek with the main verb in 2:5. (The sentence may encompass only vv. 1-7.) This suggests that it the section should be understood as one topic or argument. The movements of the argument are (1) that all humans are spiritually lost and thus hopeless and helpless, vv. 1-3, (2) that has had acted in grace, vv. 4-7, and (3) the result or response in the faith and life of believers, vv. 8-10. Each of these three sections is treated separately below.

First, **2:1-3**. Three factors in the fall are the nature of the world system (the course of this world), Satan himself, and the tendencies of human nature (passions, desires). These verses show humankind as dead in trespasses and sins, thus in rebellion to and separated from God.

Second, **2:4-7**. In the midst of this situation, with no explanation visible within the experience of humankind, God on the basis of his love and mercy, in Christ or with Christ made us alive, raised us, and seated us (exalted us).

Third, **2:8-10**. That salvation was initiated by God and that the saving work in Christ was accomplished by God without human help does not contradict human response. God's grace demands response and a changed life that conforms to his purpose (described as something has prepared in advance). The covenantal relationship that is made possible by what God extends in grace is reflected in human actions (good works).

2:1-3. Passages that describe the recipients of the letter (both Jews and Gentiles) as previously dead, walking in disobedience, and following human passions present a difficulty because it is at times hard to see how they apply to the experience of first-century Jews. (See Titus 3:3 for another example.) Paul writes that they were dead (spiritually) because of trespasses (*paraptoma*, see comments on 1:7-12) and sins (*harmartia*, missing the mark, the more common Greek word for sin). Those described in these verses formerly lived (literally, walked, a common metaphor that refers to living and manner of life) according to the principles or ways (*aion*) of the world (*kosmos*). World does not refer to the entire created system, but to the worldly way of thinking, the "world system" (cf. Gal. 1:4; 1 Cor. 3:1-3). They also lived according to (followed) the ruler of spiritual powers of the air. This refers to Satan who is the ruler of this world (cf. Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4). In the context, air (*aer*, the 'lower' air) refers to the domain of evil spirits. They lived according to the ruler of the spirit that words in disobedient people. "Sons of" is a Hebrew idiom that says "of the same nature," as in sons of light, sons of darkness, and similar constructions.

2:3. We all once lived to fulfill fleshly passions and desires and were thus deserving of God's wrath as were the rest (of humankind). The contrast between "you" and "we" in this text is perhaps parallel to the usage in 1:12-13 (see notes there). The "we" may refer specifically to Paul and his associates, or to the Jews. Applying the "we" more broadly, to Paul and all of the recipients (perhaps in various local churches), the text makes clear that none are exempt from the need for God's saving mercy and grace that he exerted in Christ Jesus.

The problem was rooted in human nature, so that all humankind was deserving of and subject to God's wrath. Nothing in the human creation was deserving of God's gracious, loving, merciful action in Christ. The conclusion is that all—you, we, the rest—are lost and deserve wrath.

The tendency of the human nature toward sin is often misunderstood, and deserves a brief word of explanation here. Humans were created as dual nature beings, possessing both the divine nature as those made in God's image and likeness, and a human biological nature that allowed them to live in the world. Human beings were made to balance these two natures. In fact, one way to describe what happened in the Incarnation is that Jesus Christ came to this world as a human being, perfectly balancing the tension between the divine nature and the human nature. The problem of sin arose when the human nature was allowed to

dominate and the divine nature was suppressed. The problem Adam and Eve faced [and failed to conquer] is still the human problem. In Christ, God made it possible to push the reset button and he dealt with the carnal nature.

2:4-7. The contrast between vv. 1-3 and this section should grab our attention. The terrible condition of humanity is more than handled with the rich mercy and the great love of God. God's mercy and love are the explanation for why he initiated a saving work through Jesus when human beings were dead in sin and totally undeserving. The explanation of what God has done, as described in Ephesians 1, is based in the character of God.

2:5-6. The human state, dead in sin, is repeated from 2:1. God has acted in love despite the human condition. Three things are mentioned. All of them are preceded by the Greek preposition "syn" indicating "with," in this case referring to participating jointly with Christ in these actions. With Christ, God made us alive, raised us, and seated us. All of this is by grace, all of this is a part of God's saving work in Christ, a truth that is set forth in more detail in v. 8. That God made us alive refers to spiritual life restored in Christ. That God raised us with him refers to baptism (Rom. 6:3-11; Col. 2:12-13). In baptism, believers participate in the major events of Jesus' life: crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, and exaltation. Believers share Jesus' life, suffering, and glory. That God seated us with him suggests the idea of reigning with him (Matt. 19:28; Col. 3:1, 2 Tim. 2:12). This is described as occurring "in the heavenlies" (see note at 6:12).

2:7. God did all of this to show (put on public display) his purpose in Christ, his great love and mercy. There is an alternative to the "age" of this world. It is the age of God's righteousness extended to human creation in Christ Jesus.

2:8-10. It may be that this section of Scripture is one of the most misunderstood and most misused in the New Testament. Paul has made clear in the two sections preceding that the salvation sorely needed by humanity (2:1-3) has been made possible by God's love, mercy, and grace (2:4-7). Salvation was initiated by God. Salvation hinges on God's nature and God's actions. Salvation begins in and flows from God's nature; it is possible because of God's actions in Christ. Salvation has not been extended to humanity based on any human merit.

The basic truths set forth in this section were introduced in 1:11-14. First, God's predetermination (predestination) was made in advance. It was made simply by defining the line of separation, and was thus made impersonally. Second, the impersonal nature of God's predetermination allows each individual to choose (or not choose) the covenant, to decide whether to share in Christ or not. Third, God's predetermination was not meritorious, that is, it was not made with a focus on the works or actions of an individual, based on God's ability to foreknow. In the text of Ephesians 2:8-9, these three points are summarized in three disclaimers: salvation is not of your own initiative, "not of yourselves"; it is a gift of God; it is not based on works and thus avoids human boasting.

"You have been saved" (repeated and expanded from 2:5) is perfect passive participle. Salvation was not accomplished by believers (active voice), but is something done to them or for them (passive voice). God is the subject. The salvation in view is the same salvation that Paul has been describing for two chapters. The salvation involves grace (in the dative-locative-instrumental case; this is not an indirect object, so it is either locative "in grace" or instrumental

“with grace”). The common translation “by grace” can be understood as instrumental, but it is important to note that grace is the means and that the action is done by another—God. One must avoid personifying grace to make it the actor.

This salvation also involves faith (the preposition *dia* followed by the genitive case, thus, because of, by, for cause, by reason of, through). In this text, grace and faith are not set as competing forces. God saves with grace and because of faith. In the context of this passage, it is not correct to ask what humans do. Salvation is applied to human beings by God because of faith. Grace and faith are together the instruments; both must be present for salvation to become reality. Salvation is freely extended with grace, but that alone does not make salvation a reality in the life of a believer. Salvation is applied because of faith, but that has no meaning if salvation has not been extended. Salvation is a process, described as a covenant transaction, it is never unilateral. God deals with sin and fallen humanity through a covenant. God offers the gift only to those who receive it.

God takes the initiative with regard to salvation and sets the boundaries, markers, and separations. Humans respond to the covenant offer because they believe God exists and that he faithfully keeps his promises (Heb. 11:6). Among the faith responses to God are worship, changed thinking, changed lives, obedience, service, and faithfulness.

2:8-9. Salvation is not of human doing. Grace and faith are not of human origin. The reference is to the whole process of salvation. Salvation is not within the power of human beings to accomplish. It is God’s doing; it is a gift; it is not merit-based (based on works or actions). No human can boast about salvation, as though we were somehow responsible for our salvation.

2:10. Because God is the one at work, the result is his work. We are his workmanship (Greek *poiema*). Some translate this idea to say that we are God’s masterpiece. Four aspects of God’s work are in view: our creation in Christ Jesus, creation to do good works, God’s previous preparations for us, God’s power for our life of good works.

Excursus on Ephesians 2:8-10

Explaining the process by which the saving work of God in Christ Jesus comes to human beings is not easy. It has been attempted by many through the years. Faith and grace are both instruments. Therefore, God’s saving work (salvation) can never be “only by grace,” and equally it can never be “only by faith.” The saving work accomplished in Christ has no value without the presence of faith. Since the “hard lifting” is done by God in Jesus (the grace part), perhaps the human response (the faith part) should be seen as a catalyst, without which the action cannot occur. Green can be made from two components—yellow and blue. Until you get both “instruments” in the same place at the same time, you have nothing even remotely related to the final outcome. You cannot look at yellow and declare that you have half of green. Nor can you look at blue and declare that you have half of green. Until you have both yellow and blue at the same place at the same time, you have nothing of green. You only have yellow and blue. I know the parallels are inadequate, but in the same way you cannot look at God’s grace and declare that you have salvation (or even half of salvation.) And you cannot look at human faith and declare that you have salvation (or even half of salvation.) Salvation is dependent on two items existing together. It is not correct biblically to say that God’s grace carries salvation to a halfway point between God and man, and that faith carries salvation the rest of the way. Any

such understanding is at heart a “works” system that makes faith a part of the power necessary for salvation. It does not matter whether your definition of faith requires only belief, only confession, only repentance, belief and baptism, or some other combination of faith, confession, repentance, baptism, and faithfulness, such an understanding is a works system if it sees human response as something that completes the action.

Thus, the two instruments, grace and faith, are both essential and both must be present for the salvation transaction to occur. Without the presence of both, you have nothing. An interesting illustration can be taken from the operation of a drawbridge. A functional drawbridge requires that both sides of the bridge operate simultaneously (the normal operation of a drawbridge). One side cannot operate without the other. God’s grace cannot operate without human faith; human faith is possible because of God’s grace. The two work together, they cannot work separately. Of course, a part of the problem with the illustration is that God’s grace was extended before any human response. The question must be limited to the individual, and in any individual case, both grace and faith must be present simultaneously.

The text refers to salvation as a gift. Faith receives God’s grace in Christ (cf. Rom. 3:22, 25; 4:5; 9:30; Gal. 2:16; 3:24; 1 Pet. 1:5). Mankind must respond to God’s offer of grace and forgiveness in Christ (cf. John 1:12; 3:16-17, 36; 6:40; 11:25-26; Rom. 10:9-13).

2:11-22. The transitional “therefore” ties this section to what precedes it, introducing a new literary unit. This is the third major point of the section. The first was a summary of God’s saving work in Christ Jesus to accomplish his eternal purpose (1:3-23), the second was God’s saving work in Christ Jesus to deal with the human dilemma posed by sin (2:1-10). The focus now turns to God’s saving work in Christ Jesus as God’s means to unify all human beings.

2:11. The text is straightforward, easily understood. Remember (present, active, imperative) suggests something already known to the recipients. The Gentiles (now Christians) are to remember their previous alienation from God. Gentiles (ethnos, literally meaning nations) refers to all non-Jews. Being non-Jews, they are called “the uncircumcision” by the Jews (the circumcision, meaning fleshly circumcision).

2:12. The text mentions five aspects of the alienation from God: separated from Christ, alienated from Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope, and without God. These descriptions may be designed to remind us of 2:1-3. Separated from Christ is also without Christ, not having Christ. Alienated suggests the idea of being excluded. The Gentiles were foreigners in regard to citizenship in Israel, and thus were strangers to the Old Testament covenants of promise (the word covenants in this verse is plural). In fact, there were several different covenants described in the Old Testament, each with different requirements, often given to different persons. The human condition without God is hopeless.

2:13-18. “But now” reflects a transition to a changed position. But is an adversative particle. Now is in contrast to the former state. This is contrast, moving from hopelessness to hope. Two groups are described—those far off (Gentiles) and those near (Jews). The Gentiles have now been brought near, in contrast to the position described in vv. 11-12 (see also v. 17). They have been brought near by the blood of Christ, a way of summarizing God’s saving work in Christ as described before.

2:14. Three things are said about Jesus. First, he is the source of peace. Second, he has made both (Jew and Gentile) one. Third, he destroyed the barrier (the middle wall that divides or separates), making possible the unity of all in Christ, that is to say, in the church. The peace, unity, participation, and sharing of the Jew and the Gentile in the church is the focus of the extended section (2:11-3:13). Paul calls this the mystery now revealed (3:3-4).

In the context, two relationships are being restored to peace. First, the text speaks of peace between God and his human creation, the vertical relationship. Second, the text speaks of peace between human beings, the horizontal relationships of life. Jesus himself makes such peace possible. The peace between human beings is seen in the fact that both groups are now one. Being Jews or being Gentiles is now replaced by being Christians. To accomplish this, Jesus broken down the dividing wall, the wall of partition or separation (Greek *fragmos*; fence, barrier, or hedge). The reference is to the divisiveness that came through the separation defined and maintained in the Mosaic law. With separation removed, unity is possible.

2:15. To understand this often-misunderstood verse, it is important to read the passage as literally as possible while seeking understanding. “⁽¹⁴⁾ For he himself is our peace, the one making both one and destroying the middle wall of separation, ⁽¹⁵⁾ the enmity, by his flesh, by abolishing the law of commandments set forth in decrees....” The result of this action by Jesus was the creation in himself of one new man where there had been two before, thus making peace.

This verse has been problematic because in Matt. 5:17, Jesus said he did not come to abolish the law and the prophets. Which the correct understanding? Did Jesus abolish the law, a frequent reading of Eph. 2:15, or did he not abolish the law according to Matt. 5:17? Unfortunately, despite a general insistence of harmonizing Scripture, a common approach is to begin with the conclusion already established. Eph. 2:15 is used as a proof text for abolishing the Old Testament law, and the conversation is ended without attempting to reconcile the two passages. What does Eph. 2:15 say in the context? Paul uses abolish in Rom. 3:31, 6:6, and Col. 2:14. It means “to make null and void” or “to cause to have no effect.”

The passage has one main verb, with dependent participles following. Jesus IS our peace, having made both one, having destroyed the middle wall of separation and hostility, having cleared away (abolished) the law of commandments as it was expressed in decrees or ordinances. The three aorist participles point to prior action, thus the translation using the present perfect participles. Note that Jesus destroyed the law of commandments as it was being expressed in various decrees and ordinances. This word (dogma, decree or ordinance) often refers to public decrees, decrees or a legislature or of rulers. When applied to the teachings of the apostles, it refers to right living. In the structure of the text, enmity is equated with the “law of commandments expressed in ordinances.” The enmity was the result, not of the teachings of the Old Testament but of the interpretation (decrees, ordinances) of the Old Testament by the Jews. Nothing in Old Testament teaching required that the Jews establish a relationship of enmity with the Gentiles. In fact, the Jews were to be a light to the Gentiles to bring them to God.

Jesus’ work in uniting, destroying separating walls, and abolishing hostility (and the law of commandments as it was being expressed in Jewish ordinances) did not demand changes in the Old Testament. In fact, the text of Matthew 5 that seems to contradict Eph. 2:15 goes on to note the problem with Jewish interpretations: “You have heard it said, but I say to you....”

The law fulfilled its purpose. Jesus came to fulfill the law. Faith does not nullify the law. In faith, the purpose of the law is fulfilled and upheld. The enmity and the dividing capacity of the law as it was being applied was abolished in Christ. The law finds its perfect fulfillment in the coming of Jesus Christ.

All of this Jesus did “in his flesh,” that is, through his ministry which culminated in his death and resurrection. By these actions, he made “in himself” (emphatic construction) one new humanity. This was God’s purpose—the uniting of all people in Jesus (1:9-10). This God did in the church—a point that will be expanded in Chapter Three. He established peace (see 2:14).

2:16. He did this to reconcile both (Jew and Gentile) to God in one body (the church) through the cross. By these actions, he killed the hostility. The focus is on eliminating the hostility. The hostility resulted from false separations based on false decrees. With the separation eliminated, reconciliation is possible, the reuniting of humanity through Christ. This reconciliation is “in one body.” This may mean the physical body of Christ, but it more likely refers to the body of Christ, the church. The cross was Christ’s way to redeem fallen humanity. In his own person, and in the cross, he killed the hostility. The emphasis is on the results of Christ’s work.

2:17-18. Jesus brings peace. He comes in peace; he preaches peace. He preaches peace to both Jew and Gentile so they can come to know genuine peace, without hostility, and with full access to the Father through the one Spirit. The preaching of peace is likely an allusion to Isaiah’s prophecy (see 57:19 and 52:7). In Christ, in the body of Christ, all have access (continual) to God’s presence.

2:19-22. The final part of the chapter explains the importance of what has just been set forth in vv. 11-18. This is not the end of the literary unit. (The chapter division does not perfectly follow Paul’s argument in this case.)

2:19. The Gentiles who were formerly far off (2:11-12) are now included. Four metaphors speak to this shared participation: not strangers, citizens, household or family, temple.

2:20. The house or household of God is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, meaning upon the teaching and proclamation of the good news by them as inspired spokesmen. In Old Testament prophecy, the coming Messiah was to be the cornerstone (Isa. 28:16; Ps. 118:22, see 1 Pet. 2:4-10).

2:21-22. The idea that God has a distinct people is communicated in various figures: nation (citizens), people (saints), family, building, body, temple. The focus is on the corporate nature of the church, the body of Christ that brings all people together under the headship of Jesus. The verbs indicate sharing “with” others.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

There is no room for doubt about mankind’s need for God’s saving grace. Just look at the way we (and all people) have lived in the past. God in rich mercy and love acted when we were dead in sin, giving us life in Christ. When we consider both God’s saving grace in Christ and our faith, we could never reach the conclusion that salvation is our doing. It is always a gift

from God, it is never received on the basis of actions, although in the eternal plan of God, we are God's "action pieces."

Thus, even when we were without hope, without Christ, without God, without connection to the promise, without connection to the pueblo of God, God in Christ made peace, brought unity, and gave us all access to God's throne room. We are no longer excluded, we are citizens, we are family members, we are God's building, God's holy temple, God's dwelling.

READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINAL MESSAGE

Ephesians 3

[Note: it is suggested that the student read the introductory materials on page 3-5 of this guide before beginning any individual preparatory reading and analysis.]

CONTENT

The paragraphing included in the Content section of each chapter are merely suggestions or guides. The student is encouraged to identify the paragraphs, and subsections within each paragraph, to assist in his or her own study. The division of the biblical text into paragraphs is usually fairly standard in modern translations. Some would make 3:1-13 one paragraph, but it seems easier to grasp the message by dividing the section in the outline. This section is a continuation of the section that began at 2:11 (2:11-3:13).

Outline of Chapter

3:1-7, the mystery revealed, Jews and Gentiles together

3:8-13, the mystery reflects God's eternal purpose

3:14-19, Paul's prayer

3:20-21, Doxology

Introductory Comments on the Chapter

3:1-21. The first part of the chapter (3:1-13) is a continuation of the literary unit that began in Chapter Two (1:1-23; 2:1-10; 2:11-3:13). A summary of these units is (1) God's saving work in Christ accords with his eternal purpose, (2) the great need of all mankind, (3) the eternal plan of God unites all in one body.

Some students divide the first part of the letter into six shorter units (1:1-14; 1:15-23; 2:1-10; 2:11-22; 3:1-13; 3:24-21). A summary would look like this: (1) God's saving work in Christ according to his eternal purpose, (2) Paul's prayer to recognize the supremacy of Christ in the world and in the church, (3) the need for God's saving work, (4) the description of God's saving work and its results, (5) God's saving work is the mystery revealed, (6) Paul's prayer for that God's saving work have its full impact. In addition to these two options (with three units and six units), there are various outlines that combine or further divide the paragraphs.

STUDY HELPS

3:1-13. It appears that Paul starts a prayer of praise at the beginning of Chapter 3, but then inserts a comment about the mystery before resuming and concluding the prayer in 3:14-21. Eph. 3:2-13 follow theologically on the themes of 2:11-22. Paul repeats the introductory phrase of 3:1 in 3:14 when he returns to the prayer. Ephesians is a "Prison Epistle." Paul was in prison when he wrote the letter. Paul had been specifically sent to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 26:16,18; Rom. 15:16; Gal. 1:16; 2:9).

This makes 3:2-13 a parenthesis that explains Paul's understanding and proclamation of the mystery, especially focused on his ministry to the Gentiles (cf. Col. 1:24ff for a possible parallel).

3:2-4. Two long sentences characterize this section; vv. 2-7 and vv. 8-12 are both long sentences in Greek. The first class condition shows the author considers the statement true. The recipients knew about Paul's ministry and calling. "You have heard of the administration of the grace of God given to me for you." Administration (*oikonomia*) communicates that idea that Paul had been entrusted with the message of grace as a steward responsible for carrying the message to the Gentiles. He received this assignment by revelation, a possible reference to his experience on the Damascus road, the words of Ananias, his vision in Jerusalem (Acts 22:17), or his time in Arabia (Gal. 1:12, 17-18).

Mystery, in this context, is not something unknown, but is rather something previously unknown but not revealed. The mystery is the existence of Jews and Gentiles together in Christ, in the church. The reference to Paul's previous writing on the subject could refer to a previous letter (now lost), but most likely in the context refers to 2:11-22.

3:5. The mystery was unknown (not revealed) in previous times, but has now been revealed. The mystery was revealed not only to Paul, but also to his holy apostles and prophets (see 2:20, also 4:11). Holy may not be parallel to saints in this passage; it may mean those set apart for a specific purpose. The revelation was by the Spirit. Since those of times past did not understand the mystery, the reference seems to be to New Testament prophets. This would reflect the meaning of prophets as spokespersons or proclaimers more than are predictors of the future. The message was revealed to and proclaimed by these holy apostles and prophets.

3:6. The message (mystery) is that the Gentiles are now heirs together, members together, sharers together in the promise. Each description uses the "syn" prefix to make a compound word, describing the shared life in Christ, Jews and Gentiles together. (The construction with the "syn" prefix is similar to 2:5-6.)

3:7. While Paul's conversion to Christianity was by God's grace, this verse refers to his appointment as an apostle to the Gentiles. He does not call himself an apostle, but rather a minister (*diakonos*, the source of the word deacon). Paul recognizes that his ability to share the gospel is not done by his own power, but by the working of God's power (cf. 3:20-21; also 1:19).

3:8-12. In verse 8 begins another long sentence in Greek (3:8-12). Paul describes himself as the "most least" of all saints (Christians). See parallel descriptions in 1 Cor. 15:9 and 1 Tim. 1:15. Nonetheless, Paul received grace which enabled him to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable (unfathomable, boundless, infinite) riches of Christ. (Compare the use of the word riches in Eph. 1:7,18; 2:4,7; 3:8,16). God's grace was also powerful to make known (explain, ESV bring to light, the verb is the root of our word photo) the plan of the mystery (plan is administration, stewardship, cf. 3:2). The mystery hidden in times past is attributed to God the Creator.

3:10. The result of the revelation and preaching is that God's many-faceted wisdom is made known. God's wisdom is made known through (the preposition *dia* with the genitive) the church. (For the same construction, see notes at 3:8, "through faith.") What was formerly not known of God's wisdom and plan (1 Pet. 1:12) is now visible in the church. This verse is sometimes used to prove that the church is responsible for evangelizing, that God's wisdom is made known 'by the church.' While it is true that the church has been commissioned with sharing the Good News, this is not a sufficient proof-text to support that claim. The context here is that God's wisdom is visible in bringing everything and everyone together in Christ. Modern church growth theory says it is easier and thus best to build a church with generally

homogenous groups. God's wisdom says that the church is evidence of forgiveness, humility, patience, endurance, love, and peace because it brings together diverse groups in unity.

Another reason the verse should not be applied to evangelism done by the church is that the revelation of God's wisdom in this context is to rulers and authorities in the heavenlies (see 6:12 and comment there).

3:11-12. All of this accords with God's eternal purpose (1:9-10) to be realized in Jesus. This concept serves to tie the first three chapters of Ephesians together. The overarching theme is God's purpose in Christ Jesus. Because of what God has done in Christ, Christians have boldness and confident access (cf. Eph. 2:19; Heb. 4:16) to God through faith in Jesus (literally, the faith of him). The question comes up frequently in Paul's writings (especially in Romans and Galatians) as to the meaning of this construction, "the faith of Jesus." As an objective genitive, Christ is the object of faith and it refers to our faith. As a subjective genitive, Christ is the subject of faith, and it refers to Christ's faithfulness to fulfill God's plan.

3:13. Probably referring to his imprisonment, Paul is suffering. He describes that suffering as "for you," referring to the recipients of the letter. He says it will also result in glory to them. Therefore, they should not lose heart.

3:14-19. With the repetition of the phrase, "for this reason," Paul resumes the prayer (cf. 3:1). He bows before the Father, although writers are generally quick to notice that the passage refers to Father, Spirit, and Christ. Father and family are from the same root. In heaven and on earth is an idiomatic way of saying "all" and should not be understood literally.

3:16-19. Paul's prayer is easily outlined based on the grammar in Greek. There are three purpose clauses (subjunctive followed by so that, *hina*) and four aorist infinitives. The construction is as follows (omitting most of the prepositional phrases): "¹⁶ So that (*hina*) God would give you to be strengthened, ¹⁷ to reside Christ in your hearts through faith, ¹⁸ so that (*hina*) you may have strength to comprehend, ¹⁹ and to know, so that (*hina*) you may be filled."

The order is Purpose—Infinitive—Infinitive—Purpose—Infinitive—Infinitive—Purpose. Purpose: that God would give you power to be strengthened in your inner being by the Spirit, to reside Christ (so that Christ may reside) in your hearts through faith. Purpose: That you may be given strength to comprehend (grasp, receive) and to know Christ's unknowable love. Purpose: that you will be filled with this fullness of God. The last two phrasings are remarkable for their repetition: to know the unknowable, to be filled with God's filling.

"According to the riches of his glory" is consistent with Paul's frequent use of this phrase in Ephesians (1:7, 18; 2:4, 7; 3:8, 16). "Inner man" refers to the spiritual component of the human being. The outer man is the fleshly body (cf. 2 Cor. 4:16-18). Christ's indwelling is paralleled in the New Testament by references to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the indwelling of God in the church (Eph. 2:22; see also 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19-20). This indwelling is by faith. Even though the recipients are described as rooted and grounded in love, there was still a need for more strength to be able to comprehend and know the love of Christ that is beyond (surpasses) knowledge. This knowledge was not uniquely available to a few; this is knowledge shared with all the saints.

The final purpose clause says "in order to be filled with all the fullness of God." The meaning of the word fullness (*pleroma*) must be determined by the context (cf. Eph. 1:23 and Col. 2:9). Generally speaking, fullness means completeness or entirety.

3:20-21. Paul's prayer of praise concludes with a doxology. "To him who is able" refers to God the Father. God's capacity is exceedingly abundant, much more, infinitely more, beyond any human thought or desire. God's capacity is according to the power at work in (energizing) believers.

Paul's prayer is that God's glory be visible in the church and in Christ Jesus. God's glory dwells in Christ. God's glory dwells in the church, the people of God. The glory and the wisdom of God are to be made known through the church, unto the end of the ages, forever and ever.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

I have been telling you about God's grace, revealed to me, the mystery that God has made known, his plan to bring everything together in Christ, all people as heirs, members, and sharers of the promise through the gospel.

I have been privileged to preach this gospel to the Gentiles, to clarify the plan, to show how wise God was in his plan, because now everyone has security and confident access to God.

I praise God for all of this—I pray that you will be strong in the inner spirit, that Christ will dwell in your hearts, that you will be rooted in God's love (to know what is in reality unknowable). God is able to do so much more than we can ever ask or think! And it is all possible because he is at work in us, energizing us, making known his glory through Christ and the church.

READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINAL MESSAGE

Ephesians 4

[Note: it is suggested that the student read the introductory materials on page 3-5 of this guide before beginning any individual preparatory reading and analysis.]

CONTENT

The paragraphs included in the Content section of each chapter are merely guides. The student is encouraged to identify the paragraphs, and subsections within each paragraph, to assist in his or her own study. Generally, the division of this chapter into paragraphs is fairly standard across modern translations. Sometimes, 4:17-32 is treated as one paragraph. It is also possible to divide 4:1-16 into smaller thought units.

Outline of Chapter

4:1-16, encouraging the unity that leads to a functioning church, how to “walk” in the church

4:17-24, renouncing the old life and pagan ways for the new life in Christ, how to “walk” in the world

4:25-32, instructions for the new life

Introductory Comments on the Chapter

4:1-32. Here begins the practical section of the book, built around five admonitions concerning how one lives (*peripateo*, to walk, is a common idiom meaning to live) as a Christian (4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15). Christianity is based on what one knows; Christianity is demonstrated by how one lives.

The theme of the book is God’s desire to unite everything (all humanity) in Christ (1:9-10). The beginning of the practical section (4:1-6) echoes the theme. Unity is intentional, to be pursued, encouraged by certain personal qualities or characteristics.

4:7-10. This section requires careful study to understand the what and why of the passage. The teaching is based on an Old Testament citation. The section sets forth the principle that Christ gives gifts to the church and thus introduces the following section.

4:11-16. This passage describes how a healthy church with healthy members should function, using the gifts that Christ gives. Important points include the purpose of leadership and the results of leadership.

4:17-5:20 urges the rejection of the old pagan lifestyles and the practice of the new life in Christ.

STUDY HELPS

4:1-6. Therefore points to what has gone before, probably the entirety of Chapters 1-3. The basis of our Christian life is what we know and believe about God’s saving work accomplished in Christ Jesus.

Paul identifies himself as a prisoner of the Lord, not unusual since this is one of the letters Paul wrote from Roman imprisonment. The initial admonition is to walk (live) worthy of the calling with which you have been called. Christianity involves answering God’s call and then

living a “worthy” life. The following verses will describe several aspects of this life. Jesus taught that following him involved both a gateway and a way (Matt. 7:13-14). This verse reflects the same truth.

4:2. Several virtues are characteristic of the worthy life (and necessary for unity, v. 3). These include humility (*tapeinophrosune*, lowliness or selflessness, literally means lowliness of mind), gentleness (*praotes*, meekness, the word refers to strength that has been tamed), and patience (*makrothumia*, longsuffering). “Forbearing one another in love” is a participial construction, including that previous items together make up forbearance, or that forbearance is the summary or capstone that describes the necessary attitude. An important point is that the Christian life is lived intentionally.

4:3. Diligence is required to maintain unity. Another participle maintains parallel construction: giving all diligence (*spoudazo*). Everyone is responsible for maintaining unity. Based on God’s desire to bring all things together in Christ, it should be immediately obvious that this is unity in diversity. Unity and peace go hand in hand, and are necessary for a healthy church.

4:4-6. One body (only one body) refers to the church. This is the overarching theme of the book and the ultimate goal of God’s eternal purpose (1:9-10). One Spirit refers to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit’s role in giving us inspired Scripture makes it possible for us to know God’s calling, hope, Jesus and faith in him, baptism, and God the Father. One hope to which you were called and that comes from your calling. This phrase may be illustrative. As there is only one calling from God and only one hope that comes from that calling, so also there is only one body and only one Spirit.

The list of “ones” continues—one Lord, referring to Jesus Christ and indicates Jesus’ deity with its connection the Hebrew YHWH. The one faith is in the one Lord. One baptism refers to water baptism, which in the New Testament was always the result of faith in Jesus. Just as Paul connects the first three in the list, so also the second three are connected. Because there is one Lord, there is only one faith (in the one Lord), and there is only one baptism that results from the one faith in the one Lord. Paul’s declaration that there is only one baptism excludes the first-century continuation of various baptisms for different reasons. By 60 A.D. Paul was able to write that there was only one baptism. Finally, unity is essential and must be maintained, unity is visible in the “One God and Father of all.”

4:7-10. The major point of these verses is that each has received grace. The point is made in v. 7, vv. 8-10 are proof or support. Christ is the one who gives each person grace (notice the passive voice, to each...was given). This is reflected also in the citation from Psalms and in v. 11, He himself. The church as a body functions because each member functions. Each member has a part (v. 16).

To each is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ. This could be Christ received as a gift (objective genitive) but is more likely Christ the giver of the gifts (subjective genitive). The evidence of grace in the life of the believer is the presence of the gifts received from Christ. This is an important concept since the gifts that are present in the lives of believers are often attributed exclusively to the Spirit, “gifts of the Spirit.”

4:8. The Old Testament citation is from Ps. 68:18. The picture is of a king returning victoriously and giving gifts. The second line of the quote differs from the Masoretic text of the

psalm, apparently inspired by a commentary that is found in Jewish literature that says, “He gave gifts to me.” The passage is applied to Moses when he went up to Mount Sinai and came down with the tables of the law. Paul’s use of the psalm appears to refer to Christ’s victory by which he conquered his enemies. After such conquest, the King gives gifts (see Col. 2:15; 2 Cor. 2:14-17).

4:9. While some have seen in this verse a reference to Jesus’ descent to Hades after his death on the cross (see Acts 2:31 where Sheol likely means grave rather than Hades, and a possible allusion in 1 Pet. 3:18-20), the reference is to Jesus’ coming into the world (John 1:14; Phil. 2:7-8). How is it possible to go up (from the words of citation, and Ps. 68:18) unless one first comes down? The one who has gone up is the same one who (literal reading follows) “first came down to the lowest parts of the earth” (*ges*, a reference to soil, land, ground). Hades is not a part of the earth. The reference is to Christ.

4:10. The one who came down is the same one who ascended far above the heavens to fill all things. To fill (*pleroo*) is to complete, satisfy, accomplish, end, or perfect. The word also appears in 1:23 and 3:19.

4:11-16. This paragraph may be one of the most overlooked passages of the New Testament. The contemporary church enamored with professionalism, attracting consumers, and hierarchical ministry structures needs to rethink the very nature of the church beginning with these verses. Leaders exist to facilitate the ministry of the body. Every member has a ministry task and is thus a minister, erasing typical minister-laity distinctions. Members must be trained (equipped, prepared, mentored) for service and must be the primary work force in the work of the church. When each member uses his or her own gifts to accomplish the work, the tendency to “Accentuate certain gifts, Boast about gifts, Compare gifts, and Define exact characteristics of gifts” is diminished.

4:11. He (Christ) gave gifts to all. The correct use of gifts begins with those who have been gifted as leaders. The gifts that exist in the local church will never be used well until the leaders do their job. Based on the definite articles, four groups of leaders are mentioned: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers. The construction is the Greek “men-de” so that the first group serves as illustration of the rest. Few English versions reflect this detail, but many Spanish translations show the basic meaning: “he gave some apostles, others prophets, others evangelists, others pastor-teachers” (e.g., Reina-Valera, LBLA, NBLH, BHTI, PDT). The meaning is this: as he (previously) gave some to be apostles, he has now given to others as prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. These have in common their work in proclaiming God’s message.

“Some apostles.” While the word apostle (meaning, one who is sent) in the New Testament is not applied exclusively to the Twelve; in the context of Ephesians 4 it appears that the group in mind is the Twelve (cf. 2:20, 3:5), given as an example of how Christ give gifts to human beings for his purpose.

“Others prophets.” Contextually (based on the men-de construction), prophets (again, cf. 2:20, 3:5) refers to a group of leaders that existed in the New Testament church. The word prophet (Heb., *nabi*) has three basic meanings: fore-tell (predict), forth-tell (proclaim or preach), and for-tell (herald, as representative carrying the message of another). The New Testament prophets were not always predictors of future events, although such prophets are

mentioned in Acts 11 and Acts 20. More often the New Testament prophets were spokespersons for God or simply proclaimers or preachers of the gospel message. In these non-miraculous meanings, it is not difficult to understand the existence of such leaders in the first century church. In the contemporary church, the problem with designating certain leaders as apostles or prophets is that there is almost always a sense of the miraculous, special revelation, and special authority, concepts which do not inhere in the words. The misuse of these two terms in the larger religious world of Christendom makes it unwise to use them without explanation.

“Others evangelists.” With the New Testament focus on the Great Commission and the need to gospel, it is surprising that the word “evangelist” appears infrequently (Eph. 4:11; Acts 21:8; 2 Tim. 4:5).

“Others pastors-teachers.” This is a combination of the functions of pastors (*poimenas*) and teachers. Biblically, there was only one group of leaders in each local church, who were at times called elders (*presbuteros*), at others times bishops (*episkopos*), and at other times pastors. The parallel use is reflected in Acts 20:18-31 and 1 Pet. 5:1-4, where these three ideas are attributed to a single group of leaders. The combination designation likely suggests the understanding that those who served as pastors were also teachers.

4:12. The purpose of these leaders was to equip the members for the work of ministry. The ministry of the local church is not the responsibility of hired staff. The ministry of the local church is the responsibility of the members. One church had a sign above the entry door, “Where every member is a minister.” That slogan summarizes well God’s plan for the local church. Leaders are responsible for training, mentoring, and being examples so the members can learn how to do ministry. The great power of the church (Eph. 3:20-21) is available through God’s working in every member. The work translated equip is used in Mark 1:20 of mending nets. In the first century, it described the work of doctors who mended broken bones. The basic idea is “to restore to usefulness.” It means being ready to function. The task of leaders extends to every member, so that the people of God will be ready for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17). A primary result of this work is the building up of the body of Christ (cf. 2:20). When Christians work together, the body is edified, is built up, and grows.

4:13. Others results include unity of the faith, knowledge of the son of God, mature Christians reaching a measure of Christ’s maturity. The proper application of 4:12 will lead to the results of 4:13. Unity of the faith (with the article) refers to the belief system or doctrine (teaching). Knowledge (*epignosis*) is not just mental, but is experiential. Mature (*telos*, sometimes translated perfect) means reaching the end or completeness, thus full-grown. Here it may mean fully-equipped.

4:14. Mature Christians are not whiplashed back and forth by every concept that comes along. The antidote to Christians who follow after every new fad that comes along is a solid foundation (edified) in faith, knowledge of Christ, and Christian maturity that seeks to become more and more like Jesus. Immaturity is described as child-like (cf. 1 Cor. 14:20).

4:15. The participial verb that begins this verse is interesting, literally it translates as “truthing.” This is not only speaking the truth, it is living the truth, it is applying the truth to every part of life, it is a life that corresponds completely to truth. The church, when it is “truthing,” grows up in every way toward the head who is Christ.

4:16. The body, the church, working together in harmony, united, with every connection point functioning for mutual help, with the appropriate activity of every member—that church will grow and it goes forward edifying itself in love.

4:17-24. The new literary section begins with another admonition related to the lifestyle of believers (to walk, a metaphor for “to live,” that you no longer walk as the nations, Gentiles, pagans, heathen). The admonition is followed by several descriptions of the pagan lifestyle. “No longer” shows that some believers formerly practiced the lifestyle described (cf. 4:28). Paul describes the lifestyle to be avoided: worthless or futile thinking, darkened understanding, alienation from God, ignorance, hard hearts, callousness, sensuality, greed, and impurity.

Worthless (*mataiotes*) thinking is literally “useless, depraved, or vain.” The way of thinking that characterized the unbelievers in the world was useless with regard to human capacity.

Darkened understanding (*dianoia*) is literally “being darkened the imagination, mind, or understanding.” The phrase may be a repetition of the preceding thought—totally incapable of understanding.

Alienated or excluded from the life that is from God reminds of 2:12.

Ignorance is likely self-willed. Ignorant because they choose to be ignorant. This connects to hard (*porosis*, stupid, callous, blind) hearts.

4:19. Being past feeling (*apalgeo*, apathetic, dulled, thus callous), and giving themselves to sensuality (*aselgeia*, wantonness, lasciviousness, filthiness). Given to an occupation (*ergasia*, working, activity) with uncleanness (*akatharsia*, with every type of unclean activity), with an attitude of greed (*pleonexia*, avarice, covetousness).

4:20. Concluding the ugly description of the lifestyle of the pagans, Paul reminds that the Christian lifestyle is exactly the opposite. You did not learn Christ this way! Paul seeks to make clear the contrasts between the two lifestyles.

4:21-24. The first class condition is considered true from the author’s viewpoint. The recipients of the letter had heard about Christ and had been taught the truth about him and in him. That truth included the need to put off the old self, that is the former way of life that was corrupted due to deceitful desires; to be renewed in mind; and to put on the new self that is created in God’s likeness with righteousness and holiness.

The passage has three aorist infinitives—to place away from oneself (*apotithemi*), to be renewed (*ananeo*), and to put on (*enduo*). These provide Paul’s major points concerning how one seeks and finds the new life in Christ. Laying aside the previous life refers to repentance (changed thinking and changed lives). The previous way of life was corrupted by deceitful desires. It is not enough to eliminate faulty thinking, it must be replaced. The second infinite refers to renovated thinking. Putting on the new self (literally man, a Greek word that can refer to both male and female) calls to mind Paul’s description of baptism in other passages (cf. Rom. 6:1-6). The concept of “putting on” also appears in Gal. 3:26-27 with reference to baptism (cf. Rom. 13:14, Col. 3; James 1:21; 1 Pet 2:1 for other uses). The new self is re-created in God’s likeness and is characterized by righteousness and holiness.

4:25-32. The initial “therefore” refers to what has gone before. Notice the repetition of “putting away” (the same verb as used previously). The second aorist participle shows previous

action, thus “having put away...” The participle, because it is connected to the imperative “speak,” also has imperatival force. A commitment to the truth in Christ (v. 21) means putting away falsehood and speaking truth to one another. Speaking truth to one another is not only based in the decision to “put away” falsehood, it is also necessary to maintain the nature and function of the body where we are members of one another (cf. 3:6), where we belong to one another (cf. Rom. 12:5). Christians are not saved in isolation, Christians cannot stay saved in isolation.

4:26-27. The rest of the chapter is a series of instructions, present imperatives with a negative. This construction often means to stop an act already in progress, but the continuous nature of the present tense can also refer to acts that are so common that they are in a sense continuous in the human experience. (In 4:25, the commands were to put away falsehood and to speak truth.)

4:26. This verse begins with two imperatives in a citation from Ps. 4:4. When anger is appropriate (be angry is an imperative), be careful that it does not lead you to sin and that you do not let it smolder within you for a prolonged period, since such only gives the devil a possible foothold. The second imperative is “do not sin.” “Do not let the sun go down on your wrath” is a third person imperative. Since the Jewish day began at sundown, this instruction is that one should not allow the day to begin with anger in control and Satan lurking near. Again, the point is not to allow anger to remain long in one’s life. This may be similar to forbearance in 4:2.

4:27. This verse begins with not even (*mete*), following by the imperative “give”; a smooth English translation reflecting the imperatival force could be, “Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, not giving the devil even the least opportunity (literally, place).” Devil is *diabolos* (literally, to throw across), perhaps referring to Satan casting accusations.

4:28. The thief, no longer let him steal (third person imperative) but rather let him work hard (third person imperative, from *kopiaio*, become fatigued). The participle continues the imperatival force, working (*ergazomai*) that which is good so that he has something to share with the needy. This reflects the changed life that is being described in this context. Those who used to be thieves are to stop stealing and do honest work with hearts focused on helping others rather than hurting others.

4:29. Do not let any worthless word come forth (*ekporeuomai*, third person imperative) from your mouth. In contrast to worthless (*sapros*, rotten, bad, corrupt) words. Rather, Christians speak words that are good for building up what is needed in order to give grace to those who hear. Here the word grace is often used not to refer to saving grace, but to refer to blessings or gifts.

4:30. Do not distress (imperative, from *lupeo*, to cause grief or sorrow) the Holy Spirit with which you were sealed (1:13) to the day of redemption (*apolutrosis*). The day of redemption is likely the Second Coming of Jesus.

4:31. The third person imperative (*airo*, to lift, to take away, to remove, to put away) has the sense of “let these removed” from the life of the Christ: bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice.

4:32. The imperative (*ginomai*, to be) is followed by two participles that partake of the imperatival force: be kind, well-compassioned, favoring one another. The favor Christians show to one another is the same favor God has shown to us (*charizomai*, the verb has the same root

as *charis*, grace). The common translation is that we forgive as God has forgiven us in Christ. Christians are imitators of God.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

If you understand God's plan for unifying all things in Christ, you will want to live in a way that reflects his calling in your life, with attitudes of peace, maintaining unity just as everything about God reflects his desire for unity—God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, faith, baptism, hope, the church. This doesn't depend on you. God gives the gifts necessary to make it happen. He has given certain leaders gifts to help the church work, to edify the church, to develop unity of faith, to know His Son, and to mature into his image.

Following God's plan keeps us from becoming unstable and deceived. God's plan lives out love, looks to Christ, unites the body with each member working and encouraging and supporting and helping the others. Each member has a task, and the church grows and is built up in love.

If you understand God's plan, why would you want to keep living in darkness like so many in the world do? They are beyond help—vain thinking, without understanding, ignorant, hard-hearted, impure. That is not the way of Christ! In Christ, truth leads to a new life of justice and holiness. Be careful about your life! Watch your talk, your anger, your greed, your selfishness—we are all part of the same unified body of Christ!

If you forget how God sealed you and guaranteed the promise with his Spirit, the Spirit will be sad. Get rid of the bad stuff—remember how God has pardoned you and be equally generous to others.

READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINAL MESSAGE

Ephesians 5

[Note: it is suggested that the student read the introductory materials on page 3-5 of this guide before beginning any individual preparatory reading and analysis.]

CONTENT

The paragraphs included in the Content section of each chapter are merely guides. The student is encouraged to identify the paragraphs, and subsections within each paragraph, to assist in his or her own study. Generally, the division of this chapter into paragraphs is fairly standard across modern translations.

Outline of Chapter

[4:17-32, the new life in Christ, no longer “walking” as the pagans]

5:1-7, walk in love

5:8-14, walk in light

5:15-21, walk in wisdom, filled with the Holy Spirit

5:22-33, the Christian household, wives and husbands

Introductory Comments on the Chapter

5:1-21 is a continuation of 4:17-32, giving instructions about how to walk in the Christian life. The outline above is built around the repeated use of the Greek word *peripateo*, to walk, meaning “to live.” The word occurs five times in the context.

5:22-33 is the first of three sections that describe family relationships in the context of the Christian life.

STUDY HELPS

5:1-14. The imperative (be, from *ginomai*) is repeated from 4:32, as though 5:1 serves as a summary of the preceding section, perhaps of 4:20-32, or of 4:25-32. Our word mimic is from the Greek word imitators. Walk (imperative) is a literal translation, is the usual word for lifestyle and way of living.

5:2. Christians walk in love because they have been loved by God (not a bad summary of Ephesians up to this point). Christ evidenced his love by giving himself as an offering (*prospora*) and sacrifice (*thusia*).

5:3. The connection between the imperative “walk or live in love” and what follows is not clear, partly because the connections are not common. Does Paul turn to other matters in vv. 3-6, or is he describing some of what it means to genuinely live in love? Love is more than emotion, love is demonstrated in actions. What kinds of actions show love?

Do not let there be a hint of immorality (*porneia*), impurity (*akatharsia*), or covetousness (*pleonexia*, greed) among you. Immorality is a broad category that includes various kinds of sexual sins. Let it not be named is another imperative. Such things are not fitting for Christians and are the opposite of loving actions.

5:4. There is not a written verb in this verse, thus it depends on and is a continuation of the prohibitions of the previous verse. Grammatically, the things mentioned in v. 4 continue the list from v. 3. This translation conveys the sense and the connection: “Let the things that are not fitting not be named among you, immorality, impurity, and covetousness; neither filthiness (obscenity), foolish talking, and vulgar witticism (crude, ribald jokes) which are not proper, but instead gratitude.” How we act is an indication of our love; how we talk is equally a measure of our love. Love is more than an emotion, an attitude or a thought.

5:5. You can know with certainty that every immoral, impure, and covetous person (the same list as in v. 3) does not have an inheritance in the kingdom (cf. 1:11,14). Covetous is identified as idolatry (cf. Col. 3:5). This is the only reference to the kingdom of God in Ephesians (cf. 2:2 where kingdom refers to the dominion of evil).

5:6. Let no one deceive you (third person imperative, from *apatao*, delude or cheat) with empty words. The things mentioned bring God’s wrath upon the sons of disobedience. Disobedience to God in these matters or any others is the opposite of a life characterized by love.

5:7. I would like to make a literary break here (as in the outline I provided earlier), based on the repeated use of the verb “to walk,” but the continuation of Paul’s thought pattern makes it a little less certain. The argument or thought seems to build throughout the section 5:1-14. Therefore (*oun*, literally then), do not be participants with them. The imperative (from *ginomai*) is repeated from 4:32 and 5:1.

5:8. This verse again contrasts the former state or practice with the present (then, now). They were formerly darkness, now they are light. The imperative (walk, *peripateo*, meaning to live) in this verse is to live as children of light. Children of light are not in darkness, they discern what pleases the Lord, they bear good fruit, they expose shameful things. Children of light contrasts with sons of disobedience (v. 6).

5:9-14. The fruit of light is goodness, righteousness, and truth. “Fruit of the spirit” is in manuscripts P⁴⁶, D^c, and I, while “fruit of light” is the obvious choice in the context, and is supported by P⁴⁹, κ, A, B, D, G, and P.

5:10. The participle (*dokimazo*, discerning, proving) continues the thought from preceding verses. It seems to connect to the verb “walk” (live) and thus has the force of the imperative: discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

5:11-13. Do not participate (literally, fellowship with) the unfruitful works of darkness. Light bears fruit; darkness is unfruitful. It is not enough to refuse to participate, the imperative form demands that believers expose (*elegcho*, convict, convince, show the fault, rebuke, reprove) such works. Such things are shameful, even to talk of them is shameful, thus they need to be exposed by the light and thus become visible.

5:14. The quotation may be an early Christian hymn, or may be loosely based on some passages from Isaiah. The point is that Christ brings light.

5:15-21. The repetition of the verb “to walk” (to live) is in the indicative. However, coupled with the imperative to watch out, it has imperatival force. Christians must walk in wisdom, not as unwise persons.

5:16-17. Living wisely includes buying up and using well (*exagorazo*) your time (opportunity, occasion) because the days are evil. The opposite of foolishness is to understand the will of the Lord.

5:18-21. The two imperatives in 5:18 are opposites (foolish talk and thanksgiving, 5:4; light and dark, 5:8ff; fruit and fruitlessness, 5:9, 11; wise and unwise, 5:15; drunk and filled with the Spirit, 5:18). The imperatives of 5:18 lead to five explanatory participles.

“Do not get drunk, but be filled with the Spirit.” The contrast may be designed to point to that which controls a person. The five participles that follow are “speaking, singing, making melody, giving thanks, and submitting to one another.” These describe the life filled with the Spirit, or describe ways to allow the Spirit to fill one’s life. Many translations fail to honor the parallel grammatical construction, choosing instead to use an imperative in v. 21. All of the participles have an imperatival force, building from “be filled with the Spirit.” My preference is for translation that shows the equality of the forms in the original language.

5:21. The participle serves reflexively, with the phrase “to one another” indicating that each is to submit to others. Submission is a reality of life. The word, in a military sense, means obedience within a chain of command. It can be applied in many other social contexts. Submission does not imply inferiority or inequality of worth. Submission simply honors the order that exists. Here it speaks to mutual submission as a characteristic of the spiritual life. The literary unit that follows (5:22-6:9) should be read in the context of mutual submission. Such mutual submission is done out of reverence to Christ.

5:22-33. In the literature of the first century, it was common to list mutual responsibility between members of a family, including slaves. In the New Testament, these responsibilities are based in Jesus as Lord. In Ephesians, Paul in turn treats three family groups that have reciprocal relationships and responsibilities, mentioning first the members of the group that were considered weakest and in most need of protection. In the context of being filled with the Spirit, it may be Paul’s purpose to show how the Christian life makes such relationships into spiritual relationships where each person is focused on responsibilities more than rights.

5:22-24. Three verses are devoted to instructions for the wives. Verse 22 has no verb, being a continuation of the thought in v. 21: literally, “the wives to their own husbands as to the Lord.” The evidence for this short reading are minimal but early. Later witnesses add verb forms to the verse. With no verb present, the meaning of the verse depends on the participle of v. 21. Wives are to submit (*hupotasso*, the verb used in v. 21) to their own husbands as to the Lord, but this is not communicated with an imperative. (The only imperative in the extended passage is for the husbands in v. 25.) Submission “as to the Lord” does not suggest that a husband has the same authority as the Lord, but that the relationship and submission is based on relationship with Christ. “As to the Lord” in v. 22 is parallel to “in reverence” in v. 21. All Christians are willing to submit to legitimate authority (cf. Rom. 13:1-3).

“Submit yourselves” is a concept that needs expansion. Some translations use “be subject.” The basic idea of *hupotasso* is to arrange things in order, thus to subordinate, to establish the order. In the active voice, it means to put in subjection. In the passive/middle, it means to subject one’s self, to obey, to submit to the control of another, to accept admonition or advice. These meanings provide helpful context for the admonition that resides in the participle in v. 21. This wide range of meanings should soften the harsh expectations and the

hard attitude that some husbands exhibit based on v. 22. This verse does not make the wife a servant without rights. The verse exhorts a wife to recognize God's order and to be obedient to the (loving) control and advice of her husband who also wants what is best for his wife (cf. 5:25-28.)

5:23. The reason for the wife's submission is given in v. 23: the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. The use of the plural husbands in the context (the correct and normal grammatical construction) makes it easy to forget that this is about the specific relationship between a husband and a wife, not about the relationship between men and women in the church. The relationship between Christ and the church is described in the Bible as like the husband-wife relationship. Christ is described as the head of the church, guiding, leading, instructing, saving. The church is the body of Christ, and later in the passage in a somewhat parallel thought, the husband is to love the wife as his own body. A husband, as head of his wife, is given a leadership role by God that is parallel to Christ's leadership role in the church. The leadership a husband should demonstrate in the home and family is servant leadership. It is functional leadership.

5:24. The church submits (is subject, obeys) Christ, and in the same way a wife submits to the husband. Of course, the difference between Christ and the husband is that Christ is the perfect head and that the husband is imperfect!

5:25-30. The husband is to love his wife (in the context, the plural which is demanded grammatically is better understood as an individual responsibility in the context of a personal family relationship). This is the only imperative in the passage.

Christ did several things on behalf of the church: he gave himself up for her, so that he might sanctify her and cleanse her, and so that he might present her without impurity, holy and without blemish. Jesus accomplished these things in his sacrifice, making possible the holiness and beauty of the church. Husbands are to love their wives in the same way. The husband loves his wife in the same way that Christ loved the church when he is willing to give himself for her (the self-sacrificial spirit). The loving husband is committed to the holiness of his wife, recognizing that his is responsible for her splendor and beauty. The observation is likely right: more of the problems in marriages today come from husbands who fail to love their wives than from wives who fail to submit to their husbands.

5:28. A husband is to love his wife as his own body (as much as he loves his own body, as much as he loves himself). "In the same way" reminds that Christ's love for the church was his love for his own body. A husband and wife become "one body" (Gen. 2:24). A husband who loves his wife is demonstrating how much he loves himself. The opposite is not said in the text, but should perhaps be stated here for clarity: A husband who fails to love his wife does not love himself very much.

5:29. Such is the normal state of things: people do not hate their own bodies (literally, flesh). On the contrary, we take care of our bodies. We nourish our bodies and cherish them, which is exactly what Christ does for his body, the church. A husband should nourish and cherish his wife.

5:30. Christ nourishes and cherishes the church because it is his body, and we are members of that body. Thus, Christ nourishes and cherishes us (one way to summarize the message of Ephesians).

5:31-33. Gen. 2:24 is quoted from the Septuagint (LXX). The mystery (previously

unknown but now revealed) is exceedingly great (*megas*, large, wide, big). The mystery (of a man and woman being one body, Gen. 2:24) is difficult to understand. Even more difficult is the fact that Paul says it refers to the oneness of Christ and the church, with the church identified as the body of Christ, so that Christ and the church are one body.

5:33. On the basis of this deep concept, every husband should love his wife as he loves himself, and every wife should respect (*phobeo*, literally fear, but in this context it means to reverence) her husband. The husband is commanded to love his wife. Wives are called on to yield to and respect their husbands.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

All of this means that you have to be careful how you live. Loving God as God has loved us means we avoid immorality, impurity, dishonesty, and useless words. Again, this is not the way of Christ. These are the things that lead to God's wrath. Don't do what you used to do. Now you live in light, you bear fruit, you know what pleases God, so it is time to be wise and diligent in how you use your time here on earth, seeking to do God's will.

You can avoid drunkenness and enjoy God's Spirit by speaking to one another in your songs, by singing and praising, by giving thanks, and by submitting to each other.

Submission also guides relationships in the home. Wives are submissive to husbands and respect them. Husbands demonstrate their submission by loving their wives, doing everything necessary for the wellbeing of their wives, serving, even willing to sacrifice themselves. Husbands and wives are one body, and it is only natural to love your own body. (When Christ loves the church, he is loving himself; when the church respects Christ, it respects itself. This is a great mystery indeed!) The wife must respect the husband, and the husband must love the wife.

READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINAL MESSAGE

Ephesians 6

[Note: it is suggested that the student read the introductory materials on page 3-5 of this guide before beginning any individual preparatory reading and analysis.]

CONTENT

The paragraphs included in the Content section of each chapter are merely guides. The student is encouraged to identify the paragraphs, and subsections within each paragraph, to assist in his or her own study. Generally, the division of this chapter into paragraphs is fairly standard across modern translations.

Outline of Chapter

6:1-4, children and parents

6:5-9, slaves and masters

6:10-20, Christian warfare against evil

6:21-24, final greetings

Introductory Comments on the Chapter

6:1-9 continue the treatment of family relationships (wife-husband, 5:22-33; children-parents, 6:1-4; slaves-masters, 6:5-9).

6:10-20 introduces what appears to be a new subject, but it has several connections to previous parts of the book. Especially obvious is the connection to Paul's earlier references to "the heavenlies" and to other authorities and powers. (See comments.)

6:21-24 is a typical concluding section with personal comments and a final salutation. The absence of a large number of personal comments and personal greetings may reflect the nature of the letter as circular, intended for multiple congregations.

STUDY HELPS

6:1-4. The second family grouping (children-fathers) again begins by addressing the weaker group. Children (no specific ages are specified by this word) are to obey (imperative, from *hupakouo*) their parents (*goneus*). "In the Lord" means according to the Lord's instructions or because the children are Christians (in the Lord). Parental authority is God-given, as are other spheres of authority, e.g. in the church and in human governments. The command is not based on whether the parents are Christians or not, although the context of this section obviously has primary application in the context of the Christian home. Jesus taught about conflicts between children and parents based on conflicting allegiances (Matt. 10:34-39). Such obedience of children to their parents is right (*dikaios*, just).

6:2-3. The quotation is from the Ten Commandments (cf. Ex. 20:12; Dt. 5:16) with the observation that the commandment to honor father and mother is the first commandment that had a promise attached to it, given in the continuation of the citation in v. 3.

6:4. The Greek text has fathers although some modern translations say parents. The construction of the passage is that in the three groupings, those with limited social rights and

power are addressed first (wives, children, slaves), and then those with power in the society (husbands, fathers, masters). Fathers is therefore the preferred translation. The instructions are especially applicable to fathers. Do not provoke to anger (imperative, from *parorgizo*) your children. The opposite of causing anger in our children is to nurture them (*ektrepho*, cherish, train) with education (*paideia*, training, tutoring, focused on teaching) and correction (*nouthesia*, admonitions, warnings). Fathers have a significant responsibility in the spiritual growth of their children.

6:5-9. The third family grouping follows the same pattern as the previous two, beginning with instructions to those with less social standing in the first century culture. Slaves (*doulos*) refers to household servants. Slaves are to obey (imperative, from *hupakouo*) their masters. This is the same word as was used in the case of the children. Wives were not instructed to obey but to submit and to respect. Human masters (masters according to the flesh, *sarx*) reminds that there is a heavenly master. Nonetheless, Christian slaves are to obey human masters with fear (*phobos*, cf. 5:33 where the idea is respect) and trembling (*tromos*). Fear and trembling is an idiom; it can indicate fear but is also used to mean respect (1 Cor. 2:3; 2 Cor. 7:15; Phil. 2:12). In sincerity (*haplotes*, singleness, without hypocrisy, generosity) of heart, as to Christ (cf. 5:22).

6:6-7. These verses explain the phrase “in sincerity.” Not in a way so that you are always calling attention to yourself and wanting to be watched, or that you are seeking to please human beings, but rather as serving and pleasing Christ, doing God’s will with vitality (*psyche*), giving your service willing (*eunoia*, literally of good mind) as to the Lord and not to men.

6:8. Whatever good thing a person does, that persons receive recompense from the Lord. This truth applies whether a person is a bondservant or is free. Christians seek to serve others without expecting reward or recognition, knowing that God is the one who sees and rewards good deeds (cf. 2:10).

6:9. Masters (*kurios*) are to use the same principles and guidance in how they treat their slaves. Do (imperative, from *poieo*) the same things, giving up (*aniemi*, letting up, forbearing) threats (*apeile*, menacing). The reason masters treat slaves well is that they recognize there is an impartial heavenly Master who is Master of all—both the master and the slave.

6:10-20. “Finally” (*loipon*, what remains, as to the rest) indicates a transition to the conclusion of the book, or to a final point. The context suggests the theme used in the outline above: Christian warfare against evil. The battle described is waged in this world but is not against flesh and blood. This is a battle against rulers, authorities, cosmic power, and spiritual forces (cf. 1:21, 2:2-3, 3:10). Therefore, it is a spiritual battle (cf. 2 Cor. 10:3-5).

6:10. The first imperative is to be strong (*endunamoo*) in the Lord in the power (*kratos*) of his might (*ischus*). The present imperative carries the sense of “be continually empowered.” Christians make a choice concerning the powers that guide and control their lives. Three different Greek words that deal with power or strength are used in v. 10. (In 1:10, these three words plus a fourth, *energia*, were used.)

6:11. Put on (aorist imperative, from *enduo*) the full armor (*panoplia*, panoply) of God. This is the second imperative in the sequence. “To be able (*dunamai*) to stand (*histemi*) against the trickery (*metodeia*, our word methods, meaning wiles, deceit) of the devil (*diabolos*,

referring to Satan). The armor is more defensive than it is offensive, perhaps because Jesus has already settled the ultimate outcome even though the battle continues in the lives of individual Christians.

6:12. This verse serves as explanation of the importance of following the instructions in v. 11. The struggle (pale) is not against flesh and blood (literally, blood and flesh, meaning human beings, cf. Heb. 2:14). The present tense conveys the sense of continual struggle. The struggle is against rulers (*arche*); against authorities (*exousia*); against the rulers of the world (*kosmokrator*, the one having power in or power over the world, world ruler, controller) of the darkness of this age; against the spiritual powers (literally, this is the adjective functioning as a noun, without designating what spiritual things are meant; spiritual powers or forces is best in the context) of evil, in the heavenlies.

The phrase “in the heavenlies” has appeared five times in Ephesians (1:3, 20, 2:6, 3:10; 6:12). These verses say the following: the spiritual blessings God gives Christians are in the heavenlies with spiritual blessings in Christ, Christ is seated at God’s right hand in the heavenlies, Christians are now seated with Christ in the heavenlies, God’s manifold wisdom is made known to rulers and authorities in the heavenlies, Evil forces that oppose Christians are in the heavenlies. The word heavenlies is an adjective that functions as a noun (substantive). The specific noun must be supplied based on context. Based on the wide variety in the verses cited, the heavenlies in Ephesians are a realm or a sphere. The heavenlies are not heaven, but are a spiritual realm. Note that evil powers are described as part of this realm.

6:13. The third imperative in this context is to take (*analambano*, receive, take up) the whole armor of God so you may be able (subjunctive, from *dunamai*) to stand (*anthistemi*, stand against) in the evil day, and having done everything (*katergazomai*, accomplished, finished), to stand (*histemi*, cf. 6:11, in the sense of remaining standing, standing firm; cf. 6:14).

6:14-17. The imperative “stand” (*histemi*) is repeated to begin the sentence, followed by four participles: having girded, having put on, having bound, and having taken up (vv. 14-16). The participles are related grammatically to the imperative. These are followed by an imperative in v. 17: receive. These verbs and the parts of the Christian armor deserve some additional comment.

Girded with truth (no article in Greek, the abstract concept may be better translated truthfulness).

Having put on the breastplate of righteousness (*dikaiosune*), the righteousness of Christ, or the righteousness that we have received through Christ.

Having bound your feet in readiness (preparation) of the gospel of peace. The subjective genitive would mean that the gospel of peace makes us ready. The objective genitive would mean that feet are prepared to carry the gospel of peace.

Above all, having taken up the shield of faith (with which you can extinguish all the flaming missiles of evil (or of the evil one)).

6:17. The imperative and four participles of vv. 14-16 are followed by one more imperative in the context of the Christian armor. Receive (*dechomai*) the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the word (rhema) of God.

6:18-20. Contextually, it could seem natural to make a literary break between v. 17 and v. 18, but the participle of v. 18 relates to the imperative (receive) of v. 17: praying always with all prayer and supplication. The repetition of Spirit is interesting and provides a connection.

Spirit is anarthrous (without the article) and may be “in the Holy Spirit” or “in spirit.” Numerous authors have noted the repeated use of “all” in v. 18. The focus on prayer is evident: praying always, with all kinds of prayer (*proseuche*) and supplication (*deesis*), with perseverance making supplication (*deesis*).

6:19-20. In vv. 19-20, Paul asks for prayers for him and his ministry in the gospel. His prayer request involves four things: to have the words (to be given words), to open his mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, to declare it boldly, to speak as he ought. These four items may be chiasmic, with #1 and #4 parallel, and #2 and #3 parallel. Mystery of the gospel probably refers to the same mystery as 1:9-10 and 3:2-6, that is, God’s plan to bring together everyone in Christ. Paul calls himself an ambassador (*presbeuo*, literally a senior, an old man, but figurative referring to a representative, a preacher) in chains.

6:21-24. The final greetings in Ephesians are brief in comparison to other of Paul’s letters. Ephesians and Colossians are often considered “sister letters” due to similar themes and wording. Here, vv. 21-22 are paralleled by Col. 4:7-8, only that in the latter Paul adds a descriptive phrase concerning Tychicus: fellow bond servant. Tychicus (Acts 20:4; Col. 4:7; Tit. 3:12, 2 Tim. 4:12) carried the letter. He would in addition give a report about Paul and his work, which was one of Paul’s reasons for sending him (v. 22), and to encourage the recipients.

6:23-24. The final salutation is typical. Incorruptible (*aphtharsia*) may also better translated unending, unchanging, genuine, or sincere.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The way Christians submit to one another is not only demonstrated in the relationship of wives and husbands, it is also demonstrated in the relationship of children and parents, and the relationship of slaves and masters. Have a submissive spirit, considering the wellbeing of the other, especially to those of you who are empowered by the culture and the system.

Finally, recognize that there is a spiritual battle at hand, but that God provides everything necessary. Therefore stand, being girded, having put on the breastplate, having bound your feet, having taken up the shield. Receive the helmet and the sword, praying always with all kinds of prayers and all kinds of supplications, with all perseverance. Please pray for my ministry.

I am sending you news about me and how things are here. Peace, love, faith, grace to those who love Christ Jesus with a never changing, unending love.