

Redeemer Fellowship Commentaries

The Epistle to the Ephesians comes to renew us in the understanding that everything is moving towards its wonderful and appointed end. It is the large view of the purpose of God—etched panoramically—designed to build faith and serenity in the viewer. There is a gripping excitement which springs from the knowledge that God has designed great things for His people.

It is a grand Epistle and deserves the time, prayer, devotion and attention we can give to it. In it we meet the Father, the Son, the Spirit and the Family—and so, ourselves.

Geoff Bingham's writings have made an active contribution to the Christian worldview of his readers and we warmly commend this fresh exposure of the truth of Ephesians to you.



Redeemer Fellowship Commentaries



EPHESIANS

GEOFFREY BINGHAM

By the same author:

*Love's Most Glorious Covenant
Strong as the Sun
Beyond Mortal Love
Tall Grow the Tallow-woods
The Profound Mystery
The Revelation of St John the Divine
Philippians—a Commentary
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One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism

Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians

by
Geoffrey Bingham

Cover



Redeemer Fellowship Commentaries

The three banners, *One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism*, are the corporate expression of the young people of Redeemer Baptist Church illustrating that 'everything we are and think and do is permeated with oneness'. They have drawn upon the rich symbolism of the early Church to portray this central truth.

...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:5-6



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SERIES PREFACE

In praise of books it has been said, ‘Without books, God would be silent’. Now we all know that is not true. It is an exaggeration. God spoke to the prophets. He spoke to Man in the person of His own Son. In each case He spoke before the book came into being. The Bible is the book *per se*, which sets the standard for the Christian faith.

Next to oral preaching, God has chosen the medium of the book in order to proclaim His goodness to us. Job sighed, ‘O that my words were written in a book’ (Job 19:23). Some prophets received God’s explicit order to put into writing all the instructions they obtained. Why? Because a book gives permanence to the spoken and easily forgotten word.

Klaus Bockmuehl reminds us that books have been linked in all ages with renewal movements. Luther, who in the early years of the Reformation said, ‘It is not really in the spirit of the New Testament to write books about Christian doctrine’, could nevertheless write extensively. And as a result he could later observe, ‘Take care now, promote and help promote the Holy Gospel. Teach, defend, speak and write...how the laws of man are nothing’. Our justification is by faith alone.

Wesley, fearful of attacks upon his open air preaching, cast lots on whether to continue. He received the answer ‘Preach and print’. He stood by this precept until his dying day. He instructed his fellow workers, ‘Take a certain title with you. The next time take another book. Preach at every place and invite the congregation after the sermon to buy the relevant tract

and read it! Wesley, who travelled 60,000 miles, read as he rode.

Current cultural critics proclaim ‘the end of the Gutenberg era’ with the dawning of a new and broad media expression. Yet when Christian book sales exceed the growth of the general book trade, when borrowings in public libraries show a steady increase, we can rejoice that ‘the end of reading is not yet in sight!’

We came to this series with the refreshing aware-ness that there is still a vital place for the publication of books. What to write and what not to write is of importance. We are reminded of the argument of the apple-growing farmer who said to his wife: ‘Thank God, we’ll have a smaller harvest this year. Prices will be up, income substantially the same, but we’ll have less trouble’. The Christian book trade currently does not face a smaller harvest but wise pruning always provides for a healthier yield. It is not our desire to increase the harvest of inferior literature but to set before the reading public something that will lead to the deepening of the fellowship of the faithful. It is our hope that this series can form an effective basis of Church seminars and Bible Study groups. Meetings that gather people from all walks of life and of all ages around a Christian book are decisive means to the consolidation of faith and doctrine.

Thomas à Kempis said 700 years ago: ‘If he shall not lose his reward who gives a cup of cold water to the thirsty neighbour, what will not be the reward of those who by putting good books into the hands of those neighbours open to them the fountains of eternal life?’ It is with such a heart that we commend to you this series.

The Editorial Committee

FOREWORD

It was a gloriously clear Adelaide mid-winter day in 1975. I had finished the morning’s lectures introducing a new Physics course to the Science teachers in South Australia. During the lunch break I made my way out to the foyer and quite unexpectedly found in the stairwell of the Salisbury College of Advanced Education, a group of students in the midst of prayer. I drew close to the edge of them and heard young people who were actually, genuinely talking to God as though they knew Him. At the conclusion I asked the question, ‘For you to possess such vitality, could you tell me who has led you to this dynamic relationship with God?’

They spoke of a man out in the hills south of Adelaide, Geoffrey Bingham, and I recalled a cold wet winter’s night in Sydney when the Rev. Geoffrey Bingham had returned from the mission field to a family member in the boarders’ quarters of a Sydney College. I was re-minded of the night that I heard this man speak in a CMS Convention to a packed Sydney Town Hall. He spoke of revival in Pakistan. He spoke of a God who was active in the lives of people. In those memories, when my last lecture concluded, I rang and made an appointment and went out to what would prove to be my first visit to ‘New Creation’ in the Coromandel Valley. And I met him in his study and he talked and we shared. And something happened that day that established a deep bond with a man because of what I sensed he knew of Christ. I felt awed by the depth of his understanding and the intensity of his energy. Yet

I knew here was no fanatic. And he loved people. Above all, he lived totally for Christ.

Three years later I would make my way with others to a mission being conducted in the Sydney suburb of Merrylands and in a nearby cafe would invite Geoff to participate in what would prove to be the first of many occasions of breaking open the word of God to the fellowship of Redeemer Baptist Church. In the early years it was the steamy heat of a February summer and one quickly recognised that if a man knew revival in the heat of Pakistan, one did not dare to consider it too hot for such an occasion in Sydney!

Year by year that ministry has penetrated the lives of those people and as an added bonus, indeed as a crowning gesture, Geoff became a *pastor pastorum* —the pastors' pastor to the elders responsible to that fellowship. He preached grace as he preached the Cross to people whose only attempts at healing had been by a variety of therapies more man-centred than God-centred. And he preached liberty. People whose inner turbulence had caused them to recycle through endless resurgences of depression came, as he put it, to know 'the cleansing of their memories'. They did not seek to muck-rake their lives but, possessing a cleansed conscience, they knew the refreshment of a revitalised life that exhibited everything of God's transforming power. They had come to peace through the blood of the Cross.

The years have done nothing to diminish Geoff's ministry and this new study of Ephesians comes to remind us that, truly, his life's work has been to present one of the central truths of Ephesians that 'we are

witnessing a gathering together of the Family'—of what Geoff calls 'a palpable living body'—'in the Household of God and the profession of a new humanity in His Son by the Cross. And we are granted a rich understanding of the nature of God who is our Father'.

I warmly commend this fresh exposure of the truth of Ephesians to you.

Noel Cannon

Castle Hill

September, 1997

INTRODUCTION

Many scholars think Paul did not write the letter we are introducing. Their reason for thinking this is that it is so different from all the other Pauline Epistles with the exception of Colossians. Even here there are marked differences. This Epistle does not deal directly with the great themes such as justification, sanctification and the like—although they are by no means excluded. Here Paul has in mind the very reason for creation, which is God's plan for filling out His Fatherhood in the Family. The planning of His sons-to-come, the present gathering together of the Family in the Household of God, and the production of the new humanity in His Son by the Cross so that Jew and Gentile distinctions disappear—all of these make for a rich understanding of the nature of the Father. The plan, from before creation, to head up or unify all things in the Son, and the exaltation of Christ—not only to be Head of all things for the Church, but to fill up all things, by Christ as Lord—also points us to the nature of Christ as Son. The fact that all things happen in Christ shows us that not only are we dependent upon the Father for our fullness, but also upon the Son. His work of salvation, and the final unification of all things, are both cosmic. In this Epistle the Holy Spirit is also very present in His ministry. It is through Him that both Jew and Gentile—now part of the new humanity—come to the Father and are incorporate in the Household of God. He holds the unity of the Church and is grieved when love, forgiveness and tenderness are withheld by any member. It is in 'fullness' that the Family lives and in

this fullness their relationships are worked out. That fullness derives from the Father, the Son and the Spirit. There is much more, of course, but perhaps it is in the first six verses of the fourth chapter that we see the rich unity that now grips the Church. Participants in one faith, one baptism, the Church is held together in fine harmony by the unity of the Spirit, the Lordship of Christ, and the 'one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all'.

Just as the Epistle to the Galatians is needed today to recall us from a programme of works which justifies us and our existence, so the Epistle to the Ephesians is needed to refresh us in the understanding that every-thing is moving towards its wonderful and appointed end. There is no philosophical determinism here, but a grand view of the purposes of God—etched panoramically—designed to build faith and serenity in the viewer. Yet not only faith and serenity. There is a gripping excitement which springs from the knowledge that God has designed great things for His people, and for their home—the universe—which will one day be purged and renewed, a place fit for a new race born in the Cross, and springing from the eternal purposes of Him Who is Father to His people.

Hence, when we read these great themes we need to work at them in detail to grasp their importance, and to relate them to ourselves. Likewise we need to step back, at times, from the detail and see where the Epistle is leading us: first, to the eternal purposes of God; then, in the light of them, to live as the new humanity, here, now, in the business of life and all relationships; and, in fact, to fight the powers of evil and conquer them.

It is a grand Epistle and deserves the time, prayer, devotion and attention we can give to it. In it we meet the Father, the Son, the Spirit and the Family—and so, ourselves.

AUTHORSHIP

In our study we will not discuss in detail the matter of authorship. Two scholars, E.J. Goodspeed and C.L. Mitton, have argued quite strongly for the non-Pauline authorship of the letter. J.A. Allan has put their views clearly in his commentary. They deduce on linguistic grounds that it cannot be Paul who writes the Epistle. The Letter differs from the Epistles which are generally agreed to be Pauline in authorship in matters of style, emphasis and doctrine, the type of words, and patterns of teaching and argument. Both these writers agree that Ephesians (whose destination is not known) and Colossians (whose destination is known) have many parallels. However, they say such parallels tell against Pauline authorship. Various words used have different meanings in the two Epistles, as Ephesians also differs in word usage from other Pauline writings. The conclusion is that a student of Paul—one who espouses Paul—wrote the letter. He is said to have written in a different style but has basic Pauline thought—although extended beyond Paul in some ways, and perhaps falling short of him in other ways. Allan suggests that he is 'St. Paul set to music'. In other words, it is Paul's basic thought developed and presented by one who sees elements of value not contained in Paul himself. The theory has a certain element of attractiveness, particularly as the Epistle does not have the actual

name ‘Ephesus’ in the earliest manuscripts (1:1). Some writers—such as Mitton—argue that, because the references to Paul in the first person are awkward and unconvincing, and the doctrinal difference from other genuine Pauline Epistles is so great, that this rules out acceptance of Paul as the author of Ephesians.

The arguments for genuine Pauline authorship are, however, very strong. Until the 19th century Paul’s authorship was never contested. Ephesians was included in the earliest formal canon, that of Marcion the heretic who acknowledged Paul as his only authority. Its title was not ‘Ephesians’ but ‘Laodiceans’. Other collections of New Testament books agree that Ephesians is Pauline. Elements of its language are traceable in the writings of Clement of Rome (about A.D. 95), Ignatius, Polycarp, Hermas and possibly the Didache. The letter to the Ephesians must, then, have been written before A.D. 95.

The Epistle itself has the name of Paul in its opening, and also in the body of the Epistle (3:1). There is also a number of details which Paul gives concerning himself (1:15, 16; 3:1, 3–4, 7, 13, 14; 4:1; 5:32; 6:19–22). He obviously knows the circumstances of his readers, as also they have knowledge of him, even apart from the Epistle. The structure of the Epistle can also be shown to be essentially Pauline, including its language and literary affinities. Those who are for and those who are against Pauline authorship both agree that the ideas in Ephesians are essentially Pauline, although the former see new ideas which they cannot concede as contained in any way in the corpus of Paul’s writings. For example, the opponents of Pauline authorship suggest that the concept of the Church has new emphases. In the Letter to the

Ephesians it is doubtful, however, that this can be pressed.¹¹

DESTINATION

Just as the Pauline authorship is debated, so is the destination. The oldest Greek codices have the word ‘Ephesus’ omitted. On the other hand many of the ancient manuscripts, and all of the later manuscripts, included the words ‘in Ephesus’. This evidence is by no means to be rejected. Irenaeus cites Ephesians 5:30 as being in the Epistle to the Ephesians. Clement of Alexandria cites Ephesians 5:21–23 in the same way. Tertullian contests Marcion’s statement that the letter was to Laodiceans. Epiphanius infers that Marcion only had parts of the letter, anyway. So there is no substantial argument for it being addressed to Laodicea (cf. Colossians 4:16 which could possibly refer to what is known as ‘Ephesians’).

Internal evidence does not seem to suggest a particular church, as Paul mentions no names—most unusual for him. This lends weight to the idea that it was a circular letter, but again there is no evidence that such letters were the custom of the day. Still, Paul may have devised this idea. Ephesians 1:15 does seem to indicate personal knowledge of a church, but then this could have been of a group of churches. If the letter had been a circular one, it could have been applicable to them all.

¹ The reader should read Guthrie pp. 100-110 for the arguments against Pauline authorship and pp. 110-127 for a refutation of this position.

It is possible that 'in Ephesus' (1:1) may have been dropped for some reason. We cannot be sure either way. One thing is certain: the letter was written and remains most valuable for all readers today, as it would have been then.

PLACE OF WRITING

Was it in Rome or was it in Caesarea that Paul wrote this Epistle? We do know it was written from prison (3:1; 4:1; 6:20). And the strongest evidence (which we do not examine here) seems to be for the imprisonment at Rome. If this were the case then the date of writing would be about A.D. 61.

EPHESIANS CHAPTER ONE

Verses 1–2 The Salutation

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus:

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

These verses constitute the salutation found in much the same form in all of Paul's Letters. As stated in the Introduction, for certain reasons some scholars do not think this is a Letter actually written by Paul because they consider that the language and much of the thought is other than Paul's. But nearly all commentators agree that its teaching is Pauline in essence and some suggest that a disciple of Paul has written the Epistle. We will leave this discussion aside in favour of seeing it as written by Paul. For the moment we will not discuss the aim and theology of the Letter but incorporate it as we proceed through the text. Paul's statement of his being an apostle is essential for claiming authority for what he writes. A study of all his salutations will show that he was called into his special office 'not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father' (Galatians 1:1); 'set apart for the gospel of God' (Romans 1:1); 'by command of God our Saviour and of Jesus Christ our hope' (I Timothy 1:1); 'by the will of God according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus' (II Timothy 1:1). As an apostle he is a slave of Jesus

Christ. Those at Ephesus would have known his apostleship contained his full knowledge of Jesus Christ, and hence his full knowledge of the whole plan of God from creation to the ultimate new creation, as is shown by the Letter itself. 'By the will of God' is not simply by one decision of God but also by the continuing will of God. Nothing can subvert this apostleship. The reason that this is important is that the truth Christ taught, the work He did and the person that He was understood by them when the Spirit came at Pentecost and brought full revelation. These were the men who understood Christ in the light of the Old Testament, and the Old Testament in the light of Christ, so that what is called 'the Apostolic truth' emerged, was written down as well as preached, and is available for us today as it was then. Had it not been written, the oral passing on of it down through the ages would have corrupted this body of truth.

He addresses the Ephesians as 'the saints', meaning that they have been sanctified by God as His people for worship and service to Him. As saints they have shown themselves faithful to God 'in Christ Jesus'. Many explanations have been written about this preposition 'in'. But it is immensely important that we understand that 'in' carries the ideas both of the locative (*in* Christ), and the instrumental (*by* Christ) —saints and believers living and working in the sphere of Christ, to say nothing of Christ working in them.

The invocation of 'grace' and 'peace' (*verse 2*) is regular for that age, but both these gifts or actions of God must be seen for the great dynamic they represented. Their importance cannot be over stressed. The source of them is from 'God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'. We see that God is first

'God our Father', a most intimate relating of us to Him. Such is not found in the Old Testament. In verse 3 He is called 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. Grace and peace come from 'the Lord Jesus Christ'. 'Lord Jesus Christ' is not a name but three designations. 'Lord', as we will see, contains His rule over all creation; 'Jesus' means 'Jehovah saves'; and 'Christ' means 'Messiah', the high name for the person of Israel's expectancy.

Verses 3–14 The Whole Spiritual Blessing

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. ⁵ He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ which he lavished upon us. ⁹ For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

¹¹ In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him,

were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Verse 3 introduces a section called a *pericope* since all the sections hold together. ‘Blessed be...’ opens the pericope. It is for all that follows that Paul blesses God. Human blessing of God is what we call ‘doxology’—the word of praise. In the many passages in the Old and New Testaments where God is blessed it is an overflow of the heart occasioned by the sight and understanding of God. When such things as glory and power and majesty and honour are ascribed to God they are not *given* to Him but are recognised as being elements of His Being and action. It is ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ who is blessed, and the blessing is because of the blessings that He has poured on us *in* Christ. Blessing, then, is always given to God for blessings He has given to humanity and His creation. Paul introduces the act of blessing that comes to us ‘in Christ’ and ‘in the heavenly places’. We will develop the term ‘heavenly places’ as we go along, but for the moment we can call it the realm of Christ and His Church. The term ‘every’ (Gk. *panta*) can also be rendered ‘every kind of’ or ‘all’, in which case ‘blessing’ is ‘blessings’, but probably it is best translated ‘the whole spiritual blessing’. In Romans 15:29 Paul speaks of ‘the fullness of the blessing of Christ’.

The little word ‘even’ in *verse 4* is indicating that all the blessings following are the substance of the full blessing. The first blessing is: ‘he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him’. ‘Before the foundation of the world’ was when this happened, but it was

with a view to the creation. The other blessings were also determined before the foundation of the world. ‘Holy and blameless’ is a term often found in the New Testament. Mankind was never spoken of as ‘holy’ at the time of creation. ‘Holy and blameless before him’ has an eschatological connotation. But the term can also be accorded to redeemed humanity now. This matter is worth considering more deeply. Man cannot stand before God unless he has been made holy by God’s grace. The ‘in love’ can refer either to the first blessing (holiness) or the second blessing (sonship) but in fact it relates to ‘the whole blessing’.

The second blessing—or part of the whole blessing—is, ‘He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will’ (*verse 5*). This means that presently and eschatologically we are sons of God. Whilst Israel was God’s son, and its members were children of God, yet passages such as Romans 8:14–17 and Galatians 4:4–7 show us the amazing reality that God is the Father of His people, the Church. We will see that Gentiles and Jews, having faith, now know God as Father. Such sonship is ‘through Jesus Christ’ and is ‘according to the purpose of his will’, that is, ‘according to his good pleasure’. Such sonship is ‘to the praise of his glorious grace’ for, whilst Adam was created to be the son of God (Luke 3:38) and all humanity to be children of God (Acts 17:28), yet it is by grace that sonship is accorded to fallen humanity, so great a gift it is. In *verse 6*, ‘glorious grace’ speaks of the lavish nature of that grace which is to do with holiness, sonship, acceptance in the Beloved, redemption, and, the forgiveness of trespasses. It required lavish grace to make all these things become true for us. The term

‘the Beloved’ undoubtedly refers to Christ, and refers to God’s love for Him, and to His being chosen by the Father for the works of the blessing.

‘In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace’ (*verse 7*). All of this is an immense work only understood when we follow the passages which refer to Christ’s death, both in this Letter and other places in the Old and New Testaments. No wonder Paul speaks of grace being *lavished* upon us (*verse 8*). It would seem, from the text, that *verses 9 and 10* are included in the ‘grace which he lavished upon us’. That is, it is of His grace that we come to know ‘the mystery of his will’. To know this *mysterion* or ‘secret’ of God’s will, that which He has decided for humanity and creation, requires ‘wisdom and insight’. Wisdom is the ability given to understand God’s mysteries, whatever they may be. Insight is seeing into them, but is a grace granted, since human reasoning alone could not arrive at that which is a secret. In Paul’s Letter ‘the mystery’ or ‘the secret’ is a truth opened by grace to one who has been prepared by God to hear it. In this case the mystery is the purpose which God has set forth in Christ for the fullness of time²—the climax or *telos*—when He will unite in Christ ‘all things in heaven and things on earth’. Without such wisdom and insight the secret will remain a secret. Those who understand it see the extent of God’s grace in unifying or heading up all things in Christ as the climax of God’s action in this universe, which includes the celestial sphere. That is, the ‘all things’ are both terrestrial and celestial. We ought not pass this by casually as a

matter of biblical fact, but see it as the whole drive of God’s action in the history He makes and controls. It is, in fact, the key to all history from the initial creation to the new creation.

In *verses 11 to 14*, the blessing continues. Having announced the unifying of all things in Christ, who had Himself at the beginning created them thus (Colossians 1:15–17), Paul—by talking of ‘we’ and ‘you’—is bringing in the fact of Jews and Gentiles as separate entities, which was hitherto a disunifying factor in human, creational unity. He thus states the case of one great division which would have to be healed in Christ’s unifying work. In *verses 11 and 12* Paul speaks of God accomplishing all things ‘according to the counsel of his will’, which means the wisdom or decision of His will. As we have seen, what He is accomplishing is the unification of all things. In this plan Israel is chosen (predestined) first as God’s appropriated children to be the first entity in relation to Christ’s unification. ‘We who first hoped’ are the Jews who were given the gifts of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and following. In *verse 13* the Gentiles followed them. Israel has been appointed ‘to live for the praise of his glory’, a constant theme of the Old Testament in regard to them (e.g. Isaiah 43:1–21).

The Gentiles—‘you also’—are now ‘*in Christ*’, for they ‘have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation’, so that they are now in the faith with the Christian portion of Israel in the Church. They ‘have believed in him’ and have been ‘sealed with the promised Holy Spirit’. The Holy Spirit had been promised as well as being the eschatological Spirit of

² The text really says ‘for an administration (stewardship) of the fullness of time’

promise, the Spirit linked with the promised *telos*.³ The Spirit sealing ‘us’—that is, ‘we’ and ‘you’—is the guarantee of the whole inheritance in Christ, making sure we are so kept that we will ultimately receive it. Ephesians 4:30 shows that the Spirit seals us for the day of redemption—the Lord’s Day, the climax of history which is God’s aim and purpose. At this point Paul exclaims ‘to the praise of his glory!’ meaning that both Jew and Gentile in Christ are to be to the praise of God’s glory in what God has done for them, through the gospel, and in pledging them their inheritance in the Holy Spirit. We note that in 1:6 it is adoption and redemption which makes them to be ‘to the praise of his glorious grace’. Here the Church is to be simply ‘to the praise of his glory’, a fulfilment for which He created Man, and will unify them with the rest of ‘all things’ by the end of the age—the *aeon* (cf. 1:21). Then ‘every spiritual blessing’ begun in 1:3 will be completed.

Verses 15–23 Paul’s First Prayer—for Enlightenment

¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,

³ For the promised Spirit see Joel 2:28f.; Acts 2:17f.; John 1:33; 16:5-15; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4, 5, 8. Some of these texts may be understood as relating to the eschatological promise. Certainly II Corinthians 1:22; Galatians 3:14; Ephesians 1:13; relate to the eschaton. Romans 8:18ff. should be read in this light.

the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; ²² and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

There are three tests to the Christian life or, more correctly, one: namely, the triad of the three virtues faith, hope and love. Paul picks up these traits in all his churches and commends his converts on their possession of faith and love. In Ephesians Paul remarks on their *faith*, the necessity for all living, and *love*, the greatest of the three—‘because I have heard of ... your love toward all the saints’ (*verse 15*)—a remarkable matter. Paul is about to press on them the significant matter of *hope*. With positivity he tells them he is ceaseless in his thanksgiving⁴ for them—those who have ‘every spiritual blessing’. His prayer—‘remembering you in my prayers’—is made to the only true source of blessing and of answering, namely ‘the God

⁴ Thanksgiving can only come from a full heart—one with the whole blessing—conscious of the goodness that he sees. Paul’s constant use of the principle of thanksgiving is remarkable.

of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory'. This phrase is used in verse 2, and speaks of a concentrated unity of Father and Son, the Father being 'all glorious' or 'the sum and source of all glory'. Glory contemplated as an object is not only God Himself but all His power, His suzerainty, that which will one day cover the whole earth visibly—His glory which is His holiness made manifest. Knowing this to be the power to which to appeal, in *verse 17* Paul prays for 'a spirit⁵ of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him', God, which is linked with the 'wisdom and insight' of 1:9. He may be praying regarding the Holy Spirit (cf. Isaiah 11:2), but the result would be that each person would have wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God.

The prayer in *verse 18* is for the inward sight—'the eyes of your hearts enlightened'—to come in such clarity of insight that three things may be known.⁶ Firstly, 'the hope to which he has called you'. This is the first matter to be unveiled and understood with given wisdom, and it is breathtaking. The hope is that which the Gentiles never had (cf. 2:12, 'having no hope') and that which Israel knew prophetically and by faith (cf. Hebrews 11). It is all that lies ahead, and, in particular, at what we call 'the End' or 'the Climax'.

⁵ Paul may be using 'Spirit' rather than 'spirit'. It is notable that when Paul uses the term 'a spirit' it generally means an habituated spirit, one taught by the Spirit but come to be a characteristic of the practicing Christian (e.g. II Timothy 1:7 not 'a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control').

⁶ Knowing' here is not merely *noetic*—an idea in mind—but personal, intimate, existential, dynamic. Only with such knowledge can the heart and life be powerfully transformed.

Paul comments on this hope in Romans 8:17–30, as also in other places. Without hope we are hopeless. Hope embraces the unification and reconciliation of all things which lead to the new heavens and the new earth, the great *telos* or climactic goal—in fact, that for which the Spirit has sealed us—the *inheritance of all things*. Secondly, this hope is thus linked with 'the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints', which can mean on the one hand 'the glorious riches which the saints will inherit' or 'the rich inheritance of the saints themselves made glorious which the Father calls His inheritance'. The text permits either and perhaps they finally amount to the one, since in Revelation 21:24 and 26 the kings of the nations bring the glory and honour of the nations into the Holy City whilst at the same time inheriting the glory of that City. Romans 8:21 and 29 speak of 'the glorious liberty of the children of God' each having been conformed to the image of the glorious Son. Thus, thirdly, the saints may know 'what is the immeasurable [excelling] greatness of his power [*dunamis*] in [or, *towards*, *for* or *over*] us who believe, according to the working of his great might', that is 'the operation of the might [*kratos*] of the strength [*tes ischuos*] of him' (*verse 19*). The immensity of this power is such as to raise Christ from the dead, effect His ascension and cause Him to be seated at the right hand of God in the heavenlies—with all that resurrection, ascension and session imply.

Thus we see that 'a spirit of wisdom and revelation' of God enlightens the faithful to see the hope, the inheritance and the power of God in and for them. The sight of that power working in Christ is expanded when it is seen that the elevation of Christ is 'far above all rule [*arches*] and authority [*exousias*] and power

[*dunameos*] and lordship [*kuriotetos*] and every name [*onomatos*] that is named not only in this age [*aeon*] but also in the age [*aeon*⁷] to come' so that 'he [God] has put all things under his [Christ's] feet'.⁸ As eternal Son and Word it would seem this was His place, but it is as a *man*⁹ that He now rules and 'for the church'—an entity not existent in His pre-incarnation being. He is clearly head of the Kingdom—of *all things*—for the Church. The Church is His Body. It is said to be 'the fullness of him who fills all in all'. This thought is also present in Philippians 2:9–11 where, because of the death on the Cross, it will come to pass 'that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father'. Here, in *verses 22 to 23*, the Church is seen to have all the fullness of Christ. So filling 'all in all' will be the completing of the plan for universal unity. To 'fill' a thing is to give it its full embodiment as a created entity. Without Christ's fullness (*pleroma*) nothing has substance. For Him to 'fill all things' is to head them up in Himself, which is to unify them, especially through reconciliation.

⁷ All the rulers presently in the hierarchy of authority may not necessarily be those who will rule in the hierarchy of the future aeon. Certainly evil powers will have been unseated and destroyed.

⁸ Psalm 110:1 is quoted, *put under feet*, meaning total sovereignty over all things and this important thought is repeated in Acts 2:34f.; Hebrews 1:2, 13; 10:13; Romans 8:34; Colossians 3:1; 1 Peter 3:22 and other places.

⁹ The cry in the early Church was not 'Christ is Lord' but 'Jesus is Lord'. By this is meant the man Jesus, rather than a creature that is of a higher order than a human being.

EPHESIANS CHAPTER TWO

Verses 1–3: Gentiles and Jews in the Death State

¹ And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Verses 1 to 3 constitute one sentence in the Greek, and *verses 4 to 7* another. In 1 to 3 Paul undoubtedly has 1:20–21 in mind, namely the great power which believers are to know by inner enlightenment. This power must be kept in mind when the past state of the Gentiles—now Christians—is kept in mind. These Gentiles were ‘*dead through trespasses and sins*’. This is a shocking state, scarcely to be understood apart from revelation. Calvin says, ‘We are all born as dead men, and we live as dead men, until we are made partakers of Christ. Out of Christ, we are altogether dead because sin, the cause of death, reigns in us’. The death is moral and spiritual. We are dead by original sin in which we were partakers and which was

not simply imputed to us,¹⁰ and we are also dead—living in death—through the many sins (‘falling short of the mark’) and trespasses (‘falling from the way’) we have committed. They are the fruits of the death of original sin. Most versions insert ‘he made alive’ because a number of thoughts are stated but no counteraction is indicated. So that ‘made alive’ in verse 1 is not part of the text. Rather the idea is in verse 5. Gentiles walked in death (cf. 4:17ff.) and they were thus forced to be ‘following the course [*aeon*] of this world [*kosmos*], following the prince of the power of the air’.

Paul has introduced two ideas, the first being *aeon-kosmos* or ‘world system’. In 1:21 we have ‘this age [*aeon*]’, but here it is particularised as an age that is not good. Verse 2 explains the age: ‘following the prince of the power of the air’. This age is ruled over by this prince.¹¹ All who are dead are in the grip of ‘the age’ (Galatians 1:4) and its leader. This ruler has ‘the authority of the air’ where it is supposed that evil spirits dwell and move (cf. 6:12) and he *energises within* ‘the sons of disobedience’. This ruler has power which energises evil actions in those under his authority. Conversely, in Ephesians 1:20 and Philippians 2:12–13, God does the *energising*. ‘Children of wrath’ are under God’s wrath (Romans 1:18–32).

In *verse 3* Paul, by the use of ‘we’, includes himself and so all Jews. In the face of God being their God

they nevertheless have—as do the Gentiles—lived ‘in the passions [lusts] of our [their] flesh’. ‘Flesh’ here is the ego-centre and ego-power of Man. The phrase ‘desires of body and mind’ speaks of the way the mind imagines, visualises and wills, thereby bringing the body to aberrant, immoral action. ‘Children of wrath’ are thus those who do the will of the ruler of this ‘world-age’ (cf. John 8:44). ‘By nature’ (*phusei*)—that is, ‘innately’—yet not created by God after this manner. This nature is against pure created nature! If we miss the crass evil of (former) Gentiles and Jews we miss the dimensions of mercy, love and grace about to be revealed. The ‘wrath of God’ as seen in Romans 1:18–32 is catastrophic beyond the measure of the human mind.

Verses 4–7: Great Mercy, Love and Grace Is Wholly Effective

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

‘But God’ introduces the contrast of the past human scene and the present work of God. Sinful and dead Man under wrath cannot extricate himself from his horrible state for he has neither the will nor the power (cf. Romans 5:6). God is not described as ‘rich in

¹⁰See Romans 5:12; 6:23; Colossians 2:13; Hebrews 6:1; Ezekiel 37:1–14.

¹¹See II Corinthians 4:4, ‘god of this world’. Jesus called him ‘the ruler of this world’ in John 12:31; 14:30–31. Other Pauline references are Romans 12:2; I Corinthians 7:31. In I Corinthians 1:21ff. the age is spoken of as having its own ‘wisdom’.

wrath' for His wrath is provoked by evil because He is holy. Yet His holiness contains mercy. For Israel he was 'the Holy One of Israel—your Redeemer' (Isaiah 54:5). Mercy is not provoked, for mercy must be fully free and never an obligation. 'Out of his great love' can have the ideas of *from* or *through* this great love' and love must be seen to be dimensionless. Mercy is not only pity but pity which acts. The dimensions of evil are not so vast as to defy mercy, but mercy shrivels them to nought.

The 'even when we were dead...' (*verse 5*), is pointing back to the seething mass of evil, the terrifying death and the horrible immorality. But mercy compasses it all. Our state, 'dead in trespasses and sins', demands redemptive action (as in 1:7 to which it points) out of which comes life. 'Made us alive together with him' means participation in both His death (Cross) and resurrection, for 'by grace you have been saved'.¹² *Verse 6* shows that the power of 'this world-age' and 'the ruler of this world-age' have lost their power and hold. Indeed, the believers are not only raised but seated with Christ in the 'heavenly places'. The first act of God is to raise Christ and seat him in the heavenly places. And secondly, to seat us in the same place *in Christ*, 'with him'—Christ. Thus God is *with* Christ, and *in* Christ we are *with* God. This is a far cry from the wretchedness of the dead Jew and the dead Gentile. The dynamics of Christ's resurrection (cf. Philippians 3:10; Romans 4:25) are the active results of grace which are described in *verse 7* as being 'immeasurable riches'—the equivalent of 'lavished' in

¹²At this point passages such as Romans 6:1–10; Colossians 3:1–3; Galatians 2:19–21 are needed to see the action of co-crucifixion and co-resurrection with Christ.

1:8. It is in 'the coming ages', when grace will have completed its work, that the triumph of grace will be fully seen.¹³ This grace is 'in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus'. That kindness is grace, mercy and love of the dimensions which meet and overcome sinful Man and give him a place beyond any he has known, even in primal innocence. So vast an evil is so overwhelmingly overcome and outdistanced by the 'immeasurable riches of his grace'. 'Kindness' in human experience is always a sweet thing, in some ways beyond all others in its personal intimacy and aid. Grace is the action of that loving intimacy of God.

Verses 8–10: All of Grace with a View to Works

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not because of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Paul is firstly safeguarding the efficacy and reputation of grace. Grace is God's love always doing us good in restoring us from fallenness into being raised to the place of fellowship with God and participation in His great plan for His creation. For Man to think he has an essential part—or even the tiniest part—in this

¹³ 'The ages to come' certainly include 'the age to come' (1:21), but it envisages eschatological actions and even, perhaps, systems as yet unfolded to us, and it is in these and to these that the message of vast grace will come.

restorative action is to make grace less than all. Unless all is of grace, nothing is of grace: grace to be grace must be total. The living, actional expression of love is grace. Here note that grace is prior to faith (cf. Romans 3:24–25) lest grace appear to be a work of faith. Grace moves and faith responds: always God's grace shows His faithfulness which brings faith to life in the graced one. The word 'gift' here refers to salvation¹⁴ rather than to faith. But elsewhere faith is described as a gift (Philippians 1:29). Here it is 'grace ... *through* faith'. Colourfully, R.W. Dale says, 'Grace is love passing beyond all claims to love, conferring on a revolted race honours which no loyalty could have earned'.

In *verse 9*, Paul shows that the strong thrust of fallen Man is to justify himself by the works he does, and indeed fallen Man does boast in his accomplishments. Paul knows the dizzy danger of such boasting. It utterly cancels grace and effects nothing that is true. When boasting excludes God it includes Man alone. To boast about oneself is the antithesis of boasting in God and His Cross (Galatians 6:14). Paul, in saying 'For we are his workmanship' (*verse 10*), is indicating that we do not craft ourselves (cf. Romans 14:20; Philippians 1:6). The initial creation of us was a mighty work of *love*: the second work, the new creation, was a mighty work of *grace*. The restoration of the ruined human frame requires unimaginable work and energy. How trifling would be any contribution fallen Man might foolishly think he could make! 'Created in Christ Jesus for good works' must mean all the works of God's plan for His

¹⁴Note that there is something of a parallel in Galatians 3:6–14 where Paul tackled headlong the idea that works might justify a person.

creation and His people. This includes the creational mandate of Genesis 1:28f. and taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. Man's works are not just those which are morally good—they are works which are an outworking of the will of God.¹⁵ Walking in God's works constitutes the entire calling (vocation) of the believers who are, as such, the Church.

Verses 11–22: The Accomplished Unity of the Divisions of Humanity

11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18 for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens

¹⁵For those 'good works' which are from grace and which will have their rich reward. See Titus 2:14; Colossians 1:10; Revelation 2 and 3—'I know your works', hence Revelation 14:13.

with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²² in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

We remember the ‘mystery of his will’ of 1:9–10, that will be the unification of all things in Christ. Here we are to see the unification of the two sections of the human race, namely the Jews (the circumcised) and the Gentiles (the uncircumcised). We might think this is embarking on a simple description of the union of the two parts of the one human race. But this is the very heart-beat of all of Paul’s teaching. The Gentiles are as much bona fide people of God as the converted Jews! Galatians 3:28–29, I Corinthians 1:9–10 and 12:12–13 all spoke of all in the Church being utterly one in Christ Jesus. The unity of all things is the heart-beat of this Epistle.

The ‘Wherefore’ or ‘Therefore’ of *verse 11* is taking up what has been stated about Gentiles and Jews in verses 1–10 of this chapter. The ‘remember’ is not stated as a mere act of the mind. It means that they must keep aware of the great event which has occurred, which will seem ordinary unless they go back—as former Gentiles—to their terrible condition. Christians today have not experienced the tragic state of affairs known to these former converts. But they had better ‘remember’ also. The Christian Jews of Paul’s time were often powerfully aware of their cultural and religious conditions, despising—some of them—even the Gentiles who had become Christian.

This same cultural, ethnic problem is present today in some areas.

‘Gentiles in the flesh’ refers to those whose humanity was an uncircumcised one. The Jews had a flesh which was circumcised, and thus the two were in fiercely separate categories. The Messiah, ‘Christ’, belonged to Israel (Romans 9:4–5). The Gentiles could lay no claim to Him. They were utterly out in the cold, ‘alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise’ (*verse 12*). These privileges which Israel had—together with their high responsibilities—were never really realised until they came into Christ, and then how desirable they appeared! These are special words: ‘covenants’, ‘promise’, ‘commonwealth’. Even now we ponder them with wonder and study them deeply. We ask, ‘What would have been the Gentile hope?’ And the answer is that, in accordance with the truth of the gospel, there was none. Golden stories of the past existed, but no authentic eschatology lay in Gentile thinking. So they were *atheoi*—atheists, without a true God. So life in the world was futile. What a state they were in! How hopeless!

Against this terrible picture Paul inserts ‘But now...!’ with all its wonderful things (*verse 13*). The wonderful things are ‘in Christ Jesus’. ‘Far off’ was the term for the place of Gentiles before God, as it was for the wicked (cf. Isaiah 57:19–21). The good news is ‘brought near^[16] in the blood of Christ’, of which Paul has spoken in 1:7 (‘through his blood’). How are the Gentiles brought near? Answer: ‘By the death of the

¹⁶This was a term used for Gentiles who were proselytes, those having become Jews through certain rituals.

Cross'. What has happened on the Cross has changed everything, though Paul at this point does not say how. 'For he is our peace' in *verse 14* is a statement which sums up the Hebrew idea of *shalom*: security, rest, tranquillity, because of being in God. Even circumstantial and relational turmoil cannot disturb this peace. Paul is saying that Christ Himself is our peace: our peace is in Him. Peace also holds the idea of reconciliation and that fits well here. He has brought this to Jew and Gentile alike so that they are one. The partition wall in the temple which divided the court of the Gentiles from the Jewish court of sacrifice—a wall five feet high and which a Gentile passed over under threat of death—was now broken down. Both sections of the human race are now reconciled to God through the death of the Cross.

This reconciliation is made possible by removing the cause of separation. All human beings are hostile to God through sin and its guilt and when Christ bears this guilt—as is shown elsewhere—the cause of separation between the sinful Jew and God, the Gentile and God, and between Jew and Gentile, is removed. Hostility between Jew and Gentile was marked by the Jewish law and its ordinances, and Christ¹⁷ abolished these in His flesh. Now the grounds of reconciliation of both Jew and Gentile are complete. This reconciliation may be described as

¹⁷The wider question of Christ abolishing the penal judgement of the law of God for both Jew and Gentile is not overt here. Jews and Gentiles could not be together in full worship, and Christ abolished this divisive action of the Mosaic law. As to fulfilling the penal demands of the law, we have passages such as Romans 3:19–31; 8:1–4; Galatians 2:16–21; 3:10–26; Colossians 2:13–14 which spell out Man's liberation.

follows: Christ on the Cross, when He took all humanity into His suffering and death, melted down the two humanities of Jew and Gentile and minted a new humanity—one which Adolf Harnack called 'the third race'. A new humanity is a re-creational miracle, bringing created-but-fallen humanity to be one Body in love. So He proclaimed both reconciliation and peace of spirit to those 'afar off' (the Gentiles) and those 'who were near' (the Jews—cf. Isaiah 52:7; 57:19). Now none need be 'afar off' or even 'near'. All are one in Christ. The plan of 1:9–10 is complete in the new unity.

Verse 18 shows how complete this unity is, for 'through him we both'—Jew and Gentile—'have access *in one Spirit* to the Father'. Here is a Trinitarian act, the Three Persons ensuring *access* to the Father. The act of access is denoted in Romans 5:1–2, Ephesians 3:12 and here. Hebrews 10:19–22 describes that access fully according to the theology of that Epistle. It is an awesome and marvellous gift. No wonder the power of the work of the Cross is required. The access means that the openness of God to redeemed humanity is now accomplished: the whole world may come to Him who is 'the Father'. It is now quite clear that Jesus is the *way* to, the *truth* of, and the life *from* the Father.

Verses 19 to 21 speak of the amazing outcome of the unifying of Jew and Gentile by the work of the Cross. 'So then' brings a contrast between the sinful nature of Gentiles in 2:1–3, their lonely desperate plight of 2:11–12, and their reconciliation. The 'you' used here refers directly to the Gentiles. No longer strangers and sojourners they are one with the Household of God—a term for covenant Israel—and are fellow citizens and members of the Family of the

Father. They are one with their Jewish peers. This Household of God was built for *both* Jews and Gentiles. Therefore the Household is not complete in Israel's former situation. But it has been built on the foundation of 'the apostles and prophets'.¹⁸ The apostles bring 'the apostolic truth', and this is supported by the utterances of the true prophets. The 'cornerstone' is Christ Himself and not simply the doctrine of Christ, though there can be no Christ without doctrine. Christ Himself is the active support and basis of the whole temple. We notice the 'joined together' (*verse 21*) spoken of all members. They all constitute the one whole, the 'holy temple in the Lord'. For the members of the Church are 'built into it' and are integral to it, 'it' being the new temple, the one prophesied by the Old Testament prophets. This is the new Household, the new place of worship, the new temple. And it is ever-living, ever growing—a thought which Peter takes up in his First Letter (2:4–10). In this temple God the Father now dwells. The Spirit is both in the formation of the temple, and in the worship of the Father in the temple.

¹⁸It is debated whether the prophets here are: the prophets of Israel who foretold this new, spiritual people and temple; or the prophets of the early Church; or both. The fact that the apostles are mentioned first would seem to indicate that the prophets were those of the early Church (cf. 4:11; 3:5; I Corinthians 12:8).

EPHESIANS CHAPTER THREE

Verses 1–13: The Mystery of the Plan

1 For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— 2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. 4 When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; 6 that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which was given me by the working of his power. 8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; 10 that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose which he has realised in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and confidence of access through our faith in him. 13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

Paul's opening words—'For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles'—are the beginning of a sentence which is not completed in the pericope of verses 1–13. These opening words of verse 1 are repeated in verse 14. Here Paul gives the reason which he did not declare in the first verse. The section following verse 1 (verses 2–13) is, however, linked with the first verse. Paul is telling them that he is a prisoner for 'you Gentiles'. He would have been a free man if he has not been made an apostle to the Gentiles. This being an apostle to the Gentiles is a theme which keeps coming up in the Acts and Paul's Epistles. It is found strongly in Galatians, especially in 2:7, in Acts 15, and this Ephesian Letter. Most powerfully it is seen in the message Christ gave to Paul at the time of his conversion on the road to Damascus (cf. Galatians 1:16; Acts 22:21; 26:17f.). We know that had Paul not gone to the Gentiles, he could have been free of persecution by his fellow countrymen.¹⁹ Having mentioned this fact, that he was a prisoner for the Gentiles, Paul dives immediately into the matter of the mystery of God's plan. He is continuing it from 1:9–14, if indeed it has not been the heart of the text from 1:3 through to this point in chapter three.

In *verse 2* he speaks of 'the stewardship of God's grace (*oikonomian tes charitos*) that was given to me for you'. Paul sees his apostolic ministry as a grace of stewardship (cf. I Corinthians 4:1–2 and Colossians 1:25 where the RSV has 'divine office', the NRSV 'God's commission'). Here Paul is saying that 'God's grace of stewardship' is not only to do with God's

grace which benefacts those for whom Christ died, but is linked with a wide ministry, linked with the vast coverage of grace in 'the mystery' which is all of grace. This includes: 'the mystery of his will' (1:9–10); 'the counsel of his will' (1:11); 'the mystery' (3:3); 'the mystery of Christ' (3:4); and 'the plan of the mystery hidden for ages' (3:9). It is parallel in meaning to 'the unsearchable riches of Christ' (3:8) and 'the eternal purpose which he has realised in Christ Jesus' (3:11). Grace is needed for one to be inducted into the 'dispensation' or 'economy' of this grace—grace is needed to redeem and save, but all that God is doing in His plan is the extent and action of His grace.

This putting together of all these elements may be preemptive of what is written in the verses ahead of 3:2 (as well as prior to that verse), but Paul is 'assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace', and in *verse 3* says he has already written of it briefly. Now he will write in fuller measure. To what, then, does it all amount? What is the mystery Paul has a ministry to unfold? The answer must be along the following lines.

In other ages the whole matter of the *Church* was not known. The *Church* is the mystery. What Paul has written above is the matter of the *Church*, Jew and Gentile being in one Body, the surpassing of the holy apparatus of the temple by the building of the new temple. In the new temple—composed of the living stones of all believers drawn into one unity by the blood of the Cross and by the wall of partition (hostility) having been broken down—God dwells by the Spirit. Whatever may be the importance of ethnic

¹⁹Paul looks on this imprisonment as an actual calling and therefore a privilege (Ephesians 4:1; II Timothy 1:8; Philemon 9).

Israel—and Paul is not concerned to deal²⁰ with it here—the mystery of Christ is the mystery of the Church which is that both Jew and Gentile are one: ‘the Gentiles are *fellow heirs, members of the same body,*^[21] and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel’ (verse 6). The mystery is that whereas there was never such a body as this there now is this Body and none is afore and none behind the other. To borrow Galatians 3:28 (fortified by I Corinthians 12:12–13 and Colossians 3:9–10), not only are all one in Christ Jesus but Christ Jesus is the one in whom all constitute the *Church*.

We know that in the Old Testament there are prophecies of Gentiles coming to Israel to gain sustenance from the kings of Israel and to learn the ways of the law and walk in them. But in the face of these prophecies, and other Old Testament references, Paul is saying that it was not revealed to those other (prophetic) generations what the present—that is, contemporary to Paul—apostles and prophets have had revealed to them. The revelation is the mystery and wonder of the Church. The living of the Gentiles

²⁰Paul deals with the importance of ethnic Israel in Romans 9–11.

²¹There is certainly room here for the thought that the Church was prior to Christ, and that it was the Body of all holy Jewish believers, so that in Christ the Gentiles join this Body. Acts 7:38 seems to point to the *qahal* of Israel as being prior to the Church, but the question is, ‘Is it the same *qahal* simply added to at Pentecost or does the new Body come into being as Jew and Gentile together, through one Spirit come to the Father, being constituted the one Body, the new race, the new holy temple?’

in this mystery is through the gospel, the good news which redeemed them.

It might seem that there is a separate pericope of *verses 7 to 13* but it is really a continuity of the same material as opened to us in the preceding part of the pericope. Paul is now enlarging on what his *oikonomos* (commission, ministry) really is. He has received a ‘servantship’—one which no one could, or would dare to take upon himself. He has been graced by God, not in being saved but in having this privilege of unfolding the mystery. And for this ministry Paul has needed from God, ‘*the energising of His dynamic*’. This is what has changed the persecutor Saul into the indefatigable Apostle to the Gentiles, the one who is: ‘to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ’; and ‘to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things’. By ‘the unsearchable riches of Christ’ Paul does not mean Christ’s omniscience—His knowledge of all things or the glories contained within Him—so much as the One by whom and through whose resources the mystery of the plan comes to its fulfilment. ‘To make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things’ means that this man—this human being, the least of all apostles—should be God’s agent to revealate ‘the mystery of the plan’. Properly comprehended, this is the most remarkable *oikonomos* which has ever been given to a human being. Undoubtedly, Christ is the completer of the plan. And, undoubtedly, that mystery is the Church and all that pertains to it dynamically, historically and eschatologically.

That it is of the utmost importance is seen by the fact that: God created all things, for the whole mystery

of the plan is tied up in the reality and purpose of creation; and the wisdom of God in His plan is a multi-faceted or variegated wisdom (of many components), to be shown ‘to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places’ (*verse 10*). That is, all celestial creatures—probably those fallen and those unfallen—are to see what God is about in His history. This is always to be the current news ‘in heavenly places’. Whether they need to know in order to conform with or be beaten by this mystery, we do not know. But we do know that all of it is indispensable to God’s creation—the world. As Paul says plainly, ‘This was according to the eternal purpose which he has realised in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (*verse 11*). We note that the *purpose* was there prior to all creation (cf. 1:3ff.) and that it *has been* realised. Nothing can reverse the accomplishment. The eschaton will show this to be the case. We are in Christ, and because the plan has been realised, and because we are *in Christ*, therefore ‘we have boldness and confidence of access through our faith in him’ (*verse 12*). We have already seen in 2:18 that we have access by the Cross, by the blood of Christ and by the Holy Spirit—so much so that we do not come timidly, or lacking strong hope. No, we have ‘boldness and confidence of access’. The Ephesian readers who despair for Paul being a prisoner, and wonder how this man can pit his limited energies against the leaders of Judaism and the Roman Empire, are told to use the ‘boldness and confidence of access’ and not to be faint-hearted. As for Paul, his ministry on their behalf—no matter what the suffering may be—is glory for them, especially as they share the mystery and the suffering that revelation will bring.

Verses 14–21: Strengthened and Empowered for Participation in the Mystery

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, 17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

In *verse 14* Paul resumes the words of *verse 1* and at the same time explains them. He is bowing his knees—which action was rarer than the standing for prayer that the pious mostly used—for power for the readers of the Letter. They need power to live and work in the fulfilment of the mystery. To *kneel* in this way probably indicates that Paul was deeply moved. His address to the Father is understandable in the light of 1:1–3. That God is Father is a great Christian doctrine whose reality is unique. Paul keeps putting it forward in this passage and indeed until 4:6. These verses of 14 to 21 are really built on the grand truth of the previous verses of the chapter. The whole matter of ‘the mystery’ and ‘the plan’ fires Paul with prayers for his reading brethren.

He prays to God as Father, which is only possible through participation in the mystery. God is the One by whom every family on heaven and earth is named. Whilst some take refuge in the fact that God's Fatherhood is figurative and not ontological, this is a vain manoeuvre. To say that humans cannot have God as their Father because they are of a different substance or quality (*ousia*) is not tenable. Jesus thought of God as Father to His humanity, as also to His Deity, and Galatians explains that baptism into Christ is baptism into His Sonship. Participation in that Sonship gives the privilege of approaching God as Father. Perhaps in the statement, 'every family in heaven and on earth is named', is the inclusion of celestial families or orders of creatures. But that need not occupy us here, now. Paul has already spoken of the Church as 'the household of God' (2:19). Likewise, the principle of 'family' as seen in I Timothy 3:15—'the household of God' and 'the pillar and bulwark (fortress) of the truth'—gives us much to go on for addressing God as Father.

In 1:17 God is the Father or Founder and Source of all glory. Glory is not something God stores. It is His constant action of working out His plan. And Paul wants his listeners to be equipped to be participators in this—hence his prayer that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith (*verse 17*). This requires the work of the Spirit to accomplish that 'strengthening with might' in the 'inner man' or 'core person'. For Christ to indwell is 'the hope of glory' (Colossians 1:27), hence His indwelling is no light thing. We might say that a person has to take the weight of the moral glory of Christ. Even so it is 'by faith', meaning surely that trust is in Christ to do what God would do by such an

indwelling. In this case it is an immeasurable stabilising of the person and the Community—the rooting and grounding of them all so that no adverse crisis can ever uproot the tree or overthrow the building. The rooting and grounding is in love. We know that the triad of faith, hope and love is never missing in Christian life and growth. The strengthening of the person and Community is so that they 'may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth' (*verse 18*), though of what Paul does not say explicitly. Is he thinking here of the dimensions of the plan, the dimensions of God, or the love of Christ? We are not told which one is the object of these remarkable dimensions. We can easily conclude 'of God' for He alone outspans all others, but then Christ is of those dimensions and the love of Christ of the same, and so we put them together. In concert 'with all the saints', and not apart from that concerted action and relationship, we come to be 'filled with all the fullness of God' (*verse 19*). To be filled with all the fullness of God is an amazing concept, let alone an experience to be anticipated. But then Romans 5:5 tells us that our hearts are flooded with the love of God brought by the Holy Spirit. We saw that the Church is the very fullness of Christ, that Christ is presently filling 'all things' and that we are to go on being filled with the Holy Spirit. Indeed we are filled full in Him (Christ) for we have 'the fullness of the blessing of Christ', the one 'who fills all in all'.²² It is with 'the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge' that we are filled. And this is not simply a *subjective* and so a *felt* experience so much as it is an *objective*

²²See Ephesians 1:23; 4:10; 5:18; Colossians 2:9; Romans 15:29.

happening, the very happening for which Paul is praying since he knows that without it his talk of plan, mystery, revelation and the life will be meaningless. Paul's prayer will be fulfilled when they are filled full according to the riches of the Father's glory.

The benediction-ascription of *verses 20 to 21* is really Paul's statement that his prayer is authentically based. The 'power at work within us' Paul knows is not only *capable* of doing a work well above 'all that we ask or think', but *is* presently working—working in erstwhile Jew, erstwhile Gentile, in the present believing Community—in order to fulfil 'the plan of the mystery'. From Paul then comes the doxology which is at the same time a further prayer that the Church may glorify the Father and the Father glorify the Church and glorify His Christ, of whom are spoken these words. For this working is in and for all generations and so for ever and ever.

EPHESIANS CHAPTER FOUR

Verses 1–6: The Unity of the Church and Maintaining It

1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

It is legitimate for Paul to remind them that he is a prisoner. In 3:1 he calls himself a prisoner for the cause of the Gentiles—which was certainly true. Here he is a prisoner *en Kurio*, that is, ‘in the Lord’ (NRSV). But RSV translates it ‘for the Lord’. In 3:1 it is ‘for Christ’. Whatever Paul does and wherever he is it is ‘in’ or ‘for’ the Lord. He knows no other way of life. It is from such a situation that he can ‘beg’ or ‘beseech’ or ‘exhort’.²³ He has his calling and they have theirs

²³Some commentators have nicely parcelled off the first three chapters of the Epistle as ‘doctrinal’ and the last three as ‘practical’. This is probably a little too simple, since Paul always ties his teaching of Christian practice with even further doctrine, and I think he does so in these last three chapters. Nevertheless it is true that Paul is on practical exhortation in these chapters and so our mode of commentary from this point onwards must necessarily also change.

yet all have the one calling—it is both personal and corporate. At the back of Paul's exhortation is the great theme of unity from 1:9–10 and 2:11–3:19. Also, there is the prayer and doxology of 3:20–21. The great theme of the mystery of God's plan—the mystery of Christ or the Church—has so gripped him that from his prisoner's cell and chains he is longing to see the Church 'maintain the unity'.

What is the 'calling' or 'the call'? God's choice and predestination of us is set out in 1:3–5. He calls us to holiness and to sonship. In 1:18 there is 'the hope to which he has called you', that is, the fulfilment of holiness and sonship, in which there is the great inheritance (Ephesians 1:13–14; 4:30). Romans 8:28–30 speaks of the order of predestination, calling and glorification—the same elements we find in Ephesians. But there is no rationalisation—no attempt to reason out and explain '*calling*'. The members of the Church at Ephesus are 'the called ones', and they are called to be participants in 'the plan of the mystery'. They must have this 'calling' continually in sight. They are a palpable, living Body and must work according to the principles of that Body. As the chapter unfolds, so what they are about—that to which they are called—will manifest itself. Immediately before them is the call of maintaining 'the bond of peace', which they are to do with zest. In order for that to succeed they need to lead their lives 'with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love' (*verse 2*). Word studies on the meanings of 'lowliness', 'meekness', 'patience', and

'love-forbearance' could enlighten us no doubt. But the meaning of these words is really made clear in their practical outworking. For those who have come to peace through the blood of the Cross, been rooted and grounded in love; for those who have come to the fullness of God, filled also with power—these elements would not be unknowable but would be the outcome of rich motivation. Thus the meanings of the terms would be fully known in their action. This 'living together' and 'working together' is the unity of the Spirit. The word *henoteta*—used in verse 13, meaning unity—occurs only once in the New Testament. But all the elements of love, fellowship, and unity are known to spring from the Holy Spirit—as the Day of Pentecost and the days following show so clearly. The nature of peace as a binding agent is easily comprehensible. We saw it in 2:11–22. In *verses 4 to 6*, Paul speaks of the seven 'unities' or unifying elements or powers.²⁴ The *first*, 'one body', is a term that he often uses. In I Corinthians 12:4ff. Paul shows the way in which the Body ministers within itself. All it does is to profit all members. And believers are not simply individual members but members one of another. It is good that we have the Trinitarian source and pattern to look at here, for the nature of the Triune Community is unity in love. 'One Spirit'—the *second* 'unity'—could almost be translated 'one-ness

²⁴It may be that the term 'unities' is not strictly correct. In one sense these seven elements help to unify and if so might be called 'unifiers'. However they do not tend so much to unify as to be elements of the very unity, components of the unity. They express and maintain the unity at the same time. The unity is dynamic, as love is dynamic, and indeed together they constitute love as though an ontology themselves.

Spirit', and He is certainly portrayed this way in I Corinthians 12:12–13 with the exposition following in those verses. The *third* unity is 'one hope', a unifying hope, seeing our eyes and minds are set on this hope as coming to us all. Hope is always oriented to the *telos*, the climax, the triumphant end. The *fourth* unity, 'one Lord', obviously refers to Christ and His Lordship of authority and purpose. His Lordship is for us, calls us with it, sets our paths and orders our means. We are secure in the unwavering unity of the Head, the Shepherd, the Bridegroom. 'One faith', the *fifth* unity, can have many meanings such as one basic set of beliefs, one set of truth values. But faith is dynamic since it is living in union with the Lord and with total trust in Him. And so faith *acts*.²⁵ It is evoked by the faithfulness of the Lord and the Father, and so it is the way of life. It is so much 'the faith of Christ', that it is best to see it as that living 'faith which was once for all delivered to the saints' (Jude 3). Again, the *sixth* unity of 'one baptism' has many aspects, unifying aspects. I Corinthians 12:12–13 goes to the heart of the unity where the Spirit can be said to be either the Element *into* which we are baptised or the Agent *by whom* we are baptised.²⁶ Of course other significant aspects of baptism include: the forgiveness and washing away of

²⁵Faith is trust in God, union with Him and obedience. But its basis is promise. It concentrates on what is unseen but promised, and does not draw back from promise, the promise which comes from God. It is assured that what is promised will be fulfilled, that what is presently unseen will then be seen. So faith cannot operate without hope and patience. Since it has been born of the love of God, faith will persist.

²⁶In I Corinthians 12:13 the exegesis of *en heni pneumati* can be translated 'by one Spirit' (RSV) or 'in the one Spirit' (NRSV).

sins; being the recipients of sanctification; the cleansing of the conscience; being made a disciple of Christ; and the union with Christ in the process of dying and rising with Him. So many of these bring us all to the one place before God, and in Christ. As an objective fact baptism is the one thing common to us all as an ordinance or a sacrament. Without it we are not covenant members and receivers of the covenant blessing.

The *seventh* and last of the unities, 'one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all' (*verse 6*) is the over all unifying One. We have seen the all encompassing Fatherhood, taking every family in heaven and on earth, and Fathering them. The 'above all' speaks of authority, care, protection. The 'through all' speaks of the Fatherhood which permeates all things, giving them His grandeur and true domesticity. 'In all' speaks not of pantheistic pervasion but personal, inner relationships with all creatures human and celestial. What, then, is this great unity if not the One of which Paul speaks in 1:9–10 when everything is unified in Christ, summed up and headed up in Him, having been reconciled by the Cross, and brought into their unity under the final Head, the Father Himself?²⁷

²⁷It is good to realise that when we speak of the Kingdom it is *the kingdom of God and his Christ* (Revelation 11:15; Ephesians 5:5), and that at the end the Son will give the Kingdom to the Father that He, the Father, may be 'all in all' or 'everything to everyone'.

Verses 7–16: The Unity, the Gifts and the Growth

7 But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it is said, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.' 9 (In saying, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.

If we keep in mind that unity is the goal of God's plan—keeping in mind, of course, that all things arose initially from unity and constituted unity until the intervention of the fall of Man—then we will see the *point* of what follows. Christ's gift is linked with unity: 'the unity of the faith' (*verse 13*) and 'the upbuilding of the body in love' (*verses 13 to 16*).

Verse 7 says, 'But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift'. This is almost the same point as is made in I Corinthians 12:7, 'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good'. It is also like Romans 12:6, 'Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us'. The 'But' of *verse 7* conjoins 'Christ's gift' with the seven unifying elements. There is a unity in diversity. The whole is constituted of living and dynamic gifts (note the plural) which together are Christ's gift to the Church, His Body. Christ Himself is God's gift, as we can see also in Romans 6:23 where He is eternal life, and in II Corinthians 9:15 where He is God's 'unspeakable gift'. Paul speaks in 3:2 of 'the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you'. Now Paul is saying that each one of us in the Church is given a gift.

In *verse 8* the quote from the Psalm 68:18—which is, in effect, a paraphrase from an Aramaic Targum—originally speaks of receiving gifts from men, the figure being of a triumphant king ascending the citadel of Sion. Here, however, Christ does not receive the spoils but distributes them, and for this His ascension to the right hand of God was necessary before He could send the gift of the Spirit (John 16:7; Acts 2:33). And His gifts to the Church are throne gifts, earned, we might say, by His Calvary victory (cf. Luke 11:22; Isaiah 53:12). It is not fanciful to think of Satan stealing God's original gifts given to Man (John 10:10) and Christ retrieving and distributing them afresh.

In the parenthetical *verses 9 and 10*, the first part of the ninth verse speaks of Him 'descending'—it is pointless to try to detail 'the lower parts of the earth'. Surely Paul is saying that there is no depth that Christ

has not deepened, and no height to which He has not succeeded (*verse 10*). The aim of all is ‘to fill all things’. Only what is empty requires filling, just as only what is disunited requires unity. What is at odds requires reconciliation. This is part of ‘the plan of the mystery’ or ‘the mystery of the plan’.

The *mean* by which Christ fills things with His own fullness is the Church (1:22), and within that fullness the *means* are the gifts. The gifts are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers. Only some are one or the other, none are all of them. Together they are Christ’s gifts to the Church rather than Christ giving, say, the gift of an apostle to one...and so on. It would seem best to see these gifts in tandem—that is, being used together, all depending on all, each one aiding the others.²⁸

The gifts certainly assist in expressing and maintaining the unity of the Body, but their main purpose (*verse 12*) is ‘to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ’. So gifts are used concertedly, purposefully and functionally and not arbitrarily and aimlessly. The outcome of this is to develop further ‘until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to

²⁸It is not our intention here to discuss these gifts which are repeated in part in I Corinthians 12:28. In 1:1 we talked about the apostolic gift. Acts 2:42 speaks of ‘the apostolic doctrine’. See that the apostles named by Christ are not replaceable after Acts 1. Acts 2:14ff. shows the Church to be the prophetic community: there are prophets (see Acts 15:32, and references to Agabus in Acts 11:28; 21:10) and utterances which are prophetic (I Corinthians 14). The only evangelist directly named is Philip (Acts 21:8), but Timothy was also included (II Timothy 4:5). Most commentators bracket ‘pastors and teachers’ together as though they have this one ministry.

mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’. Undoubtedly *verse 13* is crammed with the goal and outcome of the use of the gifts. Something is *being* attained. Firstly, the unity of faith is being attained. Surely this is to be seen as *each* having faith and *all* having faith together (‘faith unity’, cf. 1:10). Secondly, ‘the knowledge of the Son of God’ is being attained. This is to be something taught by the ministers-in-tandem, entailing as it does this special term ‘Son of God’. Knowledge is not simply noetic—of the mind—but relational, yet having all the outlines of the Great One, the fullness of whom we see in Colossians 1:15–2:19. Thirdly, ‘mature manhood’ is being attained (‘maturity’, NRSV). Whilst each member is taught with a view to all the elements mentioned here, yet it is *all* who come to this maturity. We understand that the *all* constitute the *one*. Together they are attaining to ‘the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’, which is to say that they are filling outwards and upwards and downwards to that fullness which is already Christ Himself. They cannot go beyond what He is—an impossibility!—and they must be no less than what He is.

Already we have seen references to fullness. Colossians 2:10 puts it this way, ‘You have come to fullness of life in him’. We have no essential fullness. It is ours in Christ, and it is ours *together* in Christ. The reason for this maturity, growth and fullness is to outgrow immaturity for in this untaught state people are ‘children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles’ (*verse 14*). In Paul’s day there were charlatans—‘peddlers of God’s word’ (II Corinthians 2:17)—many of whom were quite

dangerous and evil (cf. II Corinthians 11), leading people astray. In our day they are no less in number and have effective abilities and weapons to carry out their nefarious teachings. The only answer to their deceit is to have the *knowledge* and *action* of the truth.

In *verses 15 to 16* Paul speaks about ‘truthing it in love’. He means *speaking* the truth in love—as against the tricksters and rogues in deceit—and so *living out* the truth in love. In this way we ‘grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ’. Paul elsewhere sometimes uses the statement ‘love edifies’. He says, “‘Knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up’ (I Corinthians 8:1). So love and truth combine by the contribution made by every part of the Body to help the Body to grow to its proper fullness and maturity of life and action. This, of course, is the living Church, moving towards its fullness in perfection—to climax at the end time.

Verses 17–32 The Old Life and the New: Living in the Church and Society

(i) Verses 17–24: The Old Life and the Renewed Image

17 Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; 18 they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; 19 they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practise every kind of unclean-

ness. 20 You did not so learn Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. 22 Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

We have gathered that in this Church to which Paul writes there are those born Jews and those born Gentiles. They are now together as people of ‘the third race’. Without a doubt, the Jews would have brought with them into the Church a high moral understanding and practice. The Gentiles, on the other hand, had all been part of a society which was often morally decadent and which had accepted certain ways of living which were unacceptable to the Judaistic-Christian way. Almost unconsciously these Gentiles would have brought wrong practices with them into the Church, which did not tally with their new life. They would have soon become aware of these wrong practices. But, even so, some of the converted Gentiles needed to be taught. Otherwise, why would Paul embark on this teaching?

Verses 17 to 19 point back to how those who are Christians once lived as Gentiles. The contrast with unity, love, learning Christ and wholesome living is quite strong. There certainly are two different worlds or systems. One system is described here by Paul in the following terms: ‘futility of mind’; ‘darkened in understanding’; ‘alienated from the life of God’; ‘ignorance’; ‘hardness of heart’; ‘callous’; ‘licentiousness’; and ‘greedy to practise every kind of uncleanness’.

All of these terms take us back to Romans 1:18–32. Breaking away from God brings another manner of

existence altogether. Everything that is contrary to true living seems to prevail. As we ponder each detail we are struck with the reality of the depravity of Man. What is not essential to him, by creation, becomes a way of living in and against the creation. We note the ignorance of such a mind: the alienation from God; the wrong forms by which people endeavour to make intimate relationships; the hardened mind; the calloused heart; and the wrong perception which is accounted as right. These tell us what Christ has to break into in a person's mind and heart in order to bring it to His way of living, thinking and being. Concentration on the *forms* of evil do not really edify us. Paul is mentioning them here in order to remind those who were previously Gentiles just how terrible an existence was theirs.

Verse 20 tells them bluntly, 'You did not so learn Christ!' *Verses 21 to 24* tell how they did learn the truth. They had been taught it—the truth—as in Jesus. Paul does not mean that there are many 'truths' and one of these is in Jesus. No! The only truth is in Jesus. What were they taught? To 'put off^[29] your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness'. Paul is speaking about the humanity in which they

²⁹The reading of verses 22 to 24 is better in the NRSV than in the RSV. 'Put off'—an imperative in the RSV—is translated as it is in the Greek, as an infinitive, in the NRSV. Paul is not commanding them to 'put off' and to 'put on'. Such commands are given in Colossians 3. But here in Ephesians Paul is assuming that they have done so. The Ephesians will know, then, that to live as they formerly lived would be wrong and against 'the new humanity'.

once lived which elsewhere he would call 'Adamic' (cf. Romans 5:12–21; 6:6).

The Gentile life was the Adamic life. The normal term for 'nature' is *phusei* (2:3) but in this passage it is 'old man' (*palaion anthropon*) or 'old humanity'. What we must not think is that every person has an *old* and a *new* humanity. Paul's teaching is that there is one new humanity which is Christ—'one new Man'—and that He is the second or last Adam, and that we put off the old humanity (Adam) and put on the new humanity (Christ, the true Adam). Paul certainly does indicate that, unfortunately, the Ephesians can live according to the 'old humanity'. But they should live exclusively according to the 'new humanity'. The old Man is going on corrupting until it has corrupted away entirely, but living in the new Man will bring about the renewal of the mind. This new Man is 'created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness' (*verse 24*). This passage should be compared with Colossians 3:9–10. Both passages are really telling us that we *were* created in the image of God, and in Christ we *are* being—so to speak—re-created in that image, renewed unto the fullness of the true image. Being recreated in His image is dynamic in morality, in 'righteousness and holiness'. Since God is 'the living God'—that is, always acting—so we, in the new Man Christ, are always in action; the actions of 'righteousness and holiness'.

(ii) Verses 25–32: The New Way of Life in the Renewed Image

25 Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbour, for we are members

one of another. ²⁶ Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labour, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need. ²⁹ Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, with all malice, ³² and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

In this section Paul is showing what the actions of a person were when living as a Gentile outside of the Community of Christ, and what the actions of 'righteousness and holiness' must now be for those living within the New Man. These two different modes turn out to be opposites or antitheses. The new person must leave the old way and practise its opposites as the way of true life. In *verse 25* the old way of deceit and lying—natural to the 'old Man', the immoral Gentile—must be 'put away' (cf. 4:22) by 'speaking the truth'. In 4:15 we saw that corporate life is to be 'truthing it in love', which refers both to doctrine and practice. Zechariah 8:16 is the basis for this precept. To lie is to 'let down' those to whom we have lied. How different the Community in which all is 'truthed'! 'For we are members one of another.' Here is a most intimate relationality of Community.

In *verse 26* the matter of anger is brought up from Psalm 4:4, for such anger hurts and divides the Community. Paul is saying that there can be an anger which is righteous, but that it is dangerous to entertain

it for any length of time. 'Let the day of your anger be the day of your reconciliation' is someone's comment on 'do not let the sun go down on your anger'. Seemingly 'righteous' anger soon turns to 'self-righteous' anger, the most dangerous of the species. *Verse 27* is linked with *verse 26*. Satan gains entrance to the Community through the prolonged anger of a member or members. The 'members one of another' is fractured by Satan's accusation and incitement. In Christ Jesus all are one. This is the precious *unity*.

We would wonder how thieving (*verse 28*) could even be contemplated in the holy Church, but this is part of 'the old Man'. The 'putting away' of the old practice is positively replacing theft with the ontological way of life: earning in order to *give* to others, a mark of 'other-person centredness'. Thieving is the means of escaping the mandate to work (Genesis 2:15; Exodus 20:9, 15). There are always 'those in need' who are not loafers: some ill, some circumstantially in poverty, unemployment. But observe Paul's approach to his own work in I Corinthians 9, I Thessalonians 2:9 and II Thessalonians 3:8f. And note Paul's command to the Thessalonians: 'If anyone will not work, let him not eat' (II Thessalonians 3:10).

Verse 29—'Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear'—is a warning against a past manner of life. The 'evil talk' is 'bad words', the very infection of corruption for the mind and practice. The parallel of Colossians 4:6 urges 'let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt'. Loose, immoral and flippant talk soon degrade the society. Proper speech

brings grace to those who hear. ‘And do not grieve³⁰ the Holy Spirit of God’ (*verse 30*) is said because lying, anger, thieving, and ‘rotting speech’ are what vex the Spirit (cf. Isaiah 63:10). Likewise—in mentioning other things such as bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, malice, unkindness, hard-heartedness, unforgiveness (*verses 31 to 32*), Paul is saying, ‘Make the Holy Spirit rejoice in your refusal of evil habits, and in your kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness’. The drive for all this is the exercise and expression of the new humanity. Forgiveness is motivated by God’s marvellous forgiveness of our sins. In these verses Paul is not appealing to his readers so much as exhorting and warning them. On the way through as we read we marvel that Christians should have to be warned against such things as ‘wrath, anger, clamour, malice, unkindness, hard-heartedness, unforgiveness’. An examination of each of these dreadful elements shows on the one hand how strong is the old Adam, and on the other how much more powerful is the New Man, Christ, as He works by the Holy Spirit in the inner being of regenerated persons in Community: the unity of the Triune God manifested in the Church.³¹

³⁰Since 4:30 is quoted from Isaiah 63:10 we will see that ‘grieving’ is not simply that the Holy Spirit suffers grief as we would, but will act strongly when evil is persisted in by members of the Church. That is why Paul shows that ‘sealed for the day of redemption’ (cf. 1:13–14; II Corinthians 1:22; Romans 8:23) is the declaring and sealing work of the Spirit for that event. Is there, here, the suggestion that such ‘assurance of hope’ can be jeopardised by vexing the Spirit? Will His holy anger act as we see in Isaiah 63?

³¹Here—as in other places where there are exhortations against such things, word explanations in other Commentaries should be consulted. They are, anyway, fairly self-evident.

This whole passage of verses 17 to 32 can be seen as the drive against all disunifying elements by the thrust for all that is unifying. What was asked for at the beginning of the chapter is thus answered in the new way of life of the Community in Christ, the New Man.

EPHESIANS CHAPTER FIVE

Verses 1–14 Life's Way of Love and Light

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

3 But fornication and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints. 4 Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving. 5 Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not associate with them, 8 for once you were dark-ness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret; 13 but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. 14 Therefore it is said, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.'

Verses 1 to 2 are really the rounding off of 4:17–32 (the 'Therefore' links verse 1 with the last section of chapter four). Forgiveness of others is a powerful factor in

living together in unity. Indeed, without it there cannot be true unity. The Father and the Son—‘God in Christ’—have brought forgiveness to humanity by the work of the Cross, and so forgiveness of others is the richest expression of love (Matthew 5:43–48; Luke 6:35ff.). Thus the believers are to walk personally and corporately as ‘beloved children’. They imitate the walk of God their Father. Children learn by imitation, and it is natural for children to be imitators (*mimetai*) of their fathers. However it is not a crass and empty mimicking but a dynamic imitating of another, in love. This is the way the Family acts, God being their Father. It demands walking ‘in love’, which is a powerful way of life (cf. Christ and Paul in I Corinthians 11:1). We are driven back to 3:14–20 to see that the knowledge of love has its richest expression as a power. So the love of Christ in the Cross is depicted as a matter of acceptable sacrifice, ‘a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God’. In the Old Testament, sacrifices were considered sweet and acceptable to the Lord (Exodus 29:18, 25, 41; Leviticus 1:9, 13, 17; cf. Genesis 8:20–22). Just so, in imitation of Christ, our lives will prove to be sweet and acceptable—like those Old Testament sacrifices—in love. Imitation of parents by a child is natural because the child is the offspring of its parents. It is a ‘family’ thing.

Verses 3 to 14 constitute a pericope which is intensely personal, working out intimate problems in the practice of Christian living. What began in 4:17 is more detailed here—quite close to the bone. Paul names fornication clearly as an abomination. It is not to be given euphemistic names as we do today, such as ‘loving’! ‘Impurity’ covers all the forms of perverse sexuality of those days, many of them reappearing in

our own strange days. ‘Covetousness’ was the sin which found Paul out (Romans 7:7–11). In Colossians 3:5 Paul equates covetousness with idolatry because the covetous practise illicit relationships. *Verse 4* clamps down on the area of suggestiveness in which there is a corruption of good manners: ‘filthiness’ stains true purity of relationships; ‘silly talk’ is both empty and degrading, breaking down the integrity of a holy community; and ‘levity’ is ‘raillery’ or ‘light jesting’ which disintegrates responsible and proper intercourse of spirits. The ‘thanksgiving’ which Paul enjoins is not merely an antidote to these other things, but reveals the true mind which should operate. The impure things are ways of avoiding the clean and rich life God has provided, acting as a detestable substitute for them. ‘Thanksgiving’, on the other hand, is a feature of Paul’s Letters³² because those giving thanks look at the true things of God and are grateful.

Verse 5 is a strong warning to those who call themselves believers: there is no tolerance by God of the evils of fornicators, impure persons and idolaters. Such persons are told that they will never enter the Kingdom of God³³ (see also Galatians 6:7; I Corinthians 6:9; and Hebrews 3:12f.). In the Kingdom of God and His Christ—the reign and rule of the holy Father and

³²cf. II Corinthians 4:15; 9:11–12; Ephesians 5:20; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 1:3, 12; 2:7; 4:2; I Thessalonians 3:9; 5:18; I Timothy 2:1; 4:3–4.

³³Here the Kingdom of God is set out mostly in its eschatological form, its mode in the end-time. This Kingdom will be all holiness, purity and integrity of character. Now we enter the Kingdom by new birth (John 3:3–6). ‘Inheriting’ the Kingdom comes from a life of obedience commensurate with the nature of that Kingdom (Acts 14:22).

the holy Son—such evils and fripperies are wholly inappropriate and cannot exist. Here, in *verse 6*, as in Colossians 3:6, Paul says that the wrath of God is coming *now* on those he calls ‘the sons of disobedience’ (cf. 2:2–3). Christian people cannot expect anything less than wrath from the Father upon those whom He has called to be ‘holy and blameless before Him’. ‘Empty words’ rationalise away the evil of such sins—making out that they do not really matter. In *verse 7*, not only are members of the community warned against being ‘sons of disobedience’, but also against *associating* with them. For *verse 8* states a dogma: ‘once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord’. They once belonged to darkness,³⁴ lived in it, were impregnated with it, and committed wholly to it. Darkness was their way of life. Now the antithesis—the total opposite—is the case. This radical change we saw in 2:1–10.

The works of darkness mentioned above are wholly evil. Those who are of the light must do the works of light. Just as in Galatians 5:19–23 the flesh has its works in the sons of darkness, so the Holy Spirit bears fruit in the children of light. The former are an abomination, the latter an utter blessing. The fruit (*verse 9*) of living in the light is ‘all that is good and right and true’—and these are recognisable. Darkness is not just to be left alone, as *verse 11* enjoins, but it is to be exposed. *How* that happens is not a technique. Those who walk in light, by virtue of this way of light,

³⁴The Apostle John’s writings use the themes of darkness and light a great deal. Yet both he and Paul do not deal in abstractions (e.g. in I John 1:5, ‘God is light’). The words ‘darkness’ and ‘light’ may be symbols or figures, but they signify practical realities.

expose what is in darkness simply by shining on the darkness—by their true and fruitful living. In *verse 12* Paul gives us a valuable principle: ‘For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret’. Trying to expose such things by investigating and describing them does, in fact, give them the power of prurience (that is, characterised by lascivious thought).

Verse 13 speaks again of exposing darkness by light. Isaiah in the temple (Isaiah 6:1ff.) saw his evil in the light of God’s holiness: this is the principle. At first puzzling is the statement, ‘anything that becomes visible is light’. For example, if light shines on an object of darkness which itself is evil, then it does not make that object innately light, that is, the evil object does not become pure and holy. John 3:19–21 says that the people of darkness will not come to the light lest it be shown that their deeds are evil. Those who *do* come to the light would be wanting to become light, and would not mind the exposure of their deeds. So in *verse 13* there is, without doubt, some mystery. But *verse 8* is helpful: ‘Once you *were* darkness, but *now* you *are* light’. This seems to be the basis on which our present *verse* is working. It seems, too, that Paul is saying that the gospel works dynamically in changing darkness to light.

Verse 14 comes appropriately at this point. Paul seems to be telling believers who have slumbered—those who have become indifferent to what is darkness and what is light—to awaken. It is a clarion call and a strong command. This *verse* is intended to have the same effect as Paul’s call of Romans 13:11–14. It is also spoken to readers who may still be creatures of darkness, who are not yet of the light, and thus *verse 13* is fulfilled by their response—they become light! It

is thought, by some, to have been a baptismal hymn. Whatever its original use, Paul is making it clear that light and darkness do not mingle. A person belongs to one *or* the other. Those in darkness are doomed: they will never enter or inherit the Kingdom of God. Those in the light of Christ walk in love and purity and will inherit the Kingdom of God.

Verses 15–20 The Way of Wisdom and the Spirit

15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, 20 always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

Paul returns time and again to an emphasis on the Christian walk, which is the Christian way of progressing in life (see also 4:1; 4:17; 5:1). ‘Look carefully’, *verse 15*, can mean, ‘Walk accurately’. The apostle has been warning against misconceptions regarding the Christ walk, how some seem to think that ‘anything goes’. They are to be wise, not unwise. According to this context wisdom is simply doing the will of God. It is first knowing the will and then—or, simultaneously—doing it. To ‘understand the will of the Lord’ must refer to one’s manner of walking, but it

must surely also refer to the plan of God of which Paul has been speaking in the first three chapters. It is not only ethical uprightness but also sharing in the plan of God. The plan is always forwards moving, going on to complete God’s ultimate intention. To ‘buy up the time’ or ‘make the most of it’ (*verse 16*) is also to accomplish action within the plan, noting the evil nature of the times—the present evil age.³⁵ It is interesting at this point (*verse 18*) that Paul speaks against intemperance with wine. Intemperance may be only one of the evils against which he is speaking, but it seems to carry special importance as an evil. This is what we see today in the use of dependency drugs, and the ability of such drugs to twist character in a horrible manner. Human beings seem constantly to desire some stimulation. On the Day of Pentecost the 120 were stimulated into *spiritual* awareness by the coming of the Spirit and thus they appeared to some to have drunk strong drink. The ‘excess’ or ‘riot’ which comes from intemperance is ultimately evil, but the stimulation of the Spirit—if we can speak of it like that—is authentic and mandatory. Paul is commanding his readers to go on being filled with the Spirit. Grammatically, the imperative indicates the right attitude of believers to receiving the fullness *of* or *from* the Spirit. The true believer is passive to the inflowing

³⁵‘The days are evil’ is not just an unexplained matter of fact. Satan as we saw in Ephesians 2:1–3 is working his plan to its fulfilment. He is trying to counter God’s plan, God’s will. In Ephesians 6:10–18 Paul will speak further of this evil action.

of the Spirit, and the act of being infilled is continuous—not a ‘once for all’ happening.³⁶

The outcome of being constantly filled with the Spirit is seen in *verses 19 to 20*. Here all the elements named amount to worship, and, for that matter, corporate worship. However it not said that this worship is happening at one time and in one place. Such worship could be distributed with regard to time and place: it could be happening even when all were not gathered together (cf. Romans 12:1–2). The richest worship is expressed in ‘psalms and hymns and spiritual songs’. These are addressed to ‘one another’. There must therefore be teaching in them that is horizontally informative, hortatory and encouraging. There is ‘making melody to the Lord with all your heart’, which means vertical worship. Of course, it is all of one piece, especially as all are to give thanks ‘always and for everything’. Failure to give thanks-giving to God is failure to worship Him. Refusal to worship God and give thanks to Him had accompanied rejection of God in Romans 1:18ff. Living in thanksgiving, especially as it is ‘in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ’ and ‘to God the Father’—with all that His Fatherhood connotes—is a state of spiritual health and power. Such are the fruits of the constant inflow of the Holy Spirit.

³⁶The text which says ‘be filled with the Spirit’ (5:18) can mean: firstly, ‘be filled *in* spirit’ (*en pneumati*), which means both ‘be filled in your spirit’ and ‘let your spirit always be filled’; secondly, ‘be filled *by* or *through* the Spirit’ meaning ‘let your spirit be always filled by the Holy Spirit; and thirdly, ‘go on being filled *with* the Spirit’. Whatever, these translations amount to the same thing—Christian persons and the whole Community should continuously be open to God filling them in their spirits with and by means of the Holy Spirit.

Verses 21–33 The Fullness of the Spirit and Family Life—I

21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. 24 As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. 25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ 32 This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; 33 however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Verse 21 says, ‘Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ’. Is this a general statement, standing on its own as a general and good precept? Or is it a precept referring back to the worship just described or even as something essential to ‘the unity of the faith’ and ‘the unity of the Spirit’? It could be both of these but it seems to be part of a progression of Paul’s exhortation. Noting that in the Greek the verb is a present participle, ‘being subject’ (*hupotassomenoi*),

we then ask what is ‘to one another’? Who is involved? *Verse 22* in most translations repeats the verb ‘to submit’ (*hupotasso*), thus, ‘Wives be *subject* to your husbands’. But this verb is not in *verse 22*. It would seem then that the phrase ‘to one another’ has to do with a certain order such as: ‘wives to your husband’; ‘children to your parents’; ‘slaves to your masters’; ‘master to God’. Without denying that there is a principle of mutual submission, it would appear that there is here an order of submission which begins in *verse 21* and extends to 6:9.³⁷

If we keep in mind the fact that the Community is filled with the Spirit—worshipping in truth—then the use of ‘out of reverence for Christ’ in *verse 21*, and ‘as to the Lord’ in *verse 22*, will qualify the principle and act of submission. In *verse 33* the wife is to *fear* (*respect*) her husband (RSV, NRSV). Having cleared the impediment to relational unity, Paul speaks plainly in regard to husband-wife relationships. *Verse 23* speaks of Christ as the Head of the Church, His Bride. He is her Saviour. The human husband, according to this paradigm, is then to be the head of his wife and the wife is to be subject to him. *Verses 24 to 25* expect the husband to love his wife as Christ loved the Church to the extent that He ‘gave himself up for her’. There can be no greater expression of love than that (cf. 5:1–2; Galatians 2:20; Acts 20:28). Is the husband expected to go to this extent in love, to the giving up of

³⁷ It is acknowledged that the verb ‘to obey’ (*hupakouo*) is used for the children in relation to their parents, and the servants in relation to their masters. Yet this is in the order of submission. The use of *hupotasso* for the wife to the husband in *verse 24* seems to verify our point

himself? It would seem so.³⁸ *Verse 26* shows that the purpose of Christ’s death in love was to sanctify the Church. Generally speaking sanctification has two parts, and they are really simultaneous. Firstly, it means to separate, or consecrate, the elect people from the world to God so that the Church is God’s Community³⁹ and belongs to none other. Secondly, sanctifying is the act of personally purifying the members set apart as the holy Community. This cleansing is essential for the Church to be the ‘New Jerusalem’ and ‘the Holy City’.⁴⁰ But there is yet another element to sanctification. The sanctified Community is expected to live commensurate with its given holiness. We saw in 1:3f. that God had planned this holiness before creation.⁴¹ The phrase ‘the washing of water with the word’⁴² means, of course,

³⁸Christ’s giving Himself up for His Bride is salvific. No human husband can save his wife in this sense but, in principle, he can ‘save’ her in many ways. He can give himself for her in so many of life’s situations. If the husband is unloving and selfish he is making it difficult for his wife to be gladly subject to him.

³⁹Almost always the Church is called ‘the Church of God’ and not ‘the Church of Christ’, possibly for the reason that Christ is one with His Church, its Head, and she His Body.

⁴⁰For the cleansing which is linked with sanctification as consecration see I Corinthians 6:11; Hebrews 10:10, 14, 22; I Peter 1:2, 22.

⁴¹Some Scriptures which speak of this holiness are: I Corinthians 1:2, 30; Colossians 1:22; Hebrews 1:3; 9:14; 10:10–14; 10:29; I Peter 1:2.

⁴²Formally the word was spoken at baptism in the context of the water. Baptisms were always ‘in the name’, that is, in the name of the Triune Persons (Matthew 28:19) or in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:12; 10:48). Baptism, too, was connected with the proclamation.

baptism. All are incorporated into Christ through baptism, which is a cleansing ordinance, which reaches not simply to the Body but to the conscience (cf. I Peter 1:21; Hebrews 9:14; 10:22). The word of God is purifying and cleansing (John 15:3; 17:17).⁴³ The goal of that purification (*verse 27*) is to so make the Church glorious that she will be a delight in herself, and a delight to Him who beholds her. Her beauty is unfading and her youth perpetual. ‘Holy and without blemish’ reminds us of 1:4 and Colossians 1:22. Doubtless romantic applications can be made, but the exhortations in *verses 28 to 30* are eminently practical. A husband is to love his wife as he would love, nourish and care for his own body. In *verse 28* the command for husbands to love their wives as they love their own bodies does not mean to view their wives *as* their own bodies, but to love them *as* they—the husbands—love their own bodies. It follows then that he who loves his wife already loves himself.⁴⁴

⁴³Jesus said, ‘The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life’. He did not mean by this that His words are not entities on their own—having their own continuing dynamic. The words exist because they were spoken. The words are not separate from the speaker. It is the speaker who is powerful, life-giving, but then the words and the speaker are one. So when Christ commands cleansing the words cleanse—and so on.

⁴⁴Many theologians speak of God as loving Himself. They may mean that the Three Persons love mutually, or they mean that God simply delights in Himself. And so he created Man as a creature who loves what God has made of him, and will make of him. Of course the Fall brought confusion into this self-relationship of Man, so that Man loves himself without first knowing God’s love for him or without loving God. As a consequence the Man cannot love himself properly. This proper self-love is what Paul is speaking about. One can have a legitimate self-love, and thus a true love of others.

Verse 29 follows logically: ‘no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it’. A sane and healthy minded human being looks after his own flesh and constantly attends its needs, and this is the pattern Christ has for His Church. ‘Because we are members of his body’ (*verse 30*), is not perhaps what we would have expected Paul to say. We might have expected him to say, ‘Christ likewise loves his body the Church’. But Paul may have two things in mind: firstly, Christ loves all the members personally and intimately and treats them well together; and secondly, that there is no Body which is not composed of all such members. ‘The Body’ is not an abstract idea. Rather, it is an entity composed of living persons, all interrelated and active together.

As we know, *verse 31* is a quoting of Genesis 2:23–24. Here the man speaks of his wife, “‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’” Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh’. We repeat, the woman is *not* the man’s body, but the woman is *of* the man’s body so that their union is natural, and not the coming together of two different entities. Man—which is to say man and woman—constitute one in their created union of being, and are thus ‘one flesh’ and ‘one entity’. That is their created affinity, hence their blending in unity.

Verse 32 then follows with a significant comment: ‘This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church’. At first sight Paul may be venturing on a commentary on marriage in general, saying, ‘It is a deep mystery—this marriage—needing to be pondered, fathomed’. But Paul is not saying that. He is saying that Genesis 2:24 does not primarily and generally refer to a husband and wife in their union, but to Christ and His Church.⁴⁵ The ‘profound mystery’ is that Genesis 2:24 is a prophesying of the great event of Christ and His Bride. Theologically we say, ‘Genesis 2:24 is protological of what is eschatological’. By this we mean that at the time of creation God is showing that marriage has its reality not in its beginning but in what will come to the creation in the *telos* or the end-time. *The* marriage will be that of the Bride and the Lamb.⁴⁶ We note that all through Christ has set out the paradigm of true marriage as being that of Himself and the Church.

The clarity and strength of Paul’s reference to the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, as the true marriage, is such that a reader might be excused for thinking that Paul was only referring to human

⁴⁵This opens up the whole matter of the protological meaning of the first two chapters of Genesis. By this we mean that the creation—the creation of the man and the woman, the placing of them in Eden, the mandate given to them in 1:28, the union of the man and the woman—points to the ultimate climax of history in the new heavens and the new earth, the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, the ultimate Paradise, Holy City and Holy Temple. The protological elements of Genesis chapters 1 and 2 are ‘the beginning of the end’, whilst the climax at the end-time is ‘the end of the beginning’.

⁴⁶For an expansion of this idea read my *The Profound Mystery*, NCPI, 1995.

marriage in a passing way. To the contrary. He is divulging the true nature of marriage, and by so doing is holding his readers to living out such a marriage. So in *verse 33* Paul is saying, ‘Even if this refers to Christ and His Church, nevertheless let the husband love his wife as himself, and let the wife see to it that she has reverence⁴⁷ [RSV ‘respect’] for her husband’.

As a *closing note* to the verses 21 to 33, it is clear that this relational situation of man and woman—husband and wife—is part of the unity that is the plan God has in summing up all things in Christ (1:9–10). Paul uses the principle to exhort the husband and wife to live in this way of unity, knowing that it is rooted in Christ and His Bride, His Church. Of course, in chapter 6, Paul goes on to enjoin the unity of parents and children, of servants and masters; indeed, of the whole family of the holy Community.

⁴⁷The verb used here for the attitude of the wife to her husband is the word which in English translates as ‘to fear’, and contains the form of ‘phobia’. In 5:21, the same verb is translated ‘to reverence’.

EPHESIANS CHAPTER SIX

Verses 1–9: The Fullness of the Spirit and Family Life—II

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 'Honour your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth. 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ; 6 not in the way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men, 8 knowing that whatever good any one does, he will receive the same again from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. 9 Masters, do the same to them, and forbear threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

We remind ourselves that from 5:18 to 6:9 the subject matter is of unity in relationships, all aided by the continuous worship which comes through the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸ Only in such a context is unity possible and

⁴⁸There is a passage in Colossians 3:16–4:1 which is parallel to Ephesians 5:18–6:9. The difference is that Colossians 3:16 speaks of the word of Christ dwelling richly in the heart together with all wisdom, and this is surely synonymous with the Holy Spirit dwelling in the heart in all fullness. It is helpful to keep comparing the two passages as they are commentaries on each other.

continuous. Of course, unity is not an ideology or it would be a bondage to the Church. We have seen enough regarding the fullness of love which is present in the Church both in all members individually and in the corporate whole of the Body of Christ. When the infilling of the Spirit is the continuous experience of the members of the Church then that unity is the experience of the Church. All the time it works through the seven unifying entities which are stated in 4:4–6.

In *verse 1* the relationship of the children to their parents is brought forward. Doubtless the response of children to their parents will in some measure be linked with the mutual relationship of the husband and wife. Where submission and love are present, life will be more helpfully familial. At the same time children are accountable for their attitude to their parents.⁴⁹ As noted previously, the verb ‘to obey’ (*hupakouo*) is used here and also in *verse 5* where it is used in regard to servants. *Hupakouo* is also used in the parallel passage of Colossians 3:20–22. The phrase ‘in the Lord’ can be interpreted as meaning that all children of Christian parents are in the Lord, at least covenantally, or it may mean that obedience would be to commands that are consistent with the mind of the Lord and not against

⁴⁹In Romans 1:30 ‘disobedience to parents’ is a heinous sin, a departure from the universal norm.

it.⁵⁰ Here, and in the Colossian passage, Paul speaks against fathers ‘provoking their children’—such provoking is against Christ’s mind. The ‘this is right’ conclusion of *verse 1* must mean that it is ontological for children to obey. It is worth noting in regard to *verses 2 to 3* that they are an echo the Old Testament understanding of parents-children relationships. Such relationships are essential for a peaceful and well integrated society. The commands in the Pentateuch demand honour to both parents, sometimes mention of the mother taking precedent over mention of the father.⁵¹ The matter of promise is always interesting, and here the promise is of long life. Doubtless such obedience carries with it the power of good health.⁵² Whilst the Old Testament promise related to the land, the New Testament promise relates to proper human living and even longevity. Honouring parents involves obedience, amongst other things.

Verse 4 shows that parental authority must not degenerate into authoritarianism. The *way* commands are given can be harsh and endless, and pointless corrections may dispirit the child. The bringing up of a child must be in the ‘discipline and instruction of the

⁵⁰Some see this as spoken to children whose parents are not Christians but pagans, but the sense of the passage seems to be that the parents are ‘in the Lord’.

⁵¹cf. Exodus 20:12; Leviticus 19:3; Deuteronomy 5:16. If a boy was incorrigibly rebellious he was to be stoned by the whole community.

⁵²An understanding of these relationships—the practice of obedience, reverence, and right leadership—is a treasure-house of materials for pastoral help, especially if linked with the knowledge of the love and unity of the Trinity.

Lord', from which no harm can come (cf. Hebrews 12:3–11). Colossians 3:21 speaks of discouraging the child. Again we remind ourselves that all training is in the context of the continual infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Verses 5 to 8 deal with the situation of the slave (*doulos*). The term 'servant' (*diakonos*) is not used. Servants were free to come and go, but not slaves. Some of the passage comes strangely to our ears, especially when Paul is enjoining Christians who are slaves to be obedient (*hupakouo*) 'with fear and trembling,^[53] in singleness of heart'. But when he adds 'as to Christ', the matter of justice is not present so much as is that of witness, and seeing all work done as to the Lord and not primarily to human masters. Again there is a promise given here. Practical obedience to Christ will ultimately receive its due reward. 'Fear and trembling' does not mean that there should be servility and toadying, but 'doing the will of God from the heart', knowing that there is no partiality with Him. The earthly master does not receive favoured treatment from Him.⁵⁴ Verse 9, in regard to masters and their treatment of slaves, is really one with the injunctions to slaves. Masters have their responsibility seeing that both master and slave have the one Master and He is in heaven. He regards the lives of both slaves and masters. And He is just. In all of this prescribed treatment is the idea of the dignity of

⁵³See I Corinthians 2:3; II Corinthians 7:15; Philippians 2:12. 'Fear and trembling' was a phrase meaning 'having a sane estimate of the situation and a response of reverence as was fitting to it'.

⁵⁴See Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Colossians 3:25; I Peter 1:17; James 2:1, 9. These passages infer that impartiality should be the mark of the Christian believer.

the human person. Proverbs 14:31 says, 'He who oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is kind to the needy honours him'. Christ, the master's Master, is the paradigm for that master's behaviour with his slave.⁵⁵ We conclude then that Paul has taught well regarding all relationships within the Community of Christ, and how that Community is to live in the world. This brings us, then, to the warfare against the powers of evil from outside.

Verses 10–17: The Community at War: the Battle against the Devil

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; 16 besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can

⁵⁵There is still a considerable trafficking in slaves today. Whilst this is not apparent in the West, it is not for us to be indignant with Paul that he did not set about emancipating slaves. The Kingdom of God was primary in Paul's thinking. It is a fact of history that Christians led the way to the emancipation of slaves.

quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

In *Verse 10* Paul says ‘Finally’ as though he is giving his final injunction, and this is the case. He has spoken since 5:15 of the need for unity in relationships. The Community stands firm together. Once members had been under the power of Satan and forced to follow his ways (2:1–2). However, they had since been delivered from him (2:4–5) and had been seated with Christ in the heavenly places. Great power was always working towards them (1:21f.) and yet deceitful men—sometimes posing as Christian believers—had tried to catch them by their cunning and ‘deceitful wiles’ (4:14). In 4:26–27, via retained human anger, the devil had tried to gain an entrance into believers and the Church. Now the Church has to realise that it is fighting a cosmic warfare. In II Corinthians 2:10–11 the congregation is to use the means of forgiveness for stopping Satan gaining an advantage within it. Christ’s people are made aware of Satan’s devices to do harm in the community.

At this point, then, those of the Church are to get ‘strong in the Lord and in his mighty strength’. Note the use of words calculated to exhort the readers to great strength.⁵⁶ Whilst one cannot summon up some inner, human strength of one’s own, yet one can arrive at great strength ‘in the Lord’ (cf. Philippians 4:13 where Paul can do all things through Christ who *strengthens* him). So then, in *verse 11* we are to put on *the whole armour of God*. In Isaiah 59:17 it is the God

⁵⁶We are reminded of I Corinthians 16:13: ‘Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong’.

of Israel who puts on His own whole armour, going out to intercede (intervene) for Israel. Paul may have this Old Testament Scripture in mind—or he may be saying that God has provided for believers a complete armour, made by Himself, and sufficient in quality and efficiency for His people to fight this cosmic warfare against evil principalities and powers. This equipment is sufficient to deal with the ‘wiles of the devil’, who is seeking to destroy God’s unifying work and plan.⁵⁷ *Verse 12* makes it clear that one of the wiles of the devil would be to get members to come into conflict with other persons. The instinctive rationalisation that it is human beings (as opposed to principalities and powers) that have been working evil,⁵⁸ would tend to make the elect fight against human evil in human ways. But the battle is with the very principalities and powers themselves, no matter how many humans they may seek to manipulate. It is cosmic warfare ‘against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual

⁵⁷In 3:10 principalities and powers look over the actions of the Church in order to know the wisdom and plan of God. Doubtless some of these are evil powers, and there is every reason why they should attack the Church. One such reason is that God has taken many of their former slaves, adding them to the Church and using them to share in ‘the mystery of the plan’.

⁵⁸Many theologians have difficulty in believing in ‘a real devil’. Some see the use of the term as a mythologising of evil which must otherwise be seen as abstract. Paul, in this pericope of 6:10–18, sees the battle of evil as personal. God is personal, Satan is personal, the Church of Christ is personal—conflict is personal.

hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places'.⁵⁹ Thus, from the very headquarters of evil, the army of the devil seeks to overthrow the people of God. No wonder Paul repeats the injunction: 'take the whole armour of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand' (*verse 13*). 'The evil day' is the present time when 'the days are evil' (5:16). Evil is unremitting. It must be fought continually. And even when victory comes the army of Christ⁶⁰ must continue to stand, not relax or relinquish its wrestling.

From *verse 14 to verse 17* the components of the armour of God are named. They are what Paul calls 'spiritual weapons' in II Corinthians 10:3–5, and in I Thessalonians 5:8 are similar accoutrements. 'Loins girded with truth' are the antithesis of 'loins girded with deceit', for Satan goes out to deceive the whole world. Satan's armoury is built of 'the deceit of the sin' and the 'deceit of the lusts'. Truth destroys the power of deceit. 'The breastplate of righteousness' (cf. Isaiah 59:17; II Corinthians 6:7) is primarily active righteousness, not omitting the righteousness which comes from justification. Such righteousness is unassailable by evil. Feet shod 'with the equipment of the gospel of peace' means that the peace wrought by the blood of

⁵⁹The venom of the evil one—Satan—is shown in passages such as John 10:10; II Corinthians 4:4; I Peter 5:8; Revelation 12–14. He is an adversary, a tempter, a seducer and an accuser. It is in these areas that the battle rages.

⁶⁰Revelation 19:11f. speaks of Christ and 'the armies of heaven'. But this vast army contains human forces, the elect. Christian hymnary and liturgy has always spoken of warfare. But the pacifism of this era plays down this side of the battle, preferring softer, 'non-imperialistic' terms.

the Cross fortifies the Church. The Church goes against all evil well shod for its task, for its own peace is inviolable. This message of peace with God grips the restless human heart.⁶¹ In the New Testament believers are constantly urged to 'have faith in God', and the content of faith—the *faith*—supports them against Satan's deceits. That is, what they believe is what supports them. The shield of faith takes the bitter and evil accusations and quenches them, leaving the person free to fight on with the counter darts of the truth (Colossians 2:14–15; Hebrews 2:14–15; Revelation 12:10). In Romans 8:33, where accusations are intended to destroy the saints, the answer is God's justification of His people. Ultimately, nothing can separate them from His love which is in Christ Jesus the Lord. He is Lord over all forces—be they good or evil. 'The helmet of salvation' (cf. Isaiah 59:17) protects the head, a most vulnerable part of the body. In I Thessalonians 5:8 Paul speaks of the helmet as 'the hope of salvation', meaning that the victory and climax (*telos*) which is ever before the eyes of the Church renders the Community impregnable. In Christ it is never to be defeated. 'The sword of the Spirit' is the primary weapon in this 'panoply of God' which is otherwise defensive in its components. The sword of the Spirit is the deadly offensive. In Revelation 1:16 and 19:21 the sword is shown going out of the mouth of Christ. By it He smites all the nations. Of course it is the word of God or 'the breath of God' which ultimately judges and destroys all that is evil. It is 'the sword of the Spirit' and not of the Church as such,

⁶¹cf. Romans 5:11; Philippians 4:6–7; Romans 10:15; Isaiah 52:7. Contrast the former passages with the 'no peace' of Isaiah 57:19–21.

which judges and destroys. It is the Spirit who wields the sword by means of His people, hence its great effectiveness.⁶²

Verses 18–20: The Community at Prayer and Proclamation

18 Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that utterance^[63] may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

We are rightfully inclined to think of *prayer* as the next of the weapons. Think, rather, of the people equipped with the armour of God in order that they may begin and sustain the offensive against evil. Prayer is the offensive against evil. Such prayer wins victories in the battles. All are to be praying ‘at *all* times’. The word ‘all’ is used four times in *verse 18*. Note that all prayer is ‘in the Spirit’. Certainly the intercessors are always to remain alert, loins girded. With perseverance, supplication is to be made for ‘all saints’. In *verse 19* Paul asks that he be included in this intercession for he knows its value. Paul’s desire for intercession is so that

⁶²For the quality and power of the word of God: Ephesians 3:5; II Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 3:7ff.; 4:12; 9:8; 10:15; I Peter 1:11.

⁶³Some commentators see ‘utterance’ (*logos*) as meaning ‘a word’, and conclude that Paul looks for a special *logos* for certain occasions. This could possibly be the case, although it seems Paul was never at a loss for such a word or words.

he may open his mouth boldly and speak with power in proclaiming ‘the mystery of the gospel’ which, elsewhere, he calls ‘the whole counsel of God’ (Acts 20:27). He knows that a mystery is not a puzzle to be solved but a secret to be proclaimed, that those who will hear will have it unfolded to them. Paul, of course, was vulnerable himself to the fear of men and the hostility which always met him when he proclaimed the gospel. Paul seeks to come against this natural fear. He sees himself as ‘an ambassador in chains’ and yet desires that against all human fear he will speak boldly as he *ought* to speak. He certainly knows *what* to speak!

Verses 21–24: Closing Remarks

21 Now that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. 22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

23 Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love undying.

In *verses 21 and 22* we see that, whatever the letter may be—whether a letter to one Church or a circular letter to a number of Churches—it is brought by a courier from Paul whose name is Tychicus. Tychicus is with the apostle in Acts 20:4 (and probably in 21:29). In Titus 3:12 it seems he will be sent by Paul to Titus on Crete. And in II Timothy 4:12 Tychicus is sent by Paul

to Ephesus, it would seem, on the business of the gospel. He is 'the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord', obviously a dependable and able person. Paul wants his readers to have news of him. Presumably, Paul also wants to have news from the Ephesians. He wants them to be encouraged in their hearts—a valuable desire in the midst of the warfare that they are all waging. Paul is no loner, no freelance worker, but one who is always in the company of other workers.

His final salutation and blessing in *verses 23 and 24* are not empty cliches or merely formal wishes. 'Peace' and 'love with faith' is a prayer for the whole Community—'to the brethren'—and contains rich ingredients which are essential to the Church's life and progress. 'Faith' here is really 'faithfulness'. The very last verse, 'Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love undying' is most beautiful. 'Grace' is the constant action of God in love towards His people. It, too, is indispensable to the life of the Community. The description of those for whom Paul prays is most moving: 'all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love undying'. Love for Christ is not mentioned much in the New Testament. Rather, it is Christ's love for His people which is stated (II Corinthians 5:14–15; Galatians 2:20 and Ephesians 5:2). In II Corinthians 11:1–4 there is some talk of the bridal love of the Church but as we see in Ephesians 5:25f. it is the husband who loves the wife, not the wife the husband. The husband must take the initiative in love. In Titus 2:4 the older women teach the younger women to love their husbands. Here it is the brethren, both men and women, who love the Lord Jesus Christ with 'love undying' or 'love incorruptible'. What a high note on which to conclude such a wonderful Letter!

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