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The Book of Ephesians

A Practical Bible Commentary by Terry Baxter



Ephesus was an important, beautiful, and revered city in the first century. Located in what is now present-day Turkey on the Ionian coast, it was home to the Temple of Artemis –one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Despite its reputation, it had its ugly side. Unwanted babies were commonly disposed of by abandoning them on manure piles and in garbage dumps. Hedonism and sexual sins were rampant. But when Paul introduced the Ephesians to Jesus, it changed their lives –and the world– forever.

The first half of Paul's letter to the Ephesians contains powerful theology telling of our adoption into the family of God and some of the most beautiful and powerful prayers ever written. The second half is an amazing guide and handbook for daily living for all ambassadors of Christ clothed in the armor of God while we serve Him in this world.

Come and see how the Holy Spirit, moving through the words of Paul, greatly blesses, guides, and leads each of us who have been adopted and sealed into the family of God!



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Edited by Dan Jones.

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Pour Yourself Into A Few: Acts 18:18-21

“18) Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow. 19) They came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. 20) When they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, 21) but taking leave of them and saying, "I will return to you again if God wills," he set sail from Ephesus.”

As we prepare to walk through the book of Ephesians, we need to take some time and study the starting of the church as recorded in Acts 18-19. As the Ephesus story opens, Paul was wrapping up his ministry in Corinth. He had spent one year and six months there teaching and building up the disciples. (See Acts 18:8-11) It was at this point that he decided to travel back to Antioch which was his sending church. (See Acts 18:22-23)

Traveling with him were Priscilla and Aquila. They were arguably the best example of a husband and wife ministry team in the entire Bible. Paul excelled at “disciple making” by taking people with him on short-term mission trips. He never traveled alone. He equipped people for ministry by doing ministry side by side with them. Follow Paul's example: Minister to many, but focus on pouring yourself into a few. Jesus modeled this approach.

The church at Ephesus almost started by accident. I believe Paul honored the practice of resting on the Sabbath and not traveling. Since they were in Ephesus they looked for a Jewish synagogue. As was his custom, Paul entered the synagogue in Ephesus and started speaking to the Jews.

Paul had an amazing background as a former Pharisee and was a master of the Old Testament. He used the books of the Old Testament to point people to the Messiah and then give biblical proof that the Old Testament was pointing to Jesus Christ. (See Acts 9:20-22) Soon the service was transformed into an evangelistic rally.

Evidently, the Jews in Ephesus were impressed with his teaching. They begged him to stay longer, but instead Paul left Priscilla and Aquila to care for the small group who were open to the gospel. Then Paul traveled on to Antioch. The text almost indicates that Paul was only there for one Sabbath.

I love this story because it illustrates some amazing New Testament dynamics. First, walking in the Spirit recognizes that God is always working in the “now”. Ministry doesn't start when you reach your destination, it is right at hand. Let your light shine right where you are “now.” Be flexible and expect God to work in every encounter.

Second, Paul was a master at empowering others for ministry. He quickly adjusted his plans and left Priscilla and Aquila to answer the door God had just opened in Ephesus. At some point, a good leader unleashes others for crucial ministry. I am confident the Holy Spirit moved the heart

of this young ministry couple to stay in Ephesus. Paul affirmed and empowered them in the decision. They were all sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Third, this text illustrates how the early church grew by duplication. Paul was leaving more than words behind, he was leaving gifted workers. Competent leaders recognize they don't have to do it all themselves. Rather, they recognize God can and does work through others. They are constantly unleashing and empowering others for ministry.

Finally, this story screams of the fact that some form of training is important, but you don't need a Bible college or seminary degree to be effective in ministry. God wants to raise up the workforce to reach the world through disciple-making and the gifts, empowerment, and leading of the Holy Spirit. After being mentored for one year and six months under Paul in Corinth, Priscilla and Aquila were ready to become church planters.

God is doing this again today. I fully affirm the way God is raising up numerous home church movements, local churches, and third-world mission movements that disciple, equip, empower, and unleash its people for effective ministry. This is quickly becoming the new supply line for the end time work force.

The Gospel is exploding around the world today and our traditional Bible College and Seminary model is failing to produce the volume of gifted, effective, and Spirit-anointed workers needed to step into the trenches, roll up their sleeves, and go to work. There is much more to this text than meets the eye at first glance.

Stay tuned, what happened next is amazing. It illustrates that God is not limited to work through just a few like Paul or Peter. He wants to raise up an army of gospel workers. Every believer has a role to play. God does the work. We are merely His hands, feet, and mouth to the world.

Significant Ministry Influence: Acts 18:24-28

"24) Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. 25) This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; 26) and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. 27) And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, 28) for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ."

As Priscilla and Aquila remained in Ephesus, they started teaching and mentoring those who were open to the gospel. They had a rather low-key, relational-based ministry, and they were good at it. They spent their time hanging around the Jewish synagogue and most likely their

favorite “coffee shop” or public discourse spot. Their home was most likely a haven for people seeking Jesus.

One day a man named Apollos strolled into town. He was a very gifted and eloquent public orator. He was learned in the Scriptures but only aware of the ministry of John the Baptist. He was most likely a convert of one of John the Baptist's disciples.

After hearing him teach and preach, Priscilla and Aquila started investing time in him. Soon they explained to him the way of the Lord more fully over several meetings. They undoubtedly unpacked for him what they had learned from Paul about the many Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah and how Jesus fulfilled them all. They then proceeded to share the gospel with Apollos who became a sponge of everything they shared.

It wasn't long before Apollos became a fruitful evangelist. Church history tells us he became the most acclaimed Bible orator of the time and an influential leader in the early church on par with Paul and Peter. (See 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:5,6,22; 4:6; 16:12; Titus 3:13) He became a crucial part of the ministry team in the New Testament.

So what can we learn from this text? Well, you might not be the most eloquent public speaker, but as you faithfully go about your one-on-one evangelism and disciple making ministry, you might reach and influence the next Billy Graham or raise up an army of World-Changers. By far, the most effective ministry couple I've ever met were relational disciple-makers and small group mentors. I have never seen either of them lead a public evangelistic outreach, but God has used them to reach and raise up the workforce He is using to mightily impact several nations for the glory of God. I cannot calculate the huge impact they have had. Be faithful where God plants you and be intentional about mentoring people God brings into your life.

The Gospel Starts Taking Root: Acts 19:1-7

“1) It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. 2) He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said to him, “No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” 3) And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” And they said, “Into John's baptism.” 4) Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” 5) When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6) And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. There were in all about twelve men.”

As Paul came back through Ephesus, he encountered a group of twelve disciples of John the Baptist. Like Apollos, they were out spreading as much of the gospel as they were familiar with from John the Baptist.

Paul quickly quoted from John and encouraged them to believe in the One John pointed to, and then he preached Jesus to them.* It didn't take long before they became believers and were baptized in the name of Jesus. Then Paul laid hands on them and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Notice that Paul didn't argue religion with them. He just started where they were and then pointed them to Jesus and the Gospel. This is an amazing evangelism technique. Rather than discrediting what they knew, he simply filled in the blanks.

Many religious people from the Christian tradition have the basics, they just need to connect the dots. Don't put them down, instead lift them up to a full understanding of the gospel. It's our job to point them to Jesus, it's the Holy Spirit's job to draw them into a born-again experience.

Again, notice the numbers. While there were thousands being saved in Jerusalem, the numbers were much smaller in the regions beyond. There were only twelve men, but that was huge for Ephesus as the Gospel was still in the sowing stage.

It wasn't long before God opened a huge door for the gospel in Ephesus and many started turning to the Lord. There is a planting, watering and harvest process. (See 1 Corinthians 3:6-7) This is as true for an individual as it is for a region. We need to cover the process with prayer and invite the Holy Spirit to work.

*(*The Jewish people had been praying three times a day for centuries that the Messiah would come, and Orthodox Jews who have not accepted Jesus as the Messiah still do! That's why the message of John the Baptist –that the Messiah was finally here – drew “all of Judea including all of the people of Jerusalem” as it says in Mark 1:5 to spend days on a 25-mile journey across inhospitable desert to hear a bug-eating prophet dressed in camel hair! –dj)*

Seeds Of Awakening: Acts 19:8-10

“8) And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. 9) But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. 10) This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.”

When Paul returned to Ephesus, it became obvious that God was doing something special. Many started responding to the gospel. Momentum was building. Recognizing this, Paul invested the next two years of ministry in Ephesus. What started in the synagogue soon moved to the school of Tyrannus.

The study of revival and awakening is fascinating. Some might be hesitant to call what happened in the first century a “revival.” But keep in mind, God started this movement among His own people who had become cold and apostate under traditional Jewish religion.

Those who turned to Christ and were filled with the Holy Spirit were enthusiastic, bold, and vocal. Jesus became the subject of nearly every conversation.

Notice that as the gospel started spreading, opposition started building. For some reason that always happens. Satan is always opposed to the spread of the gospel. (See 2 Corinthians 4:3-4) As we shall see shortly, Ephesus became the epicenter of a first century awakening that spread far and wide. It soon embraced all of Asia.

Full-Scale Awakening: Acts 19:11-20

“11) God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, 12) so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out. 13) But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." 14) Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. 15) And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" 16) And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. 17) This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified. 18) Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. 19) And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20) So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.”

This is a profound text of Scripture. As chapter nineteen unfolds, Ephesus and the surrounding region were ushered into a full-blown awakening. This chapter becomes a unique case study of the characteristics that often accompany revivals and awakening. Four things stand out in this context.

First, there was an increase in signs and wonders. We learn from verses 11-12 “that God was performing extraordinary miracles through the hands of Paul.” Notice that God was the one performing these miracles. For some reason the more a region seeks God the more He pours out His Spirit in unique ways. Healings and unique signs sometimes happen to advance the gospel. These seem to punctuate the existence of God and His power. (See Hebrews 2:3-4)

Second, demonic activity was exposed. There was a definite increase in spiritual warfare in this chapter. This happened both with false exorcists being exposed and humiliated as contrasted with those like Paul who were living in a right relationship with Jesus Christ. It doesn't surprise me that Ephesians 6 was written to this church which contains the most practical teaching on the subject of spiritual warfare in the entire Bible.

Third, many people turned from darkness to the light. Notice that many people started confessing and disclosing their dark practices and burning their spiritistic books. God was setting people free. Spiritual bondage was being broken. People were cleansing their lives and homes from pagan artifacts. They were getting rid of the physical objects associated with the occult. This is exactly what God commanded Israel to do when they entered the promised land. They were to cleanse the land from pagan practices.

Finally, the Word of God started spreading rapidly and prevailing. Many were turning to Jesus and the gospel. The whole spiritual atmosphere of Ephesus and the surrounding region began to change. It was like a light turned on over the region. A door for the gospel was opened wide. There was a hunger for God's Word and solid doctrinal truth. Paul wrote the book of Ephesians to satisfy this hunger. Revival must be accompanied by solid biblical teaching and preaching.

These same characteristics were true of the Great Awakenings in Europe and the United States. Times of refreshing came from seeking the presence of the Lord. God worked in mighty ways. There was a prevailing hunger and thirst for God. Entire regions were enveloped in an awesome awareness of the holiness of God. Many repented of sin and came to Jesus. The results were long lasting.

I believe God can and does work in similar ways today when His people turn to Him and begin to seek His ways. Jesus wants to purify His bride for His return. More of that when we get to the book of Ephesians. At this point I just want to highlight how the church in Ephesus started.

Measuring Christian Impact: Acts 19:21-41

"23) About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way. 24) For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; 25) these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business. 26) You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all. 27) Not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence." 28) When they heard this and were filled with rage, they began crying out, saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" 29) The city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia. 30) And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him. 31) Also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater."

Unlike the spread of the gospel early in the book of Acts, no significant numbers were kept of the converts in the region of Ephesus. However, the text above indicates the numbers were large enough to put a huge dent in the tourism trade and attendance at the temple of Artemis

that was located in Ephesus. The temple seated around 50,000 people and was one of the seven wonders of the world.

Here is the point, the gospel and the resulting awakening was beginning to change the culture of Ephesus. You cannot escape that fact in this story. The early Christians were having an impact. It would not be exaggerating to assume the number of converts had grown past a few thousand and most likely the church was structured much like the church in Jerusalem after Pentecost. (See Acts 2:42-47)

This text graphically illustrates the difference between the church in revival and awakening as compared to the church in decline. The new Christians in Ephesus were impacting culture rather than culture impacting the church. The gospel was in the driver's seat.

This is the universal measuring stick of the vibrancy of the gospel in any locality. Is it the church or the world influencing the direction of the culture? When the church is on fire, it influences the culture for the glory of God. When the church is in decline, it starts to adopt the values of the world and culture drifts in a secular direction.

When the modern western church is measured by this standard, it quickly becomes obvious that we are in need of revival and awakening. We need a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We are in need of Divine intervention.

Short Introduction To Ephesians: Ephesians 1:1-2

“1) Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: 2) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul had a unique way of writing his epistles. He started by identifying himself and then his intended audience. Why? There were many letters called “pseudepigrapha” that were rejected by the early church. That means “false writings.” Heretics started writing letters and then signing Paul’s name or Peter’s name.

The early church wanted to ensure they had the real thing. When they put the New Testament cannon together they had a few tests. 1) Was the authorship known for certain? 2) Did the book speak with “thus saith the Lord” authority? 3) Was the book in harmony with the rest of scripture? 4) Were the early Christians willing to die for the letter? This Epistle fits all of those characteristics.

Notice the letter is addressed “to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus.” It has been said, “you are either a saint or an aint.” You are either a born-again Christian or you are not.” You either know Jesus as your Savior or you don’t. Many believe these letters were intended to be circulated broadly. Some early manuscripts did not include the word “Ephesus” but all emphasized the word “saints.”

He concludes his introduction with his hallmark blessing of grace and peace upon them from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. These two qualities were needed by the early church as persecution mounted. We all need them.

Plunging Into The Depth of Salvation: Ephesians 1:3-14

As we start our study of the book of Ephesians. I want to take a broad brush and paint the big picture. Then we will come back with small brushes and fill in the small details. In Ephesians 1:3-14 Paul talks about salvation. He takes several verses to talk about what each member of the Trinity did related to human redemption. Let me give you an amazing outline through which we can view these verses.

The Father Planned our Salvation. Vs 3-6

The Son Performed our Salvation. Vs 7-12

The Holy Spirit Perfected our Salvation. Vs 13-14

As you stand back and look at these verses, you soon realize that the same outline relates to creation. The Father planned the creation, the Son performed the actual work of creating, and the Holy Spirit perfected creation by adding order, design, and beauty to it. Creation and the new creation of man through human redemption have a lot in common. (See 2 Corinthians 5:17)

I also want to be fair and point out that according to the text, people do have a role to play in salvation. According to Ephesians 1:13, we hear the gospel and we believe. Notice that salvation is based on faith and not on works. God did all the work. We don't earn our salvation. It is a free gift. All we do is believe.

But the book of Ephesians gets very deep very fast. It is intellectually challenging. The awakening in Ephesus was mighty and powerful through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but it was not shallow. It was anything but mere emotional hype. Some so-called "revivals" today are tragically void of biblical truth and depth. They are silly and embarrassing. They do not measure up to the New Testament standard.

God wants His people to drive down deep roots into His Word. He wants our walk to have a doctrinal foundation. He wants us to renew our mind based on His truth. (See Ephesians 4:17-24) Though salvation is a free gift, growth toward maturity takes diligent study, thorough application, and obedience to put off, put in, and put on Jesus Christ. Growth is a daily process of putting off deception and embracing and responding to biblical truth.

We quickly discover that though the early church delighted in the power of the Holy Spirit, they were also challenged intellectually. They did not check their brains at the door. You cannot study the New Testament without significant intellectual growth and development. Over time, biblical truth becomes the lens through which we as Christians view history, the world, the universe, the unseen realm and reality. This is a lifelong process.

Let me say it this way: Paul made disciples by feeding both the spirit and the mind. When we study the books of Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, or for that matter any book of the New Testament or the Bible as a whole, we are studying the discipleship manual of the early church. Be prepared to learn, grow, and change. Be ready to be stretched.

The Father's Plan: Part 1: Ephesians 1:3-4

“3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4) just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love”

The focus of Ephesians 1:3-6 is on God the Father and His plan for humanity and the universe. Some people have difficulty relating to God the Father because of negative experiences with an earthly father. They view Him as harsh, critical, or scornful. But that is not the case with God the Father. He is full of love and favor toward us. He has “blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” He has placed the fullness of heaven within our grasp.

In these verses, Paul begins to introduce us to the sovereignty of God. He clearly states that the Father planned our salvation before He laid out the foundation of the world. In other words, God created the world with people in mind. That is what distinguishes planet earth from the sun, the moon, and other planets within our solar system. Planet earth was created by God with human habitation in mind. It would be wise to take a moment and ponder that truth.

This thought stretches some people. It is totally contrary to the notion of random and purpose-less evolution. To them, the earth was first and after millions of years life started as a fluke. The implication is that life has no intrinsic value, meaning, or purpose. By contrast, creation and this text implies that all people are the result of Divine planning and have value, dignity, and purpose.

But let's get more specific: This text also indicates that God had you and me in mind at this moment in human history before He created the world. He also had the unborn of the next generation in mind who are yet to be conceived. At the very least, we can conclude from these verses that God the Father is for us and not against us.

But let's take one more big step in our thinking. If you and I were on His mind before He laid the foundation of the world, that means that we are not a mistake or the result of random chance. David said something very similar way back in Psalms 139:13-16. Verse 16 says, “Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance, and in Thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.” That is profound! It forces us to look at ourselves, other people, and God differently.

These verses usher in the practical side of the doctrine of God's choosing and predestination. Don't push those words away or ignore them just because you cannot grasp them. Both words are used in Ephesians 1:4-5. It is a fact; God knows the end from the beginning. Foreknowledge is an attribute of God, just as exact and detailed fore-planning is within Deity. That means God is in control!

But notice that He chose us for a purpose. "He chose us in Him that we might be holy and blameless before Him." (Vs 4) He wants us to be our best and reach our potential. Sin always makes a mess of human potential, but because of the work of Christ on the cross and human redemption, people can be forgiven, set free, and overcome the curse of sin.

The bottom line is that God the Father planned the details of human salvation before He created the world. He made provision for human weakness and frailty. He loves you and me. He is for us and not against us. He created us for fellowship and relationship with Himself. He has a unique and special plan for each of us.

Are you getting the idea that the book of Ephesians is going to be very deep and thought provoking? God does not want us to be shallow as Christians!

The Father's Plan: Part 2: Ephesians 1:5-6

"In love 5) He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6) to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved."

This is an example of the verse division being off by two words. The end of verse 4 actually connects to verse five. What God the Father did was motivated by love. "In love He predestined us to adoption as sons, through Jesus Christ to Himself." The whole theme of adoption was part of God's plan from the beginning.*

Paul talks about this in Romans 8:23 and Galatians 4:4-7. God wants us in His family as children of God. He invites us to cry out "abba father", or "dear daddy." Through faith in Christ we literally become His adopted children.

Notice that this is according to the kind intentions of His will. God the Father is full of love and kindness. Later we will discover that this sets us up to be legal heirs in the family of God. That is an amazing part of His plan for us.

It gets even better. Verse six says that this is "to the praise of the glory of His grace, that He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." This is an unmerited and undeserved kindness that adorns His glory. Salvation lifts us up that we might lift Him up. God is in this for our good and for His glory.

This is a totally different approach from the world that tears others down to make self look good. God builds us up to display His glory. The better we become the more He is glorified.

(Throughout the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul will make numerous references to adoption –and there is an amazing backstory behind it: Ephesus was a Roman colony in Paul's time. It reveled in the sexuality of Roman culture and in Roman religion. The Temple of the fertility goddess Artemis in Ephesus was world-famous.

Roman law addressed "unwanted" babies by making it legal to simply abandon them. The practice was not unusual and carried no social stigma. Whether the baby was the result of rape or incest or adultery or deformed, or the "wrong" gender, or just unwanted –whatever the reason– it was a common practice to abandon that child on the dump heap or the manure pile. It was called "death by exposure." The baby was sometimes eaten by dogs or was picked up and raised as a pet or a slave. Other times, the child just died alone and abandoned.

When Paul introduced the people of Ephesus to Jesus, their hearts were broken by the fate of these children and they were changed forever. They began rescuing these babies from the dumps and manure piles, legally adopting them, and raising them as part of their own loving families. There will be more on this as the chapter progresses. –dj)

Jesus Performed our Salvation, Part 1: Ephesians 1:7-8

"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 on us. In all wisdom and insight"

Just as God the Father planned our salvation, we now discover that Jesus performed everything to purchase our salvation. Notice that "we have redemption through His blood."

The idea of being redeemed is the picture of a slave being purchased to be set free. There is a purchase price for redemption. Jesus paid for our freedom with His own life. 1 Peter 1:18-19 reminds us that " (18) ... you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19) but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ." Our purchase price was huge. It cost Jesus everything.

It is impossible to read about His blood without thinking of Jesus being introduced as the Lamb of God in the Gospel of John and the analogy of Passover Lamb in the book of Exodus. Yes, it was on the Passover that Jesus died on cross and shed His blood for the sins of humanity. Just like the children of Israel put the blood of the Passover Lamb on the doorposts of their homes so that the Destroyer would not kill the first-born, so believers have the blood of Christ applied to their lives through faith.

These verses make it clear that we are not saved by our goodness, we are saved by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The next time Satan heaps doubt on you about your salvation, remind him how rich God is in grace toward you because of the work of Jesus on the cross.

Jesus Performed our Salvation: Part 2 Ephesians 1:9-10

“9) He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10) with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him”

God is up to something that goes way beyond here and now. He wants us to know the mystery of His will, and it is all wrapped up in Jesus Christ. I confess, I often think of God’s will in light of what He wants to do in or through me now, but that’s not the focus of these verses.

Verse 10 talks about “with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and on the earth.” Paul is saying that everything God does has an eternal purpose. God’s will includes much more than what happens in our daily lives, it looks ahead to eternity.

We often get in trouble understanding what God is doing because we force on it our current perspective and time frame. It doesn’t fit. God has a radically different view. Everything Christ did on the cross providing the basis of our salvation was not aimed at making life easy here, it was done to prepare us to share His eternal glory.

The bottom line is that this is still a fallen world. Many things God has in store for eternity does not apply to this present darkness.

There is coming a time when everything will be brought together in Christ. Heaven and earth will merge into God’s plan laid out from the foundation of the world. It is a mystery for us and we cannot wrap our minds around what is about to come.

Jesus Performed our Salvation: Part 3: Ephesians 1:11-12

“In Him 11) also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, 12) to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.”

“What” Jesus did on the cross and through His resurrection is amazing, but “how” He did it is also noteworthy. He not only redeemed us, purchased our salvation, and qualified us for eternity in His presence, He also gave us an inheritance. He qualified us to share in His royalty. That has to do with “what He did!”

Notice that “He predestined us according to the counsel of His own will.” That has to do with “how He did it!” Let’s review a few phases in the broader text that emphasizes “the how.” Watch

carefully. First, He did it according to the kind intention of His will. (Vs 5) Second, He did it to the praise of the glory of His grace. (Vs 6a) Third, He freely bestowed it upon us. (Vs 6b) Fourth, He did it according to the riches of His grace. (Vs 7) Fifth, He lavished it upon us. (Vs 8) Sixth, He did it according to His kind intention. (Vs 9) Finally, He did it after the counsel of His own will. (Vs 10) How did He do it? He did it abundantly. He did it to the extreme. He did it above and beyond. He was not hesitant or tentative.

When you add all of these together it means that Jesus saved you and me to the uttermost. Our salvation is complete, thorough, and lasting. In this text the adoption, redemption, forgiveness, and inheritance relates to “what” He accomplished for us, but most of the text emphasizes “how” He did it. In this text He is trying to tell us something.

He is trying to say that His love toward us is full and complete. Notice that it was Jesus who took the initiative. He was active in seeking us. He pursued us. He poured it on. Make no mistake about it, you and I did not find Jesus, He found us and then He lavished the riches of His grace upon us!

He wants us to walk in the full assurance of His love, acceptance and goodness. He doesn't want us walking around filled with doubt or shyness to reach out to Him. He wants us to have confidence in Him and to be fully engaged in fellowship, worship, and relationship with Him. He wants us to draw near in the full assurance of sonship and everything that comes with being part of His family!

The Human Side of Salvation: Ephesians 1:13-14

“13) In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14) who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Verse 13 is sandwiched in an interesting context. After talking about God the Father planning our salvation and Jesus performing everything for our salvation, the verse briefly mentions the human side of salvation. Then the context ends with the role of the Holy Spirit in perfecting human salvation.

Simply stated, verse 13 says that people have to listen to the gospel of salvation and then believe. It leaves no doubt that salvation is not earned by human effort. Jesus did everything to purchase human salvation, but people have to believe. I don't want to keep score, but the full context puts 98% of the emphasis on divine sovereignty and only 2% on human free will –but it does leave people responsible to believe.

The Calvinists are frustrated that mankind has any role in salvation. The Arminians are frustrated that mankind has such a small role in salvation. But I love this context because it is so

clear and concise. It leaves no doubt that salvation and justification are based on faith alone in the finished work of Christ.

The Role of the Holy Spirit to Protect and Perfect our Salvation: Ephesians 1:13-14

“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.”

The role of the Holy Spirit in salvation starts with conviction of sin and drawing lost people to the gospel. (John 16:7-15) But this text in Ephesians talks about what happens at the moment of salvation. New believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. (Vs 13) The word “seal” Paul used was an official government seal; but the Holy Spirit is the official seal of heaven. There is no greater seal.

But notice that verse 14 says the Holy Spirit is given as a “pledge” of our inheritance. This is the idea of an “engagement ring” or the “earnest money down payment” on a piece of property. It is the idea that the groom or the buyer will come and fulfill the promise of either the wedding or the full purchase of the property.

The Holy Spirit that every believer receives at the moment of salvation is the promise from Jesus to follow through with the promise of salvation. It is the down payment on our inheritance and our full redemption. The Holy Spirit is our taste of heaven until we step into God's presence.

The Holy Spirit is the engagement ring promise from Jesus that the wedding day is coming. Our salvation is as certain as the Words of Jesus, because it is not based on our goodness, rather it is based on the character of Jesus Christ. I have assurance of salvation because I have total confidence and trust in the word and power of Jesus Christ. And the Holy Spirit is our seal of the promise and the down payment on everything to follow.

In the meanwhile, the Holy Spirit activity works to cleanse, purify and transform every believer. Just like He added order, design and beauty to the original creation, so He works to perfect our salvation here and now. We are the new creation. We are the new and much more beautiful work of the Holy Spirit. He works to make the bride beautiful for the wedding day.

(Under Roman law, when a child was adopted and the official government seal was placed on the adoption papers, that child was always and forever a child of those signing the document. Natural-born children could be disinherited, but adopted children could not. Their inheritance was guaranteed forever. In the same way, when we are adopted into the family of God we are sealed with the Holy Spirit and our eternal inheritance of relationship with God and eternal life in heaven are guaranteed. As Terry says, there is no greater seal! –dj)

Praying For the Brotherhood of Faith: Ephesians 1:15-16

“15) For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, 16) do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers;”

When someone became a Christian they were bumped to the top of Paul’s prayer list. In His view they hadn’t arrived; rather they were just beginning a long journey. Ahead were deserts of trials and temptations as well as valleys of spiritual warfare. They would face mountains of distractions from the world and potential heart-ache from interpersonal conflicts and disappointments from other Christians. That is not to mention the increased persecution that awaited them from Rome.

In verse 15, Paul looked for two things to validate a genuine conversion. First, did they openly profess faith in Christ? It is a huge step to publicly identify as a Christian in a hostile culture. And second, did they have genuine agape love for other Christians? Was there a kindred spirit?

I was immersed in secular culture through my role as an Iowa State Representative for eight years. I constantly have my antenna up for other Christians who are being salt and light in a difficult environment. God has them sprinkled in various places.

They come from different church backgrounds. They come from both sides of the political aisle. Some serve as legislators, some as clerks and pages, while others fill various offices at the capital and some are lobbyists. Still others come to the Capital as pastors and openly pray for us. I am grateful for them. Others visit the capital from all over the state, our country and the world. The body of Christ is amazing and it doesn’t take long to detect Christ-likeness shining from other believers.

The common denominator is that they all display faith in Christ and radiate agape love. There is a common bond and brotherhood among us that transcends artificial barriers. I thank God for them and pray for them. I sometimes use the two prayers in Ephesians (1:15-23; 3:14-21) , the one in Philippians (1:9-11), and the one in Colossians (1:9-12) as a guide. Paul understood that other Christians needed prayer and encouragement. The same holds true today.

Praying for New Life: Ephesians 1:15-17

“15) For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, 16) I do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17) that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.”

The first request that Paul prayed for believers was that “God would give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation into the knowledge of Christ.” (Vs 17) This was a significant prayer request.

Having insight into the person and work of Christ translates into developing what we often refer to as a “biblical worldview.”

It totally changes your view of reality. It shapes your view of history. You begin to believe in a Creator rather than evolution. You begin to perceive that the universe is based on order and purpose rather than random chance. Soon you recognize that all the laws of nature, science, and physics are anchored in the unchangeable character of God. This translates into seeing value and dignity in all life and soon you will begin to intuitively recognize the sanctity of human life.

It also means you begin to see all other people as having dignity, value, purpose, and potential. You see them as created in the image of God and loved by Jesus Christ. You also view people as being rational, having choice, being responsible for their actions, and redeemable through the power of the gospel. This becomes your basis of compassion for a lost and hurting world.

But even more, you will begin to recognize the reality of both the physical realm and the spiritual realm and the interaction between the two. When the Spirit God begins to work within you, He produces an intuitive understanding of light and darkness, good and bad, heaven and hell, and truth and deception. Your understanding of time and eternity will also change.

At the moment of salvation an inner switch is suddenly turned on. You begin to experience the Spirit of God communing with you and becoming active in your life. It is not long after salvation that 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 begins to happen in your life. The Spirit of God begins to unpack within your spirit and then your soul the unfathomable mystery of Christ.

You begin to function on the level of what the Bible calls “Zoe” life. That can best be translated as “Spirit life.” Instead of functioning on the mere level of physical life, those who are born-again begin to enter into the Spirit-filled life. I believe the first breath of Spirit-filled life is an inner awakening into personal communion with Jesus Christ.

This was Paul’s first prayer for new believers. He wanted them to experience the inner spirit of wisdom and revelation into the knowledge of Christ. Just as God breathed into Adam the breath of life and he became a living soul, so at the moment of salvation the Spirit of God breathes into the formerly sin-dead human spirit a new and vibrant life. (Ephesians 2:1-10) With that event and only with that event do people truly become born-again Christians. New life begins.

Three Essentials of Faith: Ephesians 1:18-19

“18) I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19) and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might”

As Paul continued his prayer for the believers in Ephesus, he asked that “the eyes of their heart might be enlightened.” This is the idea of illumination. It is turning on the mental and spiritual light bulb that they might know and understand three things.

First, he wanted them to know the hope of their calling. This might be understood as two possible things. First, it could be the assurance of salvation and their future destiny in heaven. That is very important. Every Christian needs to stop walking on spiritual eggs and start embracing their position in the family of God.

Or second, Paul could have been talking about a sense of knowing the calling and will of God in their life. This would be a sense of divine purpose and destiny. A life is a terrible thing to waste. I believe God wants to do significant things in and through every believer. We need to get in tune with God early in our Christian walk.

Second, Paul prayed that they might know “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” This was a major “light bulb moment” for me. Are you ready for this: “Christians are the inheritance of Christ.” His death on the cross was an investment in us. He purchased us. We belong to Him. That means that every Christian has meaning, value, and purpose. This gave me a basis to love myself and to love the brotherhood. Together we are the family of God!

Third, in these verses Paul prayed that they might know “what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.” Notice that this was demonstrated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This was the power that overcame death and the realm of darkness and then put Christ in the heavenly places next to the Father Himself! More on that in the next section, but Paul wanted every Christian to wrap their faith around the power of God.

This is best illustrated in 1 Corinthians 2:4-5. Listen to these two amazing verses; “4) and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5) so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.” The early church anchored the faith of new believers in the power of God. The modern evangelical church anchors the faith of new believers in rational doctrine and ideological theology. It took me a long time to recover from this after Bible College.

There is a huge difference between these two approaches. Have you ever wondered why some Christians can appear so biblically smart but be totally void of Spirit and power? They even question if God can do miracles today. I think we are knocking on the door of that problem.

To avoid this, both Jesus and Paul made disciples on the front lines of short term mission trips. Look at the enthusiastic response of the 70 when they returned to Jesus after their first mission assignment, “And the seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.” (Luke 10:17) It was at that point that Jesus started working with their understanding of doctrine and theology. In fact, He gave them a lesson in Christology 101.

Please understand this, the early church taught doctrine through the lens of personal experience of the power of God while living on the front lines of doing ministry. This resulted in “Spirit-filled” and “on fire” biblical theology.

They did not pull future leaders away from the front lines of Christian living and ministry for 6-8 years and plop them in a stale intellectual environment full of all kinds of dead orthodoxy and fruitless rational debates and then recruit them to come back and lead their churches. That’s the way legalistic Pharisees were trained in the days of Jesus. That was Paul before he met Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and was filled with the Holy Spirit. No wonder western churches are mostly dead today.

Describing Resurrection Power: Ephesians 1:19-23

“19) and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20) which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21) far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22) And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23) which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Prayer by definition is based on the realization of God’s power. It is a declaration that we need Him and that He can do what we as mere humans cannot. That is why Paul was quick to intercede and ask that new Christian would understand the power of God. But he qualifies three aspects of this power.

First, he wanted believers to understand that this is resurrection power. (See Vs 19-20) What was accomplished through the resurrection of Christ was a demonstration of God’s power over death. Rather than being immobilized by the fear of death, Christians can be energized by the love of life. Life rooted in our God is much more powerful than death rooted in the enemy. (See John 10:10)

Second, he wanted believers to understand that this is heavenly power. (See Vs 20-21) It is measured by the One who inhabits the heavens and is the sum of all power. He is far above all earthly rule and authority and power and dominion. He is timeless. He is measureless. He is pre-eminent. He is above all. His power has no bounds!

Finally, he wanted believers to understand that this is Sovereign power. (See Vs 22-23) Jesus is now head over all. All things are in subjection under His feet. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him. As head of the church, He rules and reigns over the universe. He does according to the counsel of His own will.

Knowing and embracing these three aspects of His power should impact the way we live in this world. Christians should *not* be defeated, discouraged or spineless. We should live in

submission and obedience to Him and walk in His power and authority. Entering into what Paul is praying in this full context is life-transforming!

Humanity's Lost Condition: Ephesians 2:1-3

“1) And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2) in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3) Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”

With the opening of the second chapter of Ephesians, Paul lays out the case for human salvation. In the opening three verses he declares humanity's lost condition. Let's look at four tragic problems that all people have apart from Jesus Christ.

First, apart from salvation all people are spiritually dead. (Vs 1) People are born in a lost and sinful condition. We were sinners by nature and sinners by choice. This resulted in us being dead in our trespasses and sin.

Second, apart from salvation all people are entangled by the world. (Vs 2a) Paul made it clear in the beginning of verse two that we all “walked according to the course of this world.” This is the idea that we embraced the fallen world and its values. They became our moral compass and our personal mode of operation. We were at home in the world and even defended it.

Third, apart from salvation all people are under the influence and control of Satan. (Vs 2b) We not only walked according to the prince of the power of the air, we were under his deception, domain and influence. We belonged to him. We were blind citizens of the kingdom of darkness. (See Colossians 1:13 and 2 Corinthians 4:3-4)

Fourth, apart from salvation all people are slaves to sin and depravity. (Vs 3) Prior to salvation we lived in the lusts of our flesh. We indulged in the desires of the flesh and of the mind. This means that by nature we were children deserving of God's wrath and judgment. We were lost and hell bound.

These verses are a wake-up call. Every time I read these verses I see my past dancing before me. I am also confronted by the lost condition of the vast sea of humanity being held in the grip of sin, Satan, and death. When I read these verses my mission field comes into focus and I understand the universal consequences of the fall of Adam on all people. I am confronted by human depravity.

Here is the tragic conclusion: All people apart from Jesus Christ are lost and gripped by the power of sin and death and they not only don't realize it, they don't care. They are deceived and blind while being very at home in the world. This does not mean that all people are as bad as they potentially can be. Some people are religious but lost, but they are still lost.

The reader is left asking the question, “Is there any hope for lost and sinful humanity?” Paul's case is strong and flawless. It applies to every person ever born. These verses shake me to the core for I realize that Paul is describing me, my children, my grandchildren, my neighbors, my friends, my work associates and all people. He leaves all people eternally lost and hopeless apart from Jesus Christ and the gospel.

But God! Ephesians 2:4-5

“4) But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5) even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),”

After leaving mankind lost in human depravity, Paul bursts through the gloom and doom of man's lost condition with the two most refreshing words in the Bible: “But God!” Let those two words sink in. God did for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Paul now introduces us to three redeeming qualities of God. First, He is rich in mercy. Justice is giving someone what their sin and rebellion deserves, which is eternal condemnation, death, and punishment. Mercy is just the opposite. It is not dealing out the penalty our sin deserves. Notice, God is rich in mercy. He has it in abundance. I believe mercy is rooted in God's next quality.

Second, God has “great love” toward us. 1 John 4:8 and 16 both remind us that “God is love.” This agape love is the source of His great mercy. Nearly every pagan god in the world is full of hate and vengeance. By contrast, the God of the Bible is love. This separates Christianity from every other world religion. The God of the Bible is in a category all of His own.

Third, the end-product of God's mercy and love is the mystery called, “grace.” By definition “grace is giving mankind what he does not deserve, and that is forgiveness and a fresh start in life.” This grace is extended by the One who alone has the right to throw the first stone. God is not wanting for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

These two verses are the lightning bolt that breaks through the clouds of universal human depravity. The two words that change human destiny are “But God!” Yet, as we shall see, God forces Himself on no one.

The Ages to Come: Ephesians 2:6-7

“6) and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7) so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

The book of Ephesians started with God blessing us “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly placing in Christ.” (See Eph 1:3) We now discover significant insight into that phenomenon. Our position “in Christ” means that we have been raised up with Him and seated with Him in heavenly places in Christ. This aspect of our position “in Christ” has significant blessings in this current age.

But it doesn’t stop there; verse 7 goes on to say that in “the ages to come He is going to show the surpassing riches of His kindness toward us in Christ.” I confess, this verse intrigues me. The phrase “ages to come” is plural. That indicates more than one. Let me share very briefly what I think these “ages” refer to in the future.

I believe the first future age relates to what is called “The Millennial Kingdom.” This is a period of one thousand years when Christ will rule and reign on earth. It is talked about in Revelation 20:1-6. This future age is not explained or developed at length in the Bible. It is shrouded in mystery. Scripture does give some hints here and there of what it will be like, but unfortunately we don’t have time to put that puzzle together in this post.

That future age will then be followed by a second age. This age will feature the New Jerusalem and the New Heavens and the New Earth. (Revelation 21-22, 2 Peter 3:10-13) Again, this second age is also shrouded in great mystery but will be different from the Millennial Kingdom. When placed together we have, “the ages to come.”

What is about to come is going to be unimaginably glorious for believers. We will partake in both of these ages and during them Jesus is going to pour out the riches of the kindness of His grace upon us. From our vantage point, we can only imagine what is about to come.

These two future ages are as difficult for us to comprehend as this present “church age” or “age of grace and the ministry of the Holy Spirit” was for the Old Testament saints to understand. Paul devotes Ephesians 2:11-22 to trying to explain the difference between the Old Testament Age and the New Testament Age.

By Grace Through Faith: Ephesians 2:8-10

“8) For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9) not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

Salvation is by grace through faith. Grace relates to God’s part in the equation. Through Christ God did everything to purchase our salvation. Jesus paid it all on the cross. Faith is the human role. All we do is believe. This makes salvation a free gift.

We do not work to earn salvation, rather we work because of our salvation. Jesus saved us for good works and not because of our good works. Only Christians can truly serve God. We are saved to serve rather than serving to earn our salvation.

It is so easy to get this wrong. Many people are trusting their good deeds to get them saved. Salvation is not earned, it is a free gift. It is based on the finished work of Christ on the cross to pay for human sin and purchase human redemption. These three verses are the pinnacle of what constitutes salvation.

(These are some amazing verses! We are saved by grace for His glory, not ours! And, then we are told we are His workmanship –His masterpiece –created for the purpose of doing the good works He put in place for us to do as part of the plan He had for us from the very beginning! Those good works don't save us, grace saves us! The good works are our purpose and meaning in life He invites us into to give us that full and abundant life we were designed for! HALLELUJAH!-dj)

The Wide-Open Door of Salvation: Ephesians 2:11-13

“11) Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands- 12) remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded 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 formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

This text and the balance of Ephesians Chapter Two contains the most comprehensive list in the entire Bible of what Jesus did to bring the Gentiles into the family of God. The point Paul is arguing in this full context is mind-bending!

In the Old Testament, the Gentiles were separate from God, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from all of the covenants that God promised His people, having no hope, and without God in the world. That is a list of despair!

I am not being racist in this statement, but in the Old Testament every non-Jewish ethnic group was far away from God. The Jews were His chosen people and the rest of humanity was very distant and alienated from Him. Granted, there were times when God showed His compassion to Gentile groups such as the city of Nineveh in the book of Jonah, but as a whole, His abode was with the nation of Israel.

When you study the Old Testament, you discover that God called Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants to be His people. He gave His Law to them through Moses and went before them in a cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. He fought on their behalf. He dispossessed other nations for them. He tabernacled among them in the wilderness and then Solomon built a temple for them where the glory of God dwelt.

By contrast, the Gentiles were very far off. They were lost, distant, and without hope. But all of that changed when Jesus died on the cross. His work of atonement was for “the whole world.” (See John 3:16, 1 John 2:1-2, Ephesians 2:13) He died for all of humanity. The door of salvation and access to the God of Creation was now opened wide for every man, woman, child, and ethnic group.

What Paul describes in Ephesians 2:14-22 is so wonderful and glorious I cannot wrap my mind around it. This is the ultimate expression of grace. Instead of exclusive it is now inclusive. Instead of distance there is now nearness. Instead of alienation and enmity for the Gentiles, God now offers love, peace, acceptance, and access. Paul is not describing limited atonement, he is describing *unlimited* atonement. Jesus died for everyone.

We are now living in a totally new era or age of God’s dealing with mankind. It can be called the “age of grace”, the “church age”, the “age of the indwelling Holy Spirit”. or the “age of all people.” On the cross Jesus completed God’s redemptive plan for all of humanity. All people are now equal before God. Every person has value and dignity. The gospel of grace is for everyone, but not accepted by everyone.

Breaking Down the Wall: Ephesians 2:14-16

“14) For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 15) by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, 16) and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.”

Even though the Jews were God’s chosen people in the Old Testament, they also were sinful and alienated from God. Granted, there were periodic times of revival and turning to God, but as a whole the Jewish people were sinful and rebellious. Why? Because the Law provided a standard for godliness but it did not impart the grace or strength to live godly lives. They also were marked by human depravity and in need of salvation.

The Law actually became a dividing wall between God and man. It condemned all people as sinful and lost. Paul said it well in Romans 3:19-20; “19) Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; 20) because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.”

During His life Jesus fulfilled every ordinance and demand of the Law. Through His death on the cross, Jesus paid the penalty for sin imposed by the Law. And by His resurrection and ascension Jesus broke through the wall of separation between God and man.

But let me stress a crucial point: Because Jesus was a descendant of Adam, His death on the cross atoned for all of humanity. Jesus died for all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. His atonement was not limited to the Jewish people only. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

This is the point Paul was stressing in Ephesians 2:15-16. Jesus is our peace who reconciled all people to God through the cross. He came to start something new called "the body of Christ" or "the church." There is only one way of salvation for all people whether Jew or Gentile –it is through personal saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus not only broke down the dividing wall between God and man, He also broke down the dividing wall between man and man. He is our peace. He brings all believers together. He makes us one.

Peace in Jesus: Ephesians 2:17-18

"17) and He came and He preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; 18) for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father."

Jesus came with a message not only of peace with God, but He also came to bring peace among people. Jesus preached about this in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."

This message was delivered in the upper room discourse with His disciples. In the context Jesus was talking about the coming ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is no surprise that one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is peace. He ends the inner war within people and the enmity between people within His body.

But notice that Paul also said that through Christ we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. Again we must return to the Gospel of John. When the Samaritan woman was trying to embroil Jesus in a religious argument, He answered with an amazing insight about the ministry of the Holy Spirit; "21) Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22) You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23) But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24) God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

I love this text of Scripture. Jesus made it clear that true worship of the Father was through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He is the only One that provides true access to the Father. Satan will do anything he can to confuse people about the Holy Spirit and even make them shun Him. The

Holy Spirit is our access into the presence of the Father. This is equally true for all people. It applies to men and women, to young and old... and to Jews as well as Gentiles.

Over the years God has been weaning me off from religious ceremonies, festivals and various traditions and plugging me into the precious ministry of the Holy Spirit. I still enjoy church services and Christian conferences, but I consciously try to enter into the spirit behind the event. Let me elaborate for a moment:

I have been blessed to partake of many multi-cultural Christian worship services around the world. I can be at home in most of them though some stretch me. I have worshiped in Messianic Jewish services in Ukraine, Eskimo services in Alaska, Korean style worship in Mongolia, Oriental worship in North Vietnam, Spirit-anointed worship in India and Africa and very moving worship in South America. We have worshiped in church buildings, under mango trees, packed in narrow hallways, in huge stadiums, in secret rooms with the underground church and even in barns. I have experienced worshiping God in crystal cathedrals and in dirt floor huts with rats running across the rafters in remote jungles. Many times the worship is in languages I do not know, but that does not stop me from entering into the spirit of the worship.

I have also worshiped God through Catholic and Lutheran liturgy as well as through evangelical, charismatic, and even with my Pentecostal brothers and sisters. I've enjoyed worshiping with Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterian, Reformed, and even Orthodox Christians. I've even worshiped Jesus during the daily opening of prayer in the Iowa Legislature and in intercessory prayer meetings or Bible Studies held at the Capital. I love Jesus and enjoy lifting Him up. My goal is to point people to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

The other side of this coin is that I don't need an event to worship God or commune with Him. Every day and any moment of the day or night can be an anointed encounter with God because access to the Father is through the Spirit. He is my peace, hope and focus.

Part Of The Family: Ephesians 2:19-20

"19) So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20) having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone."

There is no way I can do justice to these two verses, but let me try. In the Old Testament, non-Jewish people could pass through Israel and some even dwelt among them, but they were always treated as strangers and aliens. They did not share the same rights as Jewish people and could get no closer to God than the "court of the Gentiles." They were kept at arm's length. They were distant. They were non-citizens. They were not God's chosen people. They were stigmatized.

Because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, all of that has changed. Remember what Paul said in Ephesians 1:4; "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we

should be holy and blameless before Him.” We as Gentiles are now part of God’s chosen people through faith in Christ. It is now possible for us to be holy and blameless. We are set aside by God for God. We are His people. He welcomes us. He receives us. He has adopted us into His family on an equal basis.

We are no longer strangers and aliens. We are fellow citizens with the saints. We are of God’s household. We enter into all of the promises of the New Testament Apostles and we have the blessings of all of the Old Testament prophets. But “in Christ” we are exempt from all of the Old Testament curses. Jesus took away the curses for us.

We are part of the new wine skins filled with the new wine of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 9:17) Jesus Christ is our cornerstone. As Paul said earlier, “He is our peace.” In other words, we are at home with God. We have equal access to Him. Jesus tore down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile. Through saving faith in Jesus Christ, we belong to God. He is for us and not against us.

A Living Building: Ephesians 2:20-22

“20) having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, 21) in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22) in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”

God is at work building something more magnificent than the ancient temple which Solomon built. That was a mere shadow of things to come. God is building a spiritual temple. The apostles and prophets are the foundation. I take this to be the written Word of God, both Old and New Testaments. Jesus Christ Himself is the cornerstone.

I Peter 2:4-9 gives a clearer picture of this mystery. Let me quote a few verses; “4) “And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5) you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

You and I are living stones in this temple. God is preparing us in the quarry of life to fit into this living building. The trials of this life are shaping and fitting us for our role in the living building. But the focus is not on the individual, it is on “the whole building being fitted together.” (Eph. 2:21) God is preparing something glorious and unimaginable!

Notice that it is currently not a finished building. It is in progress and in process. It is being “fitted together.” It is “growing” into a holy temple in the Lord. It is being “built together.” It has the end purpose of being a dwelling for God in the Spirit.

The bottom line is that every believer has a role to fill in the finished product. Every building block is being individually prepared to fit into the living temple. The Old Testament teaches that

the stones and the beams for the Temple of Solomon were prepared off-site. (See 1 Kings 5:13-18) It was an amazing building process recorded in the first several chapters of 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles.

A similar building program is underway today, but it is much more glorious and much more phenomenal. God is making a living habitation for Himself and you and I as believers are a part of it. Very possibly Revelation 21:10-27 gives a glimpse of the finished product. I don't understand it all. I can't wrap my mind around it, but nothing up to this point in the history of the universe compares to what God is building.

There are times when the trials and struggles of this life do not make sense to me. I sometimes close my eyes and imagine myself in God's quarry. I thank Him that I am His workmanship and that He is preparing me for something special and unique in the future. The same is true for you and for every Christian. He is fitting us together. The end product is worth the chipping away and shaping that God has to do in my life and your life so that we fit into the end product.

The problem with being living stones is that we have independent will and can get out of step with God. Trust and surrender are so important. I ask God for the grace to yield to Him. I want to cooperate with His design and plan for my life. I try to live now with the mystery of eternity in view.

A Prisoner with a Pen: Ephesians 3:1

"1) For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-"

This verse speaks volumes of Paul's living conditions when he was writing this Epistle. The book of Ephesians is known as one of Paul's prison letters. He was most likely in prison in Rome at the time he wrote this letter.

He was there for the hope of the Gospel. Philippians 1:6-21 tells the story of how he was willing to lay his life down to both define and defend the gospel. In other words, the gospel was more important to Paul than his own life.

To amplify this point, let's look very briefly at Paul's final words to the believers in Ephesus before departing from them for the final time. They are recorded in Acts 20:24; "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God."

As Paul wrote these words he was sitting in prison for the sake of the Gospel. He literally put his life where his mouth was. He validated his belief in the Gospel through personal suffering. This is an example of how the preacher greatly expanded his ministry by becoming a writer. God put him in prison to give us much of our New Testament.

Progressive Revelation: Ephesians 3:2-5

“2) if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3) that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4) By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5) which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;”

In this text Paul begins to unpack a few concepts that are important to understand. First, he talks about a special grace that was given to him as an apostle to be the channel of revelation of the gospel, including how it embraced the Gentiles. Paul was to the New Testament revelation of the doctrine of justification by faith what Moses was to the Old Testament and the giving of The Law. God used both of them as significant vehicles of divine revelation in their time.

Second, as you read the Bible beginning with Genesis and working your way through to the book of Revelation, you soon encounter what is called “Progressive Revelation.” In other words, God did not reveal everything about Himself and his plan for mankind in the book of Genesis. He developed the picture over time in such a way that each new truth of doctrine built on what was previously revealed.

This is what Paul was referring to in verses 4-5 when he talked about “the mystery of Christ that was not revealed in previous generations.” They had glimpses and pieces of the puzzle, but the whole picture was put together by Paul and other New Testament apostles and prophets. God progressively revealed His full plan over time.

A third point is equally true, because of the way God revealed truth over time with each new biblical story building on previous stories and revelation, the Bible is best understood when studied chronologically. For example, the book of Exodus makes more sense when you have a basic understanding of the book of Genesis. In the same way, the New Testament makes more sense when you have a working understanding of the Old Testament. The new builds on the old. Ephesians Chapter Three is dedicated to Paul defending the very special stewardship entrusted to him to unpack the mystery of the gospel.

Finally, I believe another truth is hinted at in this discussion. Though our Bible is now complete, there are more ages and mysteries to come. We have things hinted at in the New Testament that we do not fully understand. For example, the millennial reign of Christ is briefly alluded to in Revelation 20, but few details are developed in full color. The same is true for the coming new heavens and earth, and the new Jerusalem pictured in Revelation 21. It has not been fully revealed to us at this point.

So how do I embrace and apply progressive revelation? First, I love to study Old Testament biblical history. This is what makes the New Testament come alive because God's character and nature have not changed. Second, I try to live in the present. We are in the age of grace and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. We have been entrusted with the gospel and the Great

Commission. I take that mandate seriously and seek to spread the knowledge of Christ around the world. Finally, I realize there are many mysteries to come in the future which we cannot and do not currently understand. I am content to walk by faith and trust the future to God. I believe it is a waste of time to fight and argue over future things which are still shrouded in mystery.

Living the Gospel: Ephesians 3:6-8

“6) to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, 7) of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. 8) To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,”

Paul became the Apostle to the Gentiles. He received the revelation that the Gospel included the Gentiles and that they were equally as important to God as the Jewish people. He modeled the implications of that doctrine.

He was entrusted with the grace stewardship to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles and to preach to them the unfathomable riches of Christ. He took this call seriously. He set aside personal dreams and ambitions and personal comfort and luxury to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles both far and wide.

He not only preached the Gospel, he lived the Gospel and made fruitful disciples every place he went. He made no distinction between Jew and Gentile. He treated them as one. He set aside all preference and prejudice and associated with everyone equally. He became all things to all people. He removed all artificial barriers for the sake of the Gospel.

I would argue that Paul became the greatest missionary of all times. The love of Christ constrained him to lay down his life for the spread of the Gospel. He became the embodiment of what it means to be a Christian and serve Christ.

The Mystery of the Church: Ephesians 3:10-13

“10) so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. 11) This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12) in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. 13) Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.”

The mystery that God used Paul to disclose to the world included more than just that the Gentiles could also be saved through faith in Christ; it also included the mystery of the church. God was doing something new. The nation of Israel as God's chosen people and a physical temple were being replaced by the mystery the Body of Christ comprised of all people and a

living building called “the church.” This mystery was so significant that it literally shook the powers in the heavenly places according to verse 11. Satan’s grip on humanity was broken.

Whereas the temple had one location, the church was going to be universal. Whereas the temple had a hierarchy of priests and Levites to administer the sacrificial system and care for the physical temple that people came to for annual ceremonies, the church would have a growing number of sent-out missionaries, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to care for the flock as it spread around the world. It would also focus on the priesthood of every believer. The physical building was being replaced by the living body of Christ. Whereas the old was governed by the external Law; the new would be governed by the inner living Spirit and grace. Whereas the old put a wall of separation between God and man, the new granted confident access to God through Christ. Whereas the old divided people along racial lines, the new brought the hope of racial reconciliation and unity.

You would think that this good news would be welcomed by everyone, but actually Paul suffered much to bring this message to the world. The revelation God gave him to preach to the world was resisted by Jew and Gentile alike. In verse 13 Paul alludes to the tribulation that he suffered to preach this new order to humanity. Old traditions die slowly.

Radical Inner Change: Ephesians 3:14-19

“14) For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15) from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16) that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, 17) so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18) may be able 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 up to all the fullness of God.”

Paul concludes the first three chapters of the book of Ephesians by praying for his recipients. After laying down a deep theological foundation, he asks God to bring inner application and transformation. He wanted far more than intellectual acceptance, he wanted the Spirit of God to fill and empower each believer.

Notice in verse 17 he focuses in on their faith in Christ and their love. Faith and love go hand-in-hand in the Christian life. Without these two functions of the spirit there can be no spiritual discernment or comprehension. Many things in the Christian life go beyond reason. The ways of God are not natural, they are supernatural. They are not of this world, they are heavenly. They are of another dimension.

Just to drive this home, Paul prays that they might know what is the breadth, length, height, and depth. This is not three dimensional geometry. Notice that Paul adds a fourth factor to the usual formula of “length x depth x height.” This is now fourth dimensional reality.

He then adds “the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.” When agape love is added to any subject the divine factor is injected. It doesn’t matter if you are talking about math, science, physics, history, philosophy, or technology: When God is added to the equation it changes everything. Any branch of knowledge void of God is distorted from the beginning. Human knowledge and education without the God factor will have flawed conclusions. That’s why secular education often produces wrong morals and behavior.

Then Paul takes a giant leap; “that you might be filled up to all the fullness of God.” (Vs 19b) When faith in Christ and agape love are filling and consistently integrated into a person's worldview and understanding of reality, it results in transformed thoughts, actions, and character. They start to produce fruits of godliness. They overflow with God's presence and glory. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, the person soon becomes “a new creature.”

Over time a metamorphosis takes place. They are transformed. They develop depth. Formerly ordinary people take on substance. They become mighty in spirit. Soon God is able to use them to do extraordinary things. Paul is praying this process into the life of every believer. His goal is not mere mental mastery of theological truth, his goal is total transformation from the inside out.

(As Terry points out, Paul's prayer goes beyond our ordinary, three-dimensional world and even asks that the subjects of his prayer would be able to understand the love of Christ, even though it is beyond our ability to fully comprehend. –dj)

God to Whom We Pray: Ephesians 3:20-21

“20) Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21) to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

Prayer is not about prayer, rather it is about God. All the prayers in the world will not help you if there is no one listening. It is equally important “who” is listening. If the one listening has no power or divine ability then our praying is at best an exercise in futility.

These are the issues Paul addresses in these two verses. He makes petition to “Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all we could ask or think.” Another translation says “exceeding abundantly.” Still another translation says “infinitely more.”

The bottom line is that God has no limitation to His power or ability. When we pray, we make requests to the One who created the universe and by His Spirit added the order, design, and beauty we behold in the created realm. Creation itself is a mere example of His power and ability. The universe is unfathomably big because God's power is unfathomably great.

But notice He does this “according to the power that works within us.” I believe this is a reference to the person of the Holy Spirit Who indwells every believer. When we pray we are not

limited by the restraints of human nature. The answer to our prayers are measured by nothing short of the power and will of God.

We are finite, but He is infinite. We are weak, but He is strong. We are temporal, but He is eternal. We are limited, but He has no limits. We are flesh, but He is Spirit. We know few things, but He knows all things. We are restricted to time and space, but He is omnipresent. We think and dream small, but He is able to do exceedingly more than all we can imagine.

The bottom line is that all glory and praise belongs to Him. All attention and focus should be directed to Him. It is His church and not our church. He is the sum of all things good and glorious. I am convinced that my greatest prayers are times of silence in the presence of the Almighty while I do nothing but bask in His Glory and Majesty.

Called to Be Full-Time Christians: Ephesians 4:1

“1) Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God.”

As Ephesians 4 opens, we are halfway through this Epistle. Many have noted that with the opening of this chapter Paul suddenly changes his focus. He moves from laying a deep theological foundation to very practical personal application. He appeals to every Christian to start living a Christ-like life.

He wastes no time setting a very high standard. He moves from attitudes to actions very quickly. The reader is left with the realization that we are not only saved by grace through faith –we are also to live daily by grace through faith.

The Christian life is impossible to fake. True inner fruit is the byproduct of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The gospel is validated to the world around us by how we live. The opposite is also true, the gospel is discredited by fleshly bondage and hypocrisy in the lives of “so called” Christians. We are either the real thing or we are cheap religious impostors merely putting on an external show.

The emphasis is on walking worthy of the calling which we have in Christ. Our calling can be boiled down to glorifying God and spreading the gospel. We are here to point people to Christ and not to ourselves. We are here to serve others and not indulge in our own fleshly lusts. We are here to build others up and not tear them down. We are here to be the hands and feet of Jesus to a lost and dying world!

As we shall see in these three chapters, the work of the Holy Spirit flows through the believer to every area of life. The transformation starts inward and moves outward. It affects our private life as well as our public life. The indwelling Christ soon changes our character and then flows through us into every human relationship. He begins to shine in our work lives as well as our

leisure lives. He shows up in our families and marriages as well as our careers and business life. There is no such thing as a part-time Christian!

Personal Growth and Development: Ephesians 4:1-3

“1) I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3) eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

I am a firm believer in personal growth and development. Qualities like humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and unity are not automatic. This list refers to character qualities we need to build into our lives. Jesus displayed all of these. As we walk with Him, He uses the trials of this life to build these qualities within us. He is very thorough. He keeps applying pressure and chipping away at us with the purpose of bringing us to growth and maturity.

Let me use these verses to become transparent and share some of my life journey. I have been challenged over the years with the need for an intentional personal growth program. Unfortunately, I was too proud in my earlier years to recognize the need for a mentor or the value of personal growth books and audios. Then I stumbled upon John Maxwell's books “Today Matters” and “The 21 Indisputable Laws of Leadership.” I was exposed. I could not escape the fact that I was bumping against the Law of the Lid. If I wanted my life circumstances to change I needed to grow and change.

Rather than be discouraged, I set out to study, learn, grow and expand my own capacity. I was no longer content being stagnant or drifting through life. I was hungry and desperate and I acknowledged to God and myself that my circumstances reflected many voids in my life.

In the absence of a good mentor or life coach, I started down the pathway of setting aside daily time to study the Bible. listen to good tapes and audios by motivational speakers, reading quality personal growth books and consciously observing successful men and women. I also launched into other areas of study such as nutrition, personal fitness, finances, physics, time management, aviation, and leadership. I needed to stretch and exercise my brain muscles.

But there was another mountain I needed to conquer. I was convicted to start guarding the garbage and filth that was seeping into my mind and soul through the television, movies, secular music, the radio, and sensual internet sites. These were feeding my flesh and escalating the war within me. I was no longer content being a double-minded man. For me, removing the negative influences was as important as selectively feeding on the positive.

These are some of the blessings and challenges of living in modern times. We have available the best resources of all times and the worst garbage ever produced by human depravity. We will reap in life what we sow into our mind and soul. Follow Paul's advice and get serious about personal growth and development.

Introduction to Boot Camp: Ephesians 4:1-6

“1) Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3) being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4) There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6) one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”

Let's work our way backward through these verses. The focus of this context of Scripture is that the church might experience the unity that is God. The word “one” is used seven times between verses four and six. There is no conflict, tension or strife within God. He is “one” and wants His people to enter into that oneness. That is where true love and peace are found.

Unfortunately, this unity, peace, and love is not found in most churches and certainly not between churches. It is often hard to find between two Christians. Verses 1-3 reveals the problem. We as people are sinful, fleshly, self centered, proud, and focused on our own desires. We are not naturally filled with the character qualities of humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, love, and unity that God calls us to in these verses.

Every Christian needs to go through dying to self in order to fit into the body of Christ. Living in community with other believers is hard to do. It exposes the level of our carnality. The end result is often conflict rather than unity. This brings us to a key point: “Christian growth and maturity is hammered out within relationships with others.”

God calls us into community to expose our sin and carnality. This is true in the church, in marriage, in the family, in friendships, and in the workplace. Unity does not mean we let go of our morals or convictions. Rather, it means we need to learn how to live by agape love and walk in the Spirit rather than the flesh.

The interpersonal relationships in our life is “Boot Camp” to prepare us for heaven, and the Holy Spirit is our personal Drill Sergeant. You and I don't graduate from this boot camp until every verse and theme of Ephesians 4-6 is thoroughly integrated into our lives.

The graduation ceremony is found in Ephesians 6:23-24. Let's look at these amazing verses; “23) Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24) Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.”

The Evangelical/Charismatic Divide. Ephesians 4:7

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.”

Paul now turns to a significant topic. He introduces the concept of “Grace Gifts.” The Greek word is “Charis”. This is where the word “Charismatic gifts” comes from. Let me give you some personal background.

Early in my Christian life, I was strongly biased against the word “Charismatic” and anything related to the Charismatic Movement. But the more I studied Scripture, the more I was confronted with the truth that we are in the age of grace, or the age of “charis”.

Over time I started to make the connection that grace and grace gifts were directly tied to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. They are inseparable in the New Testament. Soon I realized that grace was God’s divine enablement made available through the indwelling Spirit of God to make inner transformation possible and to help us crucify the flesh and walk in newness of life.

About that same time, I was on a Bible quizzing team and we were memorizing the book of 1 Corinthians. I was in an evangelical church that shunned Pentecostals and Charismatics, but we were memorizing the book of 1 Corinthians. God has a strange sense of humor.

After high school, I attended a very non-charismatic Bible College. I found that 90% of what we studied was awesome, but I was confronted by a strong bias against much of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The redeeming factor was that I developed a love for Scripture and solid principles for interpreting the Bible.

God graciously placed me right between both camps. I embraced the biblical ministry of the Holy Spirit, but was able to filter out much of the sensationalism and emotionalism of what was the Charismatic Movement at that time. I recognized that both groups needed each other. The evangelicals needed more power of the Holy Spirit, and the Charismatics needed more biblical foundation and grounding. That chasm has been filling in during the past forty years.

Today I love my brothers and sisters in both camps and recognize they are all gifts from God. I am at home with evangelicals and I love fellowshiping with Charismatics. I recruit evangelicals for detailed board positions and I recruit charismatics to lead the prayer and worship ministry. My desire is to lift up Jesus Christ and walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Victory Proclamation: Ephesians 4:7-10

“7) But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8) Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men." 9) (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10) He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)“

As we continue our discussion of “grace gifts” or “charis”, Paul seems to run down a rabbit trail. It relates to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. But even more, he points out that

between His death and resurrection, Jesus descended to the lower parts of the earth and led captive a host of captives and then He gave gifts to men.

We discover from this that whatever grace is, it is based on what Jesus did for humanity on the cross and in His resurrection. His sacrifice for human sin made forgiveness and freedom possible. But He went beyond mere freedom to lavishing grace upon people. (Review Ephesians 1:7-8)

So what was Paul referring to by saying that Jesus descended to the lower parts of the earth? It appears from Luke 16:19-31, that prior to the work of Christ on the cross when people died they were all held in the lower parts of the earth. According to this story, the Old Testament saints were held in a place called “Abraham’s bosom”, and the ungodly were in a place called “Hades.” (See Luke 16:22-23) Notice, they all had conscious existence after death and even communicated with each other. Nonetheless, they were all held captive.

Many believe that 1 Peter 3:18-20 provides another piece to the puzzle. When Jesus died, He descended to the lower parts of the earth and made a proclamation to all who had died. I believe that Jesus proclaimed that the price of human redemption was paid and the chains of death were broken.

This leads into another very important point. In Revelation 1:17-18 Jesus identifies Himself by saying; “... Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.”

These verses pull back the curtains for us and provide a glimpse into the events that transpired between His death and resurrection. Prior to that time Satan had the keys of death and of Hades. Jesus literally stripped them away from Satan during this brief encounter, proclaimed His victory, and emptied Abraham’s bosom as He ascended with the Old Testament saints.

Then He went a step beyond and gave “grace gifts” to men. In other words, He made it possible for people during this life to be born again and filled with the person and power of the Holy Spirit. He inaugurated the “age of Grace.” For those who understand it and enter into it, we live in a time unparalleled in human history and unmatched with resurrection life potential.

This is what Jesus promised prior to His ascension during His post-resurrection appearance to His disciples. This is best recorded in Acts 1:4-8 if you care to take the study a step more.

In summary, the above is a brief explanation of what Paul packed into those few verses in Ephesians 4:7-10. A lot happened in that time period between the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

(If you are curious about this, you will find more information by researching “The Harrowing of Hell.” –dj)

The Church Ministry Gifts: Ephesians 4:11-12

“11) And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12) for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;”

As the church age started, Jesus handed out spiritual gifts. There are three basic categories of spiritual gifts. This text talks about the ministry gifts. 1 Corinthians 12 talks about the manifestation gifts. Romans 12 talks about the motivation gifts. Every born-again Christian is given spiritual gifts. They complement natural talents and can be strengthened over time.

The ministry gifts are found in Ephesians 4:11. They are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Some churches place significant emphasis on these five gifts. Others look at them as being for the entire body of Christ and not necessarily for each local church. Let's look briefly at each of these five gifts.

The word “apostle” literally means “a sent-out one.” Jesus appointed twelve apostles during His public ministry prior to the day of Pentecost, but several other men had the spiritual gift of “sent-out ones” after the giving of the Holy Spirit. Paul was the most notable. He went on three missionary journeys and started many local churches. I personally see this as the modern missionary gift.

The word “prophet” in the New Testament sense is slightly different from the Old Testament prophet. They were leaders and a voice for God. They often foretold the future. But the New Testament gift most likely included being a gifted orator and commanding respect and following from people. They were often instrumental in giving direction and leadership to the Church. James is seen filling this role in the Jerusalem council in Acts 15.

The evangelists were people like Philip who spread the gospel and equipped others to do the same. He never pastored a church, but was definitely a leader in the early church. They are wired to reach new people with the gospel.

The pastor was looked at as being the shepherd in the church. They were there for the care and protection of the flock. Their goal is spiritual growth. They want to mentor, nurture, and encourage others. John filled this role of shepherding in the early church. The book of 1 John is a great example.

The teacher had the desire to bring solid biblical instruction to people. They delight in Bible studies and love God's Word, both Old and New Testaments. They often have deep insights into Scripture and a knack at communicating in such a way as to make the Bible come alive. They love study and research. Luke may be a great example of a teacher in the early church.

These five gifts should work together to build up the body of Christ. They are the team Jesus calls to lead and train His church. As Ephesians 4:12 says, they are, “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ...” They work together to grow the church both numerically and in godly maturity. They replace themselves by training up the next generation of leaders.

Equipping and Empowering the Body. Ephesians 4:11-16

“11) And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12) for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of 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 a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”

In the previous post, we looked briefly at the five-fold ministry or leadership gifts given to the church. Though important, they are not the focus of the text. The focus is on the people or the full body of Christ.

Paul follows the example of Jesus and focuses on raising up people to actively do ministry. Keep in mind John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son...” How can God send His One Son and effectively hope to reach the whole world, especially 2,000 years ago prior to modern technology? That’s a profound question to seriously wrestle with because it exposes the problem with the modern church.

The answer is found in the power of duplication. One becomes two, then two becomes four, and then four becomes eight, which in turn becomes sixteen. As the duplication continues we have the phenomenon called “exponential growth.” We soon have hundreds, followed by thousands, which in turn spills into millions. That’s how cells multiply in the human body. We should not be surprised that the church is called a living body in the Bible.

The focus of the Great Commission is not merely on sharing the message of the Gospel to the whole world, it is on making disciples. (Matthew 28:18-20). It is on 1) the equipping of the saints, 2) for the work of service, 3) for the building up of the body. (Ephesians 4:12)

This can only happen with an intentional and systematic teaching and training program that focuses on training up the whole body of believers as stated in the above verse. Let’s try to unpack the problem.

The focus of modern denominations is on “doing church” or “putting on the Sunday program.” But the focus of Jesus and the early church leaders was on equipping the believers for service so they could go out and “become the church.” (Read Acts 2:37-47) These are two radically different dynamics that produce totally different results.

The modern church focuses on its leaders, the early church focused on its people. The modern church focuses on buildings, the early church focused on the body. The modern church has a top-down focus, the early church had a bottom-up focus. The modern church focuses on leadership authority, the early church focused on leadership responsibility. The modern church emphasizes extensive education for its leaders, the early church emphasized practical training and education for all of its people.

The contrasts and comparisons go on and on. The bottom line is that most modern denominations are doing the exact opposite of what Jesus modeled and what Paul taught in this context. As you study and pray your way through Ephesians 4:11-16, you will discover a leadership producing model that is more based on the idea of being contagious than concentrated. Its focus is on equipping and unleashing people to do ministry and not on quenching or controlling them. The thrust of this text is on empowering people to reach and influence the world.

Pathway to Maturity: Ephesians 4:13-14

“13) until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14) As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;”

The mission of the church is discipleship. The goal of discipleship is maturity both spiritually and intellectually. It has the aim of helping people grow in both faith and in the knowledge of Christ. The target is that we help people reach “the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” In simple terms, that means “to become Christ-like both in character and conduct.”

Verse fourteen explains why. God does not want His people to be gullible or confused either by false teachers or false doctrines. This includes being tossed around by false philosophy, humanistic psychology, false religions, and deceitful moral values.

This verse is very applicable to our times. It is the church's job to lay down a comprehensive biblical worldview. It is not enough to “just believe in Christ” while rejecting the teaching of the Bible in every other subject matter. Believers need to become students of the ways of God as taught in the Bible.

Truth is the pathway to freedom. There is a huge difference between a biblical worldview and a secular world. Creation and evolution lead to very opposite conclusions. The road to godliness leads through the valley of accepting the Bible as the definition of truth and the foundation for daily life. Salvation is based on faith in Christ, but maturity calls us to obedience to God and the ways of God as revealed in the Bible.

This is why Paul appealed to Timothy to “be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15) Paul went on and made the very strong case to Timothy that the inspired Word of God is the foundation to produce godliness and the only basis for solid biblical preaching and teaching. (Read 2 Timothy 3:16-4:5) He admonished Timothy to preach the Word in season and out of season.

The modern church will never see revival apart from solid biblical preaching and teaching. There is no repentance from sin apart from courageous preaching about sin. Preaching biblical truth might not be popular but it is powerful. Why? Because the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God.

An Alive Local Church: Ephesians 4:15-16

“15) but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16) from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

God wants His people to 1) know the truth, 2) live the truth, and 3) speak the truth in love. Truth is the basis of both personal freedom and dynamic ministry. Becoming a Christian is a truth encounter.

Then verse 16 underlines the fact that every Christian is important to the church. Each person has a role to play. Balanced Christian growth does not happen on the sidelines watching a few professionals do ministry while putting on the Sunday show. It is not a spectator sport. Maximum Christian growth takes place on the front lines.

Each Christian needs to spend time daily with God reading the Bible and in prayer. Each Christian is called into creative and positive ways to serve God and one another. This happens by consciously considering others. Our focus should be on living the gospel and not just sharing the gospel.

Every Christian is called into building trusting relationships, engaging in spiritual fellowship, encouraging others and being a channel of love to everyone they come in contact with as we go through daily life. Christian living should be a conscious, moment-by-moment walk with God that overflows to others and becomes contagious. The goal is to consciously impart value to other people.

The church is like a chain where every link is important. I like the old musketeer rally cry: “All for one and one for all!” That should be the rallying cry of the local church. When a body of believers learns how to minister to one another very positive and healthy things begin to happen. The result is, “the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

It should be easy and natural to add new people to church. They should be welcomed with open arms and loved with open hearts. Whether they are on the nursery roll or in the nursing home they should be treated as family. The goal is not building bigger buildings, it is engaging in deeper people building relationships.

No institution or organization in society should be as inviting, energizing, healing, and affirming as the local body of Christ. The role of the gospel is to save people. The role of the church is to enfold, nurture, mentor, encourage, heal, empower, and unleash people.

The local church should be the most happening place in town. When the pieces fall into place, growth becomes spontaneous and a sense of awe begins to settle in on the church. (See Acts 2:43 in context) This is normal for an “alive church.” You cannot program or plan this phenomenon. It happens when the church comes alive and starts functioning according to the biblical plan.

The Black Hole of Sin: Ephesians 4:7-19

“17) So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18) being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19) and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.”

Sin does not stay the same. Those without Christ are destined for a moral and philosophical tailspin in their life. Their mind becomes futile and soon darkness sets into their thinking. Not only is their judgment clouded, but it's not long before they become calloused toward God and His ways.

At some point they become so twisted in their thinking and worldview that they start calling wrong right and condemning right as wrong. It happens without them knowing it. The end result is that they often give themselves over to sexuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. They begin to defend and live x-rated lives.

These verses describe the gravitational pull of sin and human depravity. There is no escaping its pull. It is like a black hole that sucks everything into it. Welcome to the world that rejects God.

Paul is not saying that all people become as bad as they can possibly be, but he is saying that people develop an anti-God mindset and value system. Deception is like pouring concrete, it takes on any shape you pour it into and then begins to harden. Over time it becomes rock hard.

The most important takeaway from these three verses is that sin becomes a terminal condition. Once the human heart rejects God and truth, it embraces deception, becomes dark, and has no boundaries to potential wickedness. It will eventually defend the immoral with fervor, passion, and conviction while preying on innocent and unsuspecting people.

This is the pathway of sin and human depravity. It creates a sad and abusive environment. It creates both villains and victims. Some are exploiters and some are exploited. Some inflict pain and suffering and many are left broken and wounded. Some become abusers and many are abused and thrown away. The bottom line is that the world can become a pitiful and painful place apart from God. The picture Paul paints is not good!

Pathway To A New Life: Ephesians 4:20-24

“20) But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21) if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22) that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23) and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24) and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

Paul is making a deliberate contrast to the previous three verses. Rather than being sucked in the black hole of human sin and depravity, the genuine believer experiences an amazing metamorphosis. As they daily take in truth and dwell on Christ, they are notably changed from the inside out.

The process starts with consciously “putting off the old self.” This is the idea of repentance and the human will is active in this process. God does not do this for us. We are called to this obedience. Notice that the old self is being corrupted in accordance to the lusts of deceit. Our flesh feeds on lusts and deception. They are the enemy of the human soul. We need to starve our soul (mind) from these things.

Instead we need to renew our minds with truth. (Vs 23) We need to consciously take in God’s Word, truth, and wholesome thinking. (See Philippians 4:8-9) Dr Carolyn Leaf gives convincing evidence that right thinking actually changes the way brain matter is formed. In other words, modern science proves that the human brain can be renewed and grow new and wholesome brain matter. Watch a few of her videos on YouTube. She makes this science come alive. She is a Christian.

Then we “put on the new self” which in the likeness of God is created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Notice again the emphasis on “truth.” I maintain that salvation is an event, but sanctification is a process. We need to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in this process.

I love this text of Scripture because it proves there is no limit to potential growth, change, and development. We are not slaves to our past. This dynamic process is powerful and real. It has been around for thousands of years. Over time it can even be used to repair brain damage and radically overcome learning impairment.

This is part of my personal story. Memorizing and meditating on Scripture transformed me academically over three years in a dramatic fashion. I went from being at the bottom of my high

school class to graduating with honors. I went from not being able to read to reading 1600 words a minute. I simply devoted 30-45 minutes every night to memorizing Scripture. Without realizing it, I tapped into what Paul is talking about in this text of Scripture. I started renewing my mind. I still use this dynamic today. I work hard every day feeding my mind Scripture, good books, wholesome thoughts and new subject matter. Then I consciously reinforce these thoughts daily.

Let me emphasize that this is a process. It happens over time. It must be done daily. But it works for anyone and at any age. New human brain matter is constantly being formed. You either control and feed the process or it happens by default based on the garbage you let seep into your mind.

The human brain can grow either positive or negative neurons. It can grow based on truth or deception. It can also produce good or bad emotions. It can become optimistic or pessimistic. Whether you realize it or not, you are daily feeding the development of new brain matter. This is one of the most fascinating studies in the Bible and modern science is just starting to document this phenomenon. Again, I point you to the work of Dr Carolyn Leaf.

Here is the good news, no matter your current life circumstances, you can change and grow. Your past need not write your future. Jesus Christ and this truth encounter process compounded by the active work of the Holy Spirit in your life can be radically transformational. Get serious and intentional about what Paul is teaching in this amazing text of Scripture.

Step to Freedom #1: Starting A Personal Truth Encounter: Ephesians 4:25

“(25) Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.”

In the next few chapters Paul is going to walk through what I believe are the steps to personal freedom. In the process he touches on several areas of fleshly bondage that give Satan a foothold in the lives of people. Let's move slowly and deal with these one at a time as we work through the next few chapters of the book of Ephesians.

In verse 25, Paul builds on the need of putting off deception and putting on truth. Lies and deception are Satan's most basic strategy to enslave people. He used deception on Eve to entice her into sin and he uses it on people today. (See 2 Corinthians 11:3-4)

Lies and deception are so basic to what Satan uses on people that Jesus Himself connected this to the very nature of Satan. Let's look at what He said in John 8:44 when talking in the context of how enslaving deception can be: “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

That is a profound insight. I have discovered that the plans and purposes of Satan are always advanced by deception. He is a liar and a deceiver. He hates the truth. Why?

Earlier in that same chapter Jesus made another revelation about the power of truth. Let's look at three verses; "31) So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32) and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." 36) So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:31, 32, 36)

In John 14:6 Jesus identified Himself as the truth. In Ephesians 1:13 the Gospel is called, "the message of truth." In Ephesians 6:14, the first piece of armor is the belt of truth. Much of the practical application of the Gospel is a truth encounter.

When working with people to break the power of bondage and bring them to freedom, we always start by explaining the necessity of exposing deception and replacing it with truth. If you now go back and read Ephesians 4:17-24 you will be able to clearly see this battle between truth and deception.

Your first step to freedom and a new life will be laying aside falsehood and speaking truth in your every relationship. It is not only speaking truth, it is also thinking and living truth. Exposing deception and replacing it with truth becomes a continual process in the Christian life.

The Holy Spirit wants to guide the believer through A process of peeling back and exposing layer after layer of lies and deception that have accumulated over the years and replace it with truth. This process brings healing to many people as it changes their core identity. The negative and destructive identities of "rejected" "failure", "ugly", "dirty", "looser" and "guilt and condemnation" are replaced by the truth of "loved", "forgiven", "accepted", "pure and holy", "personal worth, value and dignity" and "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

This is the metamorphosis Paul was talking about in Ephesians 4:20-24. The gospel is powerful. It can and does set people free and opens the door for a new life as they renew their mind with truth and step into their new identity "in Christ."

Step to Freedom #2: Defeat Anger With Love and Forgiveness: Ephesians 4:26-27

"26) Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27) and do not give the devil an opportunity."

Paul now introduces a theme that he revisits again later in this context. Anger and bitterness are Satan's playground. Way back in Genesis 4:5-7, God warned Cain about his anger. He said it would try to master him. It wanted to be his master and lead him into bondage. The end result was that Cain ended up killing his own brother.

Anger must be dealt with quickly. Paul's suggestion is to deal with it before the sun goes down. Keep your anger from festering because it will produce a big crop of bitterness, wrath, vulgarity, and vengeance. It very quickly results in smelly soul-rot. But the question is "why is anger so personally devastating? After all, isn't anger a normal human emotion?"

Well, it is a normal fleshly response, but according to the text, it gives Satan a foothold or yields ground over to him. He will build a stronghold on this ground from which he will seek to master, manipulate, and control you. Your anger will twist your perception of truth and feed your mind with all kinds of deception.

According to Ephesians 4:31-32 and 2 Corinthians 2:10-11, love and forgiveness are the two primary vaccines for this sinful virus. Responding to anger with love and forgiveness is not optional, it is the only way to disarm this scheme of Satan in your life.

It is not a coincidence that Genesis 4:5-7, Ephesians 4:26-27, and 2 Corinthians 2:10-11 all tie anger to the activity of Satan. I know many Christians who quickly condemn other sins while quickly justifying and excusing their own problem of anger and bitterness. Without realizing it, they are a pawn of Satan. He is using them to destroy marriages, families, and churches. He has used his scheme for many generations very effectively.

Step to Freedom #3: Overcoming A Bent Toward Rebellion and Vulgarity: Ephesians 4:28-29

"28) Let Him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need. 29) Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear."

Paul now addresses the wayward and sinful heart given to rebellion and filthy talking. Instead of working, this person is bent toward theft and robbery. Instead of kind words and blessings, this person is given to curses and vulgarity. You can often tell a rebel by the way they talk. They are loud, boisterous, threatening, and usually filled with cursing. Many times this is done for peer acceptance, to fit into the crowd, or to project the image of being strong and tough. It is often a veneer covering a hurt and wounded heart.

Curbing this magnetic attraction of the human soul to want to "fit in" or find acceptance motivated Solomon to write the first warning to the young men of Israel when he penned his book of Wisdom. Proverbs 1:10-19 warns about throwing aside character and caution for the sake of whatever is trending with the rebellious and misguided. Spend time pondering these verses.

Never underestimate the spirit of rebellion that resides in the flesh of every child of Adam. It is part of human nature. It is also an open door for Satan to entice and lure. It is that inner search for significance or desire to be great that resides in each of us.

The serpent appealed to this inner seed of rebellion in Eve in Genesis 3:5 when he said, "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and will be like God, knowing good and evil." The bait was set and she was moved to nibble on attraction of significance and self-will, even if it meant disobeying both her husband and God as her authority.

The biggest warning about the bent of rebellion comes from King Saul himself. 1 Samuel 15 should be known well by every child of God. It is the prolific chapter that exposes the disobedient and rebellious heart of Saul. He set out to make a name for himself, but in the process, he disobeyed God. All he did was do things his own way rather than God's way. He openly argued with Samuel and even reached out and assaulted him when he would not honor him before the people.

Listen to this insightful warning given to Saul: "22) Samuel said, 'Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. '23) For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king.'" (1 Samuel 15: 22-23)

There we have it. Rebellion is tied directly to the activity of Satan in a person's heart. I believe Satan exploits this bent toward rebellion as much as deception and bitterness in the previous two verses of Ephesians 4:25-27. Do you see what Paul is doing? He is systematically exposing the main sinful strongholds that Satan uses to lead people into captivity and bondage. Jesus wants to break these chains and set people free!

Step to Freedom #4: Conquering Lust, Porneia, and Sexual Immorality: Ephesians 4:3-5

"3) But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; 4) and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5) For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."

The fourth category of sin that Paul identifies that needs to be "put off" or "conquered" is sexual immorality. This is Satan's fourth basic stronghold to keep people in shameful bondage. Not surprisingly, the Greek word for "immorality" is "porneia." This is the same root word from which we get the English word "pornography."

According to 1 Corinthians 6:18 there are unique personal consequences to the man or woman caught in sexual immorality; "18) Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body." The problem is that this category of sin is compounded by the production of human hormones. Pornography, sexual immorality, and sexual perversion can become both an obsession and an addiction. Satan can and does use

them to enslave and destroy people. One sexual sin is not worse than the others. They are just lumped together in the Bible under the heading of “porneia” or “immorality.”

Notice that verse five puts them in a list with idolaters. At first glance that may seem strange, but many pagan religions are driven by gods of fertility and sexual perversion. If you have any doubt, just take a moment and read Revelation 18:2-3. Tragically, the text culminates in Revelation 18:13 with human trafficking.

Many people coming to Jesus Christ come from very immoral backgrounds. Jesus wants to forgive, wash, sanctify, and justify them. Take a moment and ponder 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. The work of Jesus Christ on the cross atoned for every sin, broke every bondage, and the Holy Spirit can change any immoral lifestyle. God is in the business of setting people free from sinful compulsions and bondage.

This process of “putting off the old”, being “renewed in the spirit of your mind” and “putting on the new self” affects every area of our lives. (See Ephesians 4:22-24) The area of sexual bondage is often one of the biggest hurdles for people, yet it must be addressed. God wants to bring every Christian to moral purity. It is a battle worth fighting and a journey worth taking. Don't surrender and give up!

This is made very clear in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8. Paul introduces this context by saying; “3) For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality.” Again, I want to stress that justification is an event that happens at the moment of our salvation, but sanctification is a process of the Holy Spirit cleansing and purifying our lives over time as we grow toward maturity.

Paul understood this battle. That's why he wrote 1 Corinthians 5-7. Corinth was a very X-rated city that fully embraced all the immoral values of Greek culture. Yet, that's where God decided to start a church. These three chapters are absolutely profound in this journey to moral freedom. Paul's teaching on this subject actually culminates in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 saying one of the reasons for Christian marriage is to help one another in this battle of “porneia.”

We have it all wrong today. The early church did not teach that if you have an immorality problem you should get a divorce. Paul actually taught that because sexual immorality is such a problem, you should get married and work out your sexual drives in the safety of a trusting and honest marriage. If you don't believe me just read the text again and again and again.

Keep in mind, the book of Ephesians is a spiritual warfare book. Between chapters 4-6, Paul systematically identifies seven basic strongholds that Satan uses to enslave and destroy people. So far we have looked at: 1) deception, 2) anger and bitterness, 3) rebellion and vulgarity, and 4) sexual immorality. Many times people struggle with all of these.

Over the next three entries, we will consider the remaining three strongholds. If you wrestle with these, do not be discouraged. Everyone has battles, but Jesus Christ came to set the captives free. He can forgive every sin and break every bondage. He is in the business of changing lives.

Over the years I have assembled and taught a spiritual warfare seminar. The concept of identifying and pulling down these seven basic strongholds is a core part of that material. This was part of the disciple making process in the early church. Jesus came to break every bondage and set captives free. Becoming a Christian is merely the first step of a long journey.

Step to Freedom #5: Breaking Free From Chemical Addiction: Ephesians 4:18

“18) And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,”

Paul now touches on an issue that has destroyed many lives. He uses alcohol to represent the whole category of chemical abuse and stimulant addictions. In his day alcohol was the primary drug of choice, even though others were being used and abused. Don't let this one small verse minimize the significance of this issue. It is mammoth in terms of personal destruction and social impact.

Solomon warned about alcohol addiction in Proverbs 23:29-35. Addictions take control of a person's life. An addiction will steal your wealth, destroy your marriage, impact your family, end your career, distort your character, reduce your potential, and ruin your health. It feeds the previous four strongholds and becomes the new master of your life.

What is the Basic Scheme of the Enemy Exposed in Step Five? God holds people accountable for every thought, word, and deed. Satan uses a variety of mood-altering stimulants to enslave, control, and demoralize people.

Key Scriptures on Stimulant Abuse: Study the following Scriptures. Ponder each main point.

1. Genesis 9:20-27 (The first mention of wine and drunkenness in the Bible resulted in a curse on many generations through Noah's drunkenness)
2. Proverbs 23:29-35 (Solomon describes alcoholism)
3. Ephesians 5:18 (Paul warns about drunkenness to the point of being beyond good health)
4. Galatians 5:19-21 (Paul places drunkenness at the heart of the deeds of the flesh)
5. Revelation 18:2-3 (Connects the Babylonian use of wine and immorality to bring demonic seduction of people)
6. Isaiah 14:11 (Some forms of music and arts can be a negative stimulants... note that Satan's music and arts fell with him... he uses them to deceive nations)
7. (Stimulant abuse in the Bible was mostly attached to alcohol but could relate to anything that is mood-altering and results in unhealthy addictions. Many liquor stores still advertise "spirits." Alcohol can be a pathway to the demon in the bottle.)

Key Scriptures on Self Control:

1. Galatians 5:22-24 (Self control is a crucial fruit of the Spirit.)
2. 1 Timothy 3:1-7 (Not being addicted to wine is a key qualification for leadership.)
3. 1 Peter 1:13-14 (Believers are to gird their minds for action and remain sober in spirit.)
4. 1 Peter 4:3-5 (The whole lifestyle of drinking parties and associated activities should stop with salvation.)
5. Ephesians 5:15-21 (The new wine for believers is to be the filling and control of the Holy Spirit.)

I share the above material to give you hope. Jesus Christ extends His grace to end addictions and help you regain control of your life. A few are healed, but most have to work through steps to overcome the addiction and remain accountable for sobriety. I believe in faith-based programs like "Celebrate Recovery." It can be a pathway to rebuild a life and end the slavery. Go to the web and check for a program near you.

Step to Freedom #6: Overcoming Pride and Greed. James 4:6-8 & 1 Peter 5:5-9

"6) But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 7) Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8) Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands you sinners and purify your hearts you double-minded." (James 4:6-8)

"5) You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. 6) Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, 7) casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. 8) Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9) But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world." (1 Peter 5:5-9)

To help us fill in the sixth area that Satan so effectively uses against people we need to borrow from James and Peter. Both of them point to pride as the door through which the devil gains access to the human heart. He prowls about as a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. The proud of heart are easy prey for him.

I have seen many religious folk over the years shun the previous five strongholds only to be fools in their own self righteousness, religious arrogance, and pious pride. There is a stench about them so strong that they cannot even find unity among themselves. They fight and quarrel, argue, and bicker about the smallest things. Often their attitudes are terrible and they go through life scorning and judging others.

You may wonder why the sixth spot is reserved for the proud of heart. Both of the above texts warn that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Self-pride is the highest insult against the glory of God. It is lived out by worshipping "the god in the mirror" while becoming

self-reliant, hedonistic and building our own materialistic empire for which we take full credit. It is living as if God doesn't exist or is irrelevant.

Key Scriptures on Pride and Greed:

Dialogue on the following Scriptures... Emphasize the following talking points.

1. Ezekiel 28:15-17 (Satan's fall came when he started focusing on self.)
2. Isaiah 14:13-14 (Notice what Satan said five times about himself.)
3. Proverbs 16:5 (The proud in heart are an abomination to the Lord.)
4. *Daniel 4:28-37 (Nebuchadnezzar learned that God hates pride.)
5. James 4:6-7 (God resists the proud... notice that Satan is in the context.)
6. 1 Peter 5:5-9 (God resists the proud... notice the activity of the devil in the context.)
7. 1 John 2:15-17 (Notice the three basic sins are related to pride and greed.)

Key Scriptures on Humility and a Contrite Heart:

1. 2 Chronicles 7:13-18 (Humbling ourselves is the starting point of deep and lasting renewal.)
2. *Isaiah 55:6-12 (God wants us to consciously live our lives according to "His ways" and not "our ways.")
3. Isaiah 57:15 (Notice where God dwells.)
4. Isaiah 66:1-2 (God pays special attention to the humble.)
5. *James 4:4-10 (God gives special grace to the humble who reject worldly values, resist the devil, submit to God, draw near to God, and repent from their sinful ways.)
6. *1 Peter 5:5-11 (God gives a special grace to those who humble themselves, submit to other people, casts all anxiety on God, recognizes His care and provisions for our life, become sober in spirit, resist the devil firm in their faith, and respond to trials in a godly fashion.)
7. 1 John 2:15-17 (Those who build their lives on God abide forever.)

If you are filled with pride and greed, you have already been caught in one of the devil's most subtle traps. You have become a religious Pharisee and are far from Christ. You are most likely governed by legalism and oblivious to the precious doctrine of grace. Both James and Peter call the proud of heart to repentance and warn of the danger lurking in the shadows of the proud of heart.

Step To Freedom #7: Breaking the Grip of Demonic Torment. Ephesians 6:10-13

"10) Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11) Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12) For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13) Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm."

The city of Ephesus was full of demonic influence. When you slip back and read Acts 19 you discover an abbreviated history of the beginning of the church in Ephesus. The chapter includes testimony of amazing signs and wonders done through Paul as well as a dramatic account of demonic possession. (See Acts 19:11-17)

After the humiliation of the Jewish exorcists, the text records what looks like a spontaneous movement by the Christians to deal with past involvement with spiritism and the occult by cleansing their homes from spiritistic paraphernalia. They were cutting off any influence from the enemy from their lives. Let me quote the verses; “17) This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified. 18) Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. 19) And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20) So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.”

The final step to freedom is confessing and repenting from all past involvement with spiritism and the occult. This closes the final door of access to the enemy. I will not argue this point, but simply point out that this was the practice of the early church. Ephesians 4-6 deals in orderly fashion with the seven steps to freedom. This was part of the discipleship program in the early church. Every new believer was encouraged to “put off the old self”, be “renewed in the spirit of their mind”, and then “put on the new self.” (Ephesians 4:22-24)

The modern church makes the mistake of not walking new Christians through the steps to freedom of thoroughly putting off the old self. As a result, we have many defeated Christians whose lives are filled with carnality, sinful bondage, and roller coaster testimonies of progress followed by failure and defeat in these seven areas. Some have tragic stories of ongoing demonic torment. Any door left open becomes an access point for temptation and a playground for the enemy.

Some will find this final step to freedom strange and bizarre, while others will welcome it as hope to their inner battles and torment from the enemy that they dare not talk about in the church. If you need more information on the steps to freedom, get Neil Anderson's books *“Victory Over Darkness”* and *“The Bondage Breaker.”* It is nearly impossible to put on the new self without taking off the old self. This leads to certain frustration and defeat.

Soaring to New Heights: Ephesians 4: 22-24

“22) that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23) and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24) and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

In the last seven sections, we have looked in depth at the seven steps to freedom. These are areas that God calls us to “put off.” But that is only part of the story. The Christian life is also an intentional process of renewing the mind. I am a firm believer in the importance of daily being in the Word of God and filling my mind with good and quality substance.

I believe the goal of formal education is merely to accumulate the tools necessary to launch into a lifelong journey of learning, discovery, and growth. The human brain is amazing. It is constantly changing. It is like a muscle that needs to be worked and stimulated to grow. Tragically, 98% of people never read another book after graduating from high school unless they go on to college. Sadly, the statistics are only slightly better for college graduates. Why do I point this out? God wants us to exercise and develop our minds.

But Paul does not stop with renewing the mind, he goes on and talks about “putting on the new self which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” (Vs 24) God has given each of us incredible potential for growth and development that is limited most by ignorance, neglect, and the lack of intentional effort.

Let’s briefly look at the list of things God calls every believer to “put on” in becoming the new self in the balance of the book of Ephesians. To me, this is an exciting and motivational list. It is very challenging and forward-looking. Every believer has a closet with an abundant wardrobe to “put on.”

Put on truth. (Ephesians 4:24-25; 6:14)

Put on love, forgiveness and kindness. (Ephesians 4:32-5:2)

Put on a good work ethic. (Ephesians 4:28; 6:5-8)

Put on gracious communication skills. (Ephesians 4:29)

Put on the habit of consciously walking in the light. (Ephesians 5:8-9)

Put on wisdom. (Ephesians 5:15)

Put on good time management skills in seeking to fulfill the will of God. (Ephesians 5:16-17)

Put on continually being filled with the Spirit. (Ephesians 5:18)

Put on an attitude of gratitude and thanksgiving toward others. (Ephesians 5:18-21)

Put on the goal of becoming the best spouse you can be. (Ephesians 5:22-33)

Put on good family relations and parenting skills. (Ephesians 6:1-4)

Put on the goal of adding value to society as a good worker or business owner. Expand your capacity, productivity, career, and financial management skills. (Ephesians 6:5-9)

Put on the full armor of God. Become a skilled and seasoned warrior in the army of God. (Ephesians 6:10-17)

Put on deepening prayer and intercession skills. (Ephesians 6:18-20)

This list amazes me because it touches on every area of life. It drives home the point that the Christian life is not about what you do or don’t do; rather it is focused on who you become. God is committed to helping you reach your potential in life. He wants to break the chains and give you wings. He wants you to soar for His glory.

Learning How to Talk: Ephesians 4:29

“29) Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.”

Words are important. They have the power to build up and they have the power to tear down. Words can bring healing or they can wound. Words can impart edification or they can suck life out of people. Here is an amazing thought, our words can impart grace and strength to people. The way we speak to and about people is the core of our ministry to them.

Let's take a broader look at the book of Ephesians and see what we can learn about positive and influential communication skills. God wants you to learn how to use your mouth for His glory. I found eleven amazing insights on good communications in the book of Ephesians alone. (Can you imagine the treasure hidden in the entire Bible?) Let's quickly look at them.

First, we are to speak the truth with love. (Ephesians 4:15, 25) Truth by itself is powerful, but when delivered on the platter of love it helps the medicine go down.

Second, avoid speaking when you are angry. (Ephesians 4:26-27) James 3:1-6 warns about the potential damage the tongue can cause in our lives. It took me years to learn the importance of keeping my mouth shut when I'm boiling inside. Words delivered on the platter of anger are often daggers and fighting words.

Third, pick your words carefully for the purpose of edifying and imparting grace to other people. (Ephesians 4:29) View yourself as a master sculptor and your words as the tools to adorn others with detailed beauty. Learn the art of good communications.

Fourth, when you sense the Holy Spirit is grieved in a conversation, start pulling on the reins of your tongue. (Ephesians 4:30) If you stop throwing wood on the fire it will simmer down and go out.

Fifth, be quick to forgive others for their harsh words and equally as quick to seek forgiveness when your mouth has wounded someone. (Ephesians 4:32) The three most powerful words in any language are “Please forgive me.”

Sixth, don't let any cursing, filthy conversation, coarse jokes, or immoral humor come from your mouth. (Ephesians 5:3-4) Your mouth exposes the true condition of your heart and character.

Seventh, don't spread rumors, gossip, slander, or stories about others. (Ephesians 5:11) This will build invisible walls of resentment and bitterness between yourself and the very person God may want you to reach.

Eighth, learn the secret of weaving biblical principles and thankfulness into your casual conversations. (Ephesians 5:19-21) People will be drawn to your positivity and cheerfulness. It will pull down walls and open huge doors for sincere ministry.

Ninth, save romantic and intimate communications for your spouse and your marriage. (Ephesians 5:22-33) Husbands, give your wife verbal roses every day. Wives cook up well seasoned meals of words for your husband every day. (Colossians 4:6)

Tenth, learn how to talk to and about your children in encouraging and inspiring ways. (Ephesians 6:4) Use 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 as your guide for verbal parenting.

Finally, learn how to harness your mouth and words for intercession and prayer. (Ephesians 6:18-19) The person who learns how to talk to God will become a better mouthpiece for God to people.

Most Christians never think about it, but the Bible is a book on good communication skills. Learning the principles of good speech will direct the course of your entire life. (James 3:6) Make sure that both your brain and your heart are in gear before you take your tongue out of neutral.

Grieving the Holy Spirit: Ephesians 4:30

“30) Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

We now come to a profound verse that is often skipped over. Paul warns Christians not to grieve the Holy Spirit. Let me take a moment and point out a significant detail.

This verse helps establish the personhood of the Holy Spirit. The fact that He can be grieved drives home the point that He has emotions. (See also Galatians 5:22-23 and the fruit of the Spirit) He is not an impersonal force like electricity that has neither emotions or intelligence. Scripture reveals that the Holy Spirit has both emotions and intelligence, plus the quality of independent will as pointed to in 1 Corinthians 12:11. (Take time to wrap your mind around those three points. They have profound implications.)

Please underline this in your thinking: The third member of the Godhead or the Trinity is a person. If we were to launch into a deep study of theology, we would spend considerable time on the person and work of the Holy Spirit as revealed in the Bible. There are literally hundreds of Scriptures that point to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is a person, but unfortunately we do not have time for that discussion in this format.

However, this does lead to another point. Our actions and behavior can grieve the indwelling Holy Spirit. In the immediate context of this verse we discover that the way we speak (Vs 29), and our attitudes toward others (Vs 31) can grieve the Holy Spirit. Things like bitterness, wrath,

anger, clamor, slander, and malice, deeply grieve the Holy Spirit. I have seen more than a few church business meetings and conversations between believers that were very grievous.

But let's take one more big step. If I read the extended context of Ephesians 5:3-13 correctly, our actions can also grieve the Holy Spirit. He is deeply grieved when believers drag Him into things like immorality, impurity, greed, filthy communications, and a host of other sinful things. He is called the "Holy" Spirit for a reason. He is Holy! Sin is offensive to God.

We can now take another big step in our thinking. Having the Holy Spirit in our lives is a dynamic and not a static event. He changes us! He actively works to cleanse and purify believers from the inside out. (Read Titus 3:4-7) Let me state again the point that salvation is an event, but sanctification is a process. When the Holy Spirit seals, indwells, and fills a believer at the moment of salvation, He rolls up His sleeves and goes to work. Just like He added order, design, and beauty to the original creation (Genesis 1:2), He starts the same process in every Christian turning them into a "new creation." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The book of 1 Corinthians states two times that a Christian is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Take a moment and read 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 and 6:18-20. Just like the temple of Solomon was one of the wonders of the ancient world, every believer should become a glorious wonder to the modern world that points to the transforming power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Smelling Good: Ephesians 4:32-5:2

"32) And be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven you. 1) Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2) and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."

Some texts of Scripture are really hard to comprehend. Such is the case with these three verses. We have a tendency to think the gospel is validated to the world by what we believe, but Paul makes the case that the real message is validated by how we live and treat others.

If we reach back and grab verse 29 into this discussion, we discover that the indwelling Holy Spirit works to make us kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving toward others. It is more through our service and treatment of others than through our belief system that we reflect the gospel to the world. We are to become living imitators of God.

So let me ask a very personal question; "How do you smell to God and to other people?" According to the text, you can either stink or you can be a fragrant aroma. We put on aftershave, perfume, and deodorant to smell good outwardly, but then we stink in our people skills. No amount of cologne can cover up this stench.

Unfortunately, many Christians fail to realize that the true cologne of life is more measured by our treatment of others than by our creeds, doctrines, or personal theology. The way we treat people can be an offering and a sacrifice to God or it can be a mockery and a slap in His face.

I have met many Christians who are theologically sound but have stinky attitudes. They are bitter, grumpy, demanding, and disrespectful. They are concerned about every punctuation mark in their neatly assembled belief system, but they smell like a manure spreader.

Paul came from that failed religious system. He was a former Pharisee. As Saul of Tarsus, he set out to punish and kill those who disagreed with him. His methodology was forced conformity to an external religious code. Many Christians have bought into that failed system. These three verses are the total antithesis of his former approach to people.

What changed? The Holy Spirit put the heart of Jesus in Saul. He gave him a genuine love for people that was kind, tender, and forgiving. Somewhere in his journey, Paul lost his temper and became an imitator of God. His new cologne became agape love.

Winning the Inner War While Being an Influence on Outer Culture: Ephesians 5:3-13

“3) But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; 4) and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5) For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6) Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7) Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8) for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light 9) (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), 10) trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11) Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; 12) for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13) But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.”

The best way to win the inner war is to put a guard around your heart and mind. Simply stop the sewer from draining into your life. If you were living in Greek culture that would mean avoiding the x-rated theaters, staying away from the taverns and public bath houses, not walking through the red light districts, and avoiding most coliseum events that featured blood, violence, and death.

The conversations, humor, vulgarity, excessive drinking, sensual parties, violent sports, and leisure activities of Ephesus all exploited the flesh. It was an overflowing sewer of human depravity. The only difference between Greek culture and modern culture is that we can buy filters for our computers.

As raw as Greek culture was, it also offered the free exchange of thought, philosophy, ideas, and debate. It was a very inquisitive culture that encouraged numerous viewpoints to take the stage and lead dialogue into all kinds of subjects. This proved to be fertile ground for the gospel and a ready stage for men like Paul and Apollos.

There were also many hurting, wounded, exploited and poor people in Ephesus. Human slavery was openly practiced and corruption abounded. There were ample opportunities to put agape love into action by feeding the poor, caring for orphans, healing the hurting, and showing acts of kindness in Jesus' name.

The bottom line is that children of light can shine brightly in any culture so long as they remain a loving contrast to the darkness. Goodness, sincere righteousness and truth are neon lights of hope in dark places. The early church taught the Christians to be in the world but not to be of the world.

This is where theology becomes practical and needs to be lived out in the marketplace of everyday life. The verses above are both profound and challenging. We need to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the process of winning the inner war while being a positive influence on outer culture.

With this background, enjoy these verses. Wrestle with them. Take them seriously. Invite God to both work in you and through you. I dare say, if He is not actively working in you, He most likely is not accomplishing much through you either. Your light can quickly grow dim.

Make The Most of Your Time: Ephesians 5:15-17

“15) Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16) making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17) So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

A number of years ago I was an honorary member of procrastinators anonymous. I was very disorganized, forgot appointments, had piles of unfinished projects, and wasted valuable time on trivial things. The direction of my life radically changed when I invested one day in attending a time management course taught by Franklin Planner. Soon, I started accomplishing more in a few days or weeks than I used to do in a few months... and I suddenly had more time! Let me share a few things I have learned about time management over the years.

First, when you dedicate your life and time to God, He gives you an eternal perspective and shoots you like an arrow at noble things. His Spirit working through you can accomplish infinitely more than anything you could ask or dream with your life.

Second, we all have the same amount of time each day. Twenty-four hours a day is the universal plan for all of us. So as Paul said; “make the most of your time.”

Third, time is a treasure that's worth more than money. You can get more money but you cannot get more time. Invest it wisely.

Fourth, discover the phenomenon that you can move more mountains consistently working an hour every day than you can working like crazy for one day or one week. For example, writing a book is such a daunting task most people never start. Almost miraculously, when I focused on writing one hour each day, I shortly had two manuscripts published and five additional manuscripts completed.

Fifth, recognize that quality people ministry is measured in terms of time. Learn how to invest time in the people you value. The best way to show people you love and value them is by giving them your undivided time and attention.

Sixth, if you don't schedule your time intentionally other people or worthless events will steal it from you. The best way to manage energy-sucking tasks and people is by putting them in your schedule. Trivial things will fall off your list and squeaky people will start to respect your time.

Seventh, you can compress time and add huge value to your life by learning how to do two things at the same time. For example, my personal growth and development blasted into orbit when I discovered the simplicity of quality audio books. Now, I constantly have personal growth audio's playing when I am weight lifting, driving, sitting in a bow stand, working in the shop, and sometimes even sleeping.

Eighth, learn the value of finishing every day on paper before you take your first step into it. Then close each day by reflecting back over how you spent your time. Do the same with each week, month, and year. This will add intentionality to your life and enable you to harness the power of planning.

Ninth, make a courageous list of dreams and goals you want to accomplish in life and start directing your otherwise wasted time and money toward them. This not only helps you make the most of your time, it also helps you accomplish the most with your life.

Tenth, schedule time for yourself and the activities you enjoy. Don't waste time planning your vacation when you are at work or you will waste your vacation thinking about what you should be doing back at work.

Eleventh, build margins into your schedule each day that will enable you to be flexible when need arises. If something gets bumped off my list today I add it to my "to do list tomorrow."

Finally, accept the fact that time wasted is gone forever. Don't waste your life storing up empty yesterday's. They pile up really fast.

These are a few time management keys I have learned over the years. I constantly keep my eyes open for more valuable insights.

Becoming a Cheerful Person: Ephesians 5:18-21

“18) And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19) speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20) always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; 21) and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”

Are you ready for some practical theology? The above verses don't make it into many systematic theology books, but they will determine your success in life and effectiveness in ministry. Can you imagine; I went all the way through Bible College and was never offered a class on being a cheerful and positive person? Yet we can not be the salt of the earth or the light of the world if we're negative, self-focused and grumpy all the time.

Let me give you some godly counsel and spiritual advice: Make it your goal to become a positive and cheerful person. Let's be honest, not even a grump likes a grump. If you want to have friends and influence others, it helps if you are sincere, cheerful, and encouraging. The above text is filled with this valuable advice.

For example, verse 18 says we should be “continually filled with the Spirit.” When was the last time you sat down and seriously looked at the fruit of the Spirit? It is recorded for us in Galatians 5:22-23; “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” If you think being negative and grumpy is godly, you better take a second and third look at this list. Those qualities are all positive, uplifting, and encouraging.

Paul goes on in Ephesians 5:19 and says we should have a song in our hearts. We should speak to one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. When Christians get together they should have reason to celebrate, sing, and dance. After all, it's a gathering of the Redeemed! I love assembling with God's people for praise and worship.

But there's more to this. Paul knew the power of a good song to lift his spirit. King David mastered this secret years earlier when he wrote the Psalms. Many of them were put to music and were worship songs. In fact, the book of Psalm might be the oldest known hymnbook. Why go through life as an old crow when you can be a songbird?

But there is another key to being cheerful in this text: Learn how to count your blessings and be thankful. (See Vs 20) Paul actually says “always” be thankful. This is the opposite of complaining and being negative and grumpy. If you have a tendency of getting up on the wrong side of the bed, then push that side of the bed against the wall so you can't get up on that side any more! I'm serious! The way you get out of bed is a choice and it sets the rest of your day in motion.

But be credible in the way you express thankfulness. Do it with a genuine smile on your face. I once did a ride-along with a police officer who attended a church I was pastoring. We were doing a radar speed patrol and soon he had to pursue and pull over a woman for speeding. He came walking back to the car with a big smile on his face. I asked, "Did you give her a ticket?" He said, "No, she was so happy and cheerful I just gave her a verbal warning." Then he added, "The way people respond to me affects the way I respond to them." Wow! That was a nugget of wisdom worth remembering.

Here's another thing I wish I had learned years ago; master the art of a hearty handshake. Look the person in the eye, put a smile on your face and say; "I'm pleased to meet you." Giving a firm handshake expresses confidence, but you don't have to crush their hand either. Don't expect to change the world if you haven't even learned how to meet new people in a positive way. The initial meeting sets the tone of your relationship.

And finally, verse 21 says "Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ." I'm not sure of the full meaning of that verse, but at the very least it means we need to genuinely value people. Spend as much time listening as you do talking. Find out some significant things about them and what's on their heart. Be a servant to them.

Invite Him Into Your Home: Ephesians 5:33-6:1

"33) Nevertheless, let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see to it that she respects her husband." 1) Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Paul now turns to the huge subject of Christian marriage and family living. Be careful not to divorce this subject from what we have been studying up to this point in the book of Ephesians. The keys to a happy marriage and successful family are found in the context of the whole book.

As I mentioned previously, the first three chapters of the book of Ephesians are theological, the last three chapters are practical. Paul now takes everything we have learned up to this point and focuses it like a laser on Christian marriage and family living.

Stop! Time Out! Slow down and fully comprehend what I just said in the last two paragraphs. If you miss this, you will forever be searching for the mystery of how to find happiness in your marriage and family. Go back and read it again!

Let's review: Everything from who God is, to salvation, a spirit of unity, spiritual gifts, putting off the old self and putting on the new self, the steps to freedom, learning good communication skills, smelling good, winning the inner war, time management, and being a positive and cheerful person... all converge in Christian marriage and family living. The principles are all there and are intended to be lived out in the marriage and family.

Have you noticed that one of the qualifications for leadership in the church is a good marriage and a healthy and functioning family? Why do you suppose God made it that way? It appears that God wants Christian living to be modeled in the family first. The opposite might also be true, marriage and the family may be the place where these qualities are most needed!

I met a guy once who said; “Terry, it would be easy for me to be a good Christian if it wasn’t for my wife and kids.” He paused for a moment and then added; “they bring out the worst in me.” I replied by saying, “Bingo!” “That’s exactly why God put you in that marriage and family. He wants you to live out your Christianity in those relationships first.” That was a totally foreign concept to him.

If your walk with Jesus doesn’t spill over into your marriage and family, then maybe you just took a walk with Jesus instead of actually walking with Jesus. Invite Him into your home.

The Heart of the Marriage: Ephesians 5:22-25

“22) Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23) For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. 24) But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.”

God has established certain roles for life that we should strive to fit into. Things go much better when we fill our role and let others fill their roles. For example, it is the role of the Holy Spirit to bring conviction. Things do not turn out very well when we try to play the Holy Spirit and point out the faults in other people.

The same is true for marriage. God wants the husband to take the lead and be the head. He wants the wife to use her intuition and be the heart. Both the head and the heart are crucial, but they do have slightly different perspectives. Let me illustrate.

Have you taken time to listen to the way men and women communicate? A man will often ask, “What do you think about this situation?” By contrast, a woman will often phrase the question differently. She is more likely to ask, “What do you feel about this situation?”

It is only after years of interdependent marriage that the wife will ask her husband, “What do you think we should do?” To which, if the husband has gained any wisdom over the years, he will quickly respond by asking; “What do you feel we should do?”

As a general rule, God designed men to analyze life through their head and women to experience life through their hearts. Men see things in black and white while women view things in technicolor. Men have a narrow focus, but women see the panoramic view. Men are focused on one task at a time, women tend to be multitaskers. Men are generally more mechanical and are interested in how something works. Women are more practical and just expect things to work.

When it comes to marriage, Paul uses two illustrations. First, he uses the human body. He says in marriage the man is to be like the head and women is to be like the rest of the body. When viewed from the onlookers perspective, men seem to sit around a lot.

My wife often asks me, "What are you doing?" I respond by saying, "I'm thinking!" The truth is that I am. I'm analyzing a task, designing a project or solving a problem. I cannot explain it, but I can go to bed at night with a problem on my mind and wake up in the morning with a clear solution... as long as I'm dealing with things, processes, or tasks.

By contrast, I will often ask my wife, "What are you doing?" She appears to have fifty things happening all at the same time, knows exactly what everyone in the family is doing and she is talking on the phone all at the same time. She is relationally connected to everything and has amazing insights into people.

How do you explain the difference between men and women? I personally think Paul nailed it with the illustration of the human body and the head and the heart. They both have vital roles and are designed to compliment each other and work together.

The second illustration he uses is Christ and the church. Jesus is to love, lead, guide, provide for, and protect the church. The church is to submit to His lead, respect and admire Him, and become His hands and feet in the world. This is profound. And men, just in case you want to be lazy and put everything on your wife, keep in mind that Jesus is the head and you are the church and part of His body. Jesus expects you to engage your heart, hands, and feet in reaching the world.

Hopefully, with that background it becomes more palatable for the wife to understand, respect, and submit to her husband. Encourage him to step up and lead. Make him become responsible. And then cheer him on, speak highly of him, and admire him. Become his heart!

The Protective Head of the Marriage: Ephesians 5:25-33

"25) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26) so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27) that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. 28) So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29) for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30) because we are members of His body. 31) For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. 32) This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. 33) Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband."

Paul now presents the husband as the protective and legal head of the marriage. He commands husbands to do something that is nearly impossible for otherwise self-centered men to do; he tells them to love their wives with agape love. This is the sacrificial love that Christ demonstrated when He laid His life down for the church.

Frankly, this surprised me about the text. Because the context is about marriage, I naturally assumed Paul would be talking about intimate love, romantic love, or even erotic love. But that's not what he does. He talks about agape love. This is the God kind of love that looks out for the best interests of the other person first.

This explodes the myth men often have about marriage. The foundation to a happy marriage is not sex and romance, rather it is kindness, caring, and security. It is wrapped up in the definition Paul gives of agape love over in 1 Corinthians 13:1-9.

God calls the husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church. This is a picture of sacrificial love. This presents a huge dilemma. Can a self-centered, self-indulgent, and hedonistic secular man who is driven by lust and greed love his wife the way God intends? It also forces me to ask the question, "Why do so few Christian men fail to bring agape love into their marriage and home?"

I personally believe that God holds the husband more accountable for the health of the marriage. This is the thrust of verses 25-27. Jesus makes the church pure and beautiful by his actions and His words. He literally makes her radiant and beautiful through intentional and daily love, affirmation, and encouragement. He uses His Word to accomplish this beautification process. (Big clue here men!)

Remember all of those people and verbal skills Paul talked about earlier in this chapter? God wants the husband to use those in the marriage to nurture, feed, and literally beautify his wife. According to these verses, the way a husband treats his wife determines the direction of the marriage.

In the human body, it is the head that sends all of the neuron responses to the rest of the body. It is the communication center. It determines what the body does and I dare say what the body becomes. God wants the husband to use agape love as the message center to the marriage.

As I look at the balance of this chapter and the first part of the next chapter, Paul is basically saying that the husband needs to grow up, step up, and shape up and assume responsibility for his wife and family. There is a reason why God places him as the head of the marriage. The role carries huge responsibility.

Leaving and Cleaving: Ephesians 5:31-33

"31) For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. 30) This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to

Christ and the church. 31) Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.”

The idea of “leaving and cleaving” was introduced way back in Genesis 2:27. When marriage takes place a new loyalty begins. A new home is established. A new family starts. Parents need to stand back and let the new couple emerge and stand on their own. Both the husband and the wife need to bond with each other spiritually, emotionally, socially, sexually, and financially. Seeking wise counsel from parents is one thing, remaining under their control is another.

Paul provides an illustration for us in verse 30. He said a new marriage is like the mystery of Christ and the church. At the moment of salvation a new Christian is transferred out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light. Old things pass away, new things come. Some lessons and skills from the old life are built upon, but many are discarded and replaced. Salvation is the beginning of a new journey. Paul says marriage is that monumental. It is the beginning of a new life journey with new roles and new responsibilities. It takes time for the glue of marriage to dry and the bonding to become strong. Wise parents stand back and encourage the process.

Like a good preacher, Paul wraps up his message on marriage with a good conclusion in verse 31. He tells the husbands to agape his own wife even as himself. The man in the mirror now also has a woman in the mirror. From that point forward the two become one. She needs love, acceptance, admiration, words of affirmation, and romance.

Paul then tells the wife to see to it that she respects her husband. It is at this point that she decides if she is going to be a mother to him or a wife to him. If she decides to control him as a mother, at some point another woman will most likely fill his void for admiration, respect, and most likely romance. Men are not in search of a new mother, they are in search of admiration, companionship, intimacy, and a soulmate. They need to be needed. They want to be wanted. They long for respect and belief.

Honoring Those Who Parented Us: Ephesians 6:1-3

“1) Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2) Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), 3) so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.”

One thing we all have in common since Adam and Eve is that we all have parents. There was a man and a woman involved in our conception. But notice that Paul says, “obey your parents in the Lord.” This covers everyone including those adopted, living in foster care, and children raised in an orphanage. The idea is to obey those who officially nurture and care for you.

Parenthood is a huge calling. It is a major responsibility. It is a significant commitment. 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 captures the monumental scope of this task. Both the mother and the

father are called to pour themselves into the children. The sacrifice is well worth the effort. Few rewards in life compare to a job well done in parenting.

Notice that “obeying” or “honoring” our parents in the Lord carries a biblical promise. The goal is that 1) it might go well with us, 2) and that we might live long on the earth. A spirit of appreciation and thankfulness are essentials in life. The benefits far surpass those who have an attitude of resentment, bitterness, or rebellion.

Let me be candid, not everyone had the same upbringing. Some come from good homes, but many today come from broken, abusive, or dysfunctional homes. A few come from wealth and privilege, but most grow up in relative poverty. Some have two parents, many were raised by only one parent. Some have natural brothers and sisters but many become custodians of the state or are raised in orphanages.

The same was true in Paul’s day. We will discover in the next few verses that slavery was practiced heavily in the ancient world. The nurturing situation for slave children was not good. But did you notice, Paul makes no distinction? He simply says we are to honor our parents in the Lord. Having an attitude of respect and honor in life will cause things to go much better for us no matter our circumstances in life.

The bottom line is that God loves children. He promises to be the Father to the fatherless. Look at some of the amazing upbringings mentioned in the Bible. Joseph was separated from his family and placed in slavery. Moses was taken from his natural family and raised by Pharaoh’s daughter, who was most likely a single mother. Esther was raised by her uncle. David was the youngest and had seven older brothers. Daniel was taken captive and raised in a foreign land in an orphan school. Not one of them had an ideal situation, but they all became amazing leaders.

I believe part of what Paul was saying is that we all need to resolve our past. We need to accept our genetics, be thankful for the good memories of our childhood, overcome the negative aspects of our upbringing, and run to Jesus for healing, acceptance, significance and new identity. At the same time we need to learn honor and respect for the significant people God placed in our lives.

I confess, my input into these verses has been colored by my ministry around the world and the huge number of orphans under the care of GoServe Global. I am biased toward disadvantaged children and will do everything in my power to give them love, acceptance, protection, food, clothing, shelter, security, a quality education, good memories, and a sense of being valued and wanted.

I am a firm believer in James 1:27; “This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” It is amazing to see how many come back to say “Thank you.”

The Bible is equally intolerant and condemning of those who abandon, neglect, abuse, or exploit children. I share the value that all children are valuable treasures. Everyone needs a launching pad in life.

Taking Child-Sculpting Seriously: Ephesians 6:4

“4) Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

Fathers have the unique ability to build up or tear down their children. Within Jewish tradition, the role of the father was taken very seriously, especially in the development of their children. Every Jewish family actually followed a special curriculum and time table for their children. Parenting was taken very seriously and every Jewish home thrived at home education.

The book of Proverbs mentions the process in Proverbs 1:8-9. “8) Hear my son, your father’s instruction, and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. 9) Indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head, and ornaments about your neck.” Notice the mention of the father’s instruction and the mother’s teaching.

Generally, the mother focused on getting the child started with the basics of reading, writing, math, and social skills. When those foundational skills were in place, the father worked on shaping the child’s mind and character. The Old Testament was used to teach history and the book of Proverbs was used to teach the fear of the Lord, wisdom, knowledge, philosophy, and life skills. The local synagogue and the Rabbi also played a vital role in reinforcing this instruction. Every boy had to memorize the book of Proverbs.

Somewhere between the age of twelve and fourteen, the male child was formally adopted into the family and was either groomed to step into the family business or was placed in an apprenticeship program under a master of some kind of trade or business skill. Girls were groomed for domestic skills, equipped with business partner skills to assist their future husband, and for eventual marriage.

The bottom line was that education and mentoring was taken much more seriously in Jewish culture than in any surrounding society. This is why Jewish children often had a head start in life and became prime candidates for leadership, management, and business ownership.

They were also bilingual. They mastered both Hebrew language and culture as well as the language of the land of their sojourning. This is what enabled them to retain Jewish nationalism even though they did not have a home land for centuries. They thrived wherever they lived.

The early Christians picked up this tradition and adopted much of this model of child rearing. It was very thorough, effective, and powerful. Eventually, a Greek approach to education was embraced by the church and more and more the parents handed their children over to either

private or public schools for either religious or secular instruction. In this model the parents had a more hands-off approach to education.

Sadly, many cultures did not stress education at all. The ruling class exploited this to govern the masses who were uneducated and therefore gullible. The result was the dark ages.

But the Jewish people were always educated and often viewed with contempt because they were informed and had sharp thinking skills. They often became the middle class of merchants or stepped into the void of skillful professionals. A significant number of them became doctors, lawyers, musicians, scientists, investors, and inventors because of their amazing educational foundation and life skills generated by the home education model.

You may have noticed that these three approaches to education rival one another in modern American culture. For the reasons mentioned above, there is a renewed interest in home education. As a Christian worldview and the secular worldview become more polarized and toxic toward each other, many Christians families are seeing the wisdom and value of the Jewish model of child-rearing and education.

I do not want to turn this into a debate on models of education, but I do want to say that parenting is vital and parents need to be involved in the education and nurturing of their children no matter which approach they choose. God holds the fathers especially accountable for this molding process. Paul is saying fathers need to be involved in the sculpting and instruction of their children.

The Gospel and Social Change: Ephesians 6:5-9

“5) Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; 6) not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. 7) With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, 8) knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.” 9) “And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.”

Paul now addresses the institution of slavery which was practiced widely in the Roman Empire. There were slaves who were conquered in battle. There were slaves who sold themselves as indentured servants. There were slaves of poverty who were there to pay off debts. There were people who were born into slavery. Different conditions of slavery had different terms, but the whole institution was disgusting.

Eventually, the gospel and the Christian message of love and equality of all people brought the end to slavery in the entire Roman Empire. This is an absolutely monumental accomplishment. But how did the social change happen when it was never part of the mission statement Jesus gave to His church? (See Matthew 28:18-20) Wow! We just stumbled upon a huge subject.

I am not going to deviate from the text to tackle this very big issue, but I do want to point out the amazing natural flow of this phenomenon as Paul rather casually addresses it in the text. How did the early church approach social change?

First, as our study opens, we discover that the New Testament neither condemns nor encourages the practice of slavery, but it does use it as an analogy for sinful bondage and the freedom that Christ brings into the life of a Christian. (Romans 6:12-23) It also used it as an illustration of the obedience a Christian should have for Jesus Christ. Paul referred to himself as a bond-servant of Jesus Christ. (See Romans 1:1; Philippians 1:1). He viewed himself as a slave to God and not to man.

Second, the early church focused on preaching the message of the gospel to all people without preference. (James 2:1-13) It did not deviate from this mandate. They viewed the gospel as the prerequisite for change both individually and socially.

Third, the early church applied Christian character and ethics to those in slavery who became Christians. (Ephesians 6:5-8) The goal was radical inner change and becoming new people in Christ.

Fourth, the early church applied Christian character and ethics to those who were slave masters that became Christians. (Ephesians 6:9) The goal was radical inner change and becoming a new person in Christ.

Fifth, the early church directly confronted hypocrisy and tackled the dilemma of equality and brotherhood within the family of God. (See the amazing book of Philemon) It is almost comical the way Paul unpacks this issue for Philemon. But notice, the implications of the Gospel were wrestled through within the family of God as the social injustice was tackled.

Sixth, the early church focused on the gospel, changed hearts, discipleship and the power of the Holy Spirit to change people one heart at a time. (2 Corinthians 5:17) They did not lay the gospel aside to focus on social change. They rightly understood that you cannot force lost and sinful people to adopt godly standards.

Finally, the early church expected social change to become the eventual natural outcome of the gospel and not the new focus of the gospel. (See the context of the whole New Testament.) The church focused on the call and mission of the church and let the Holy Spirit direct the radical social change.

This might sound like a minor post, but the implications are profound. When social change becomes the new mission of the church, the gospel is lost and the power is gone. If you abandon the gospel and use the legal system to force the change, you leave people on both sides of the issues eternally lost, unredeemed and at bitter odds with each other. It has no

vehicle to bring healing, forgiveness, love, and brotherhood. This approach will divide a nation and not heal a nation.

I apologize for opening up such a monumental subject and then devoting such little attention to it, but that's exactly how the early church dealt with it. They majored in the major of the gospel and left the radical implications to God.

So what does this subject have to do with you and me and our modern world? Well, let me ask a few questions. 1) How should the church approach immigration and ethnic assimilation in America? 2) How can the church reach out to Hindu and Muslim communities in America? 3) As we step into world missions, how do we reach countries like India that is uniquely Hindu in culture? 4) How does Christianity take root and reach a communist country? 5) How does the Christian message bring hope and change to a country like Haiti? 6) How do we as Christians reach into the LGBTQ community as effectively as the early church reached Corinth, Ephesus, or Rome?

I could go on and on. Let me just summarize that texts like Ephesians 6:5-9 are profound. We have so much to learn from the early church!

A Case for Economics and Human Government: Ephesians 4:28; 6:5-9

“28) He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.”

“5) Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; 6) not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. 7) With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, 8) knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. 9) And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.”

I want to take a moment and with these verses introduce another subject matter that I do not intend to develop in-depth. The Bible establishes the importance of labor, economics, and some form of monetary system. It also talks about the importance for a nation having some form of tax system to support essential public services. (See Romans 13:6-7). Without these things human civilization would not and I would argue could not exist.

Different systems of trade, commerce, and a monetary system started way back in the book of Genesis and are seen all the way through the Bible. We could spend considerable time arguing the best form of Government and which system of trade and commerce is superior, but my goal in this post is to merely point out their value and importance.

Coupled with this discussion is also the acknowledgement of a legal system and the concept of a criminal justice system seen all the way through the Bible. The books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy have greatly influenced the formation of law and justice around the world. These books also establish things like private property, just compensation for labor, and compassionate treatment of aliens.

The whole concept of nations, national sovereignty and international relations can also be traced back to the Bible. Why do I bring this up? Because a substantial proportion of the Bible unfolds against the backdrop of these subjects. We can grumble, debate, and complain about the best system of government, commerce, and criminal justice, but it is biblically impossible to have human civilization without the existence of these structures.

I am thankful to live in a democratic republic that gives all citizens a voice in government and grants civil liberties, justice, and freedom to all people. I also highly value our system of free trade and the fact that anyone can theoretically start with nothing and become upwardly mobile without undue artificial barriers.

Let me resist the temptation to stand on a soap box at this point, but I do want to say that I owe a debt of gratitude to the United States of America. I furthermore counted it a privilege to give back to my country as an elected official in the Iowa House of Representatives and encourage good, moral, conservative men and women of faith to step up and do the same. No government can be better than the moral integrity of the men and women who are entrusted with the mantle of public office.

Living in Strength for the Battle: Ephesians 6:10

“10) Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.”

As Paul launches into the subject of spiritual warfare, he gives an admonition that can be a stand alone thought. Every believer is to “be strong in the Lord and in His mighty strength.” This is not physical strength or mental strength. It is not measured by our talents or abilities. It is not calculated by our money or resources. It is measured by God's strength.

The best illustration I can think of to illustrate this is found in 1 Samuel 17:45-47. David was facing down Goliath. The odds were stacked against Him in the natural realm. But David was not fighting a mere physical battle. Listen to what he said to Goliath in the hearing of all the people.

“45) Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. 46) This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, 47) and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does

not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD'S and He will give you into our hands."

This is an absolutely profound text. It illustrates exactly what Paul was talking about when He said, "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might." We don't come into battle with a sword, spear, or javelin. We come with a different kind of armor. We put on the mighty armor of God. We turn the battle over to Him. We let Him do the fighting for us.

This is living by grace, walking in the Spirit, standing on faith, speaking His promises, acknowledging His presence, humbling ourselves, making Him the focal point and casting all of our care on Him all at the same time. Paul is saying that every Christian needs to do this every day, in every situation, and all the time.

This is not just for the perceived Goliath situations in life. Every day is a battle and every trial is a Goliath. As we shall see in the next two verses, our opponent is much bigger than Goliath. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood. But don't make the mistake of focusing on your opponent. Do what David did and focus on God.

This is why I wanted to tackle this as a stand-alone verse, because we usually get caught up in the next two verses and focus on the enemy. The whole army had spent forty days focusing on Goliath. They were immobilized by fear.

But David had spent the previous forty days hanging out with God in the outback. He came with a radically different perspective. The army saw Goliath as a champion compared to themselves. David saw him as an uncircumcised, mouthy blob of fat compared to God. Right there, at that moment the victory was won because David became strong in the Lord and put on His mighty strength.

This is where God calls us to live. He wants us to continually "hang out with Him." He wants to cloth us with His mighty strength. He wants to equip us with His superior armor.

Time for Panoply! Ephesians 6:11

"Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil."

Years ago I was studying this text and consulted a Greek transliteration. To capture the meaning of this verse the translator used an old English word. He said, "put on the full panoply of God." The word "panoply" captures the meaning of this verse. It means, "a complete or impressive collection of things." It has the idea of "every one with none lacking."

As Paul surveyed a Roman soldier, he noted that the armor was designed as a full suit and not random pieces to be arbitrarily chosen. It was a "panoply." Ancient war strategists studied the

tactics and strategies of the enemy and designed the armor accordingly. Every piece had a purpose. It was designed to function as a whole and give every advantage to the Roman soldier.

There are amazing stories of well equipped Greek or Roman legions taking on armies many times their size and predictably coming out victorious. The reason was that they fought as a unit and their armor was designed to function together. They could join shields and form a wall. They would often shift the front rank to keep rested and fresh men at the front to face the heat of the battle so that they were not overcome by exhaustion. Ancient warfare was a science.

Paul borrowed this analogy to describe both the individual Christian and the church as a whole. His emphasis is that “we need to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty strength. Then we need to be diligent to put on the full panoply of God so that we may be able to stand firm against the full range of schemes the devil might launch against us.”

The word “schemes” is also interesting. It comes from the Greek word “methodeia.” Does that look familiar? It is often translated as “methods” in English. The idea is “following or employing an orderly and technical procedure in the handling of a subject.” It emphasizes “a systematic approach according to a set of rules to accomplish a task.”

Paul's point is profound. He is saying that Satan is not random in what he throws against us. Do you remember the story of Job? God allowed Satan to test Job, but God set the rules. This might be a radical and new thought for you, but the schemes of the enemy are revealed in Scripture and the armor of God was designed accordingly. Why? Because God sets the parameters.

I briefly mentioned above that “ancient warfare was a science.” Each piece of armor was designed to counter a warfare tactic of the enemy. The Roman soldier had both defensive and offensive weapons and was trained and skilled in using them. They devoted their lives to being well trained and equipped for battle.

I've heard many Christians mistakenly observe that spiritual warfare must not be that significant or God would have devoted more time and space to the subject than just Ephesians 6:10-20. But what if these verses are merely a condensed summary of the broader warfare manual? Let me explain.

Do you want to learn more about God and His mighty power? Then Review Ephesians 1:1-14.

Do you need to be trained in the long distance weapon of prayer? Then review Ephesians 1:15-23 and 3:14-21.

Do you need to put on the belt of truth and polish your breastplate of righteousness? Then you better go back and review Ephesians 4:17-5:21.

Do you need to shod your feet with the gospel of peace? You would be wise to review Ephesians 1:3-14 and 2:1-10.

Do you need to find your place of service in the army of God and how you fit into the bigger picture? Then I would beg you to review Ephesians 4:1-16.

Do you need to understand your role as an ambassador for Christ as mentioned in Ephesians 6:20? Then you would be wise to understand the ramifications of Ephesians 3:1-13.

I trust you are getting my point. The whole book of Ephesians is a warfare manual. The full panoply of God is developed and the full range of the enemies schemes are exposed throughout the whole book.

It is now up to you to put on the full armor of God so that you can stand firm against the schemes the enemy will throw at you as you go through life. But the greater emphasis of the book is that you might become equipped and fruitful for God in your personal moral freedom, your character, your marriage, your family, your career and your calling for God through the church and in the world.

Unveiling Our Opponents: Ephesians 6:12

“12) For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

Different translations use different words to capture the meaning of the Greek. For example, the ESV quoted above says “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood.” The NASB says, “our struggle is not against flesh and blood.” The NIV also uses the word “struggle.” Note that none of the translations use the word warfare. Why is this?

I suspect a few reasons. First, we are in more of a wrestling match than an outright war. Jesus has already won the war. Satan and his demonic forces have been defeated by the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Second, that means Jesus Christ is Lord! He is in control. He sets the rules of engagement for Satan and his cohorts. Like in the story of Job mentioned in an earlier post, God let Satan test Job, but God established the boundaries. Third, we are in an ongoing wrestling match for our good. We don't become strong sitting in the bleachers, we become strong out on the mat wrestling better opponents than ourselves. The trials of life are intended to strengthen us and not destroy us. They also expose our weaknesses.

But make no mistake, the wrestling is very real and the consequences can be severe. If you do not believe me, take a moment and read 2 Corinthians 10:3-6. Notice in this text Paul does use both the words, “war” and “warfare”, but again he emphasizes that the battle is not in the physical realm. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood. Paul is also quick to point out that God has given us “divine weapons” for this warfare.

Back in Ephesians 6:12, Paul describes our opponents. He says we wrestle against rulers, against powers, against world forces of darkness, and against spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (NASB) Let's step back and make some observations about this list of opponents.

First, our opponents are real. Second, our opponents are unseen. Third, our opponents are more than one. Fourth, our opponents are not flesh and blood of the physical realm. Fifth, our opponents are connected to darkness and wickedness. Sixth, some of our opponents are actual entities in the demonic realm. Seventh, some of our opponents are not entities, but rather "world forces of this darkness." Finally, if we include 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 and Colossians 2:8, we discover that our opponents include things like institutional strongholds, lies, and deception, false philosophies, and worldly values. The bottom line is that we wrestle against a tag-team of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Think about this for a moment. My flesh and your flesh is an internal enemy pulling us toward sin. I constantly struggle against this enemy. Sometimes, I am my own worst enemy. I cannot afford to feed my flesh or it will defeat me every time. This is our first opponent.

Our second opponent is the world. This is an external enemy of fallen values, morals, philosophies, false religions, established and accepted traditions, norms, and wicked institutions. Many of these are legal in most countries and promoted in many societies. They represent things like abortion, prostitution, adult entertainment, pornography, drugs and alcohol and underlying philosophies like humanism. These are not actual entities, but they are very real forces of darkness and this list is merely the tip of the iceberg. But each of us will face them and wrestle against them. These are far more common opponents than the demonic realm and they easily harmonize with our flesh. This opponent has no rules of engagement. I would say this category has by far the most captives and is responsible for more death and ruined lives than our other two opponents. This is "the world forces of this darkness" that Paul talked about in Ephesians 6:12.

Finally, there is the demonic realm. These are unseen enemies and by comparison are easier to identify and defeat than the two previous enemies. As we read the New Testament we discover that this category was directly confronted and quickly dealt with and defeated by both Jesus and the early church. Though the battles were real, they were won very quickly and decisively.

But here is the problem: Most Christians reduce spiritual warfare to just this final category and that is merely a small fraction of our battle. In fact, for many it is seemingly non-existent so they reject the full notion of spiritual warfare. Meanwhile, they are pinned to the mat by their own flesh, living in tragic personal bondage and have no idea what a biblical worldview even is. They are defeated and don't even realize they are in the battle.

The good news is the armor Paul is about to describe covers all three categories. The weapons of our warfare are divinely powerful against all three opponents of the world, the flesh, and the

devil. The battle is real, our opponents are formidable, and the stakes are very high. Whether you care to acknowledge it or not, you are in the battle.

Turning the Tide of the Battle: Ephesians 6:13

“13) Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.”

I now invite you to broaden your mind and do some critical thinking with me. If we battle against three enemies, what strategies do we need to employ against which enemy to “stand firm?” What pieces of armor are essential to help us face each front of the battle? Let’s briefly consider each front in the battle.

When it comes to our flesh, we need to repent from personal sin, stop feeding on smut and secular junk food, exercise self discipline, renew our minds, learn to say “no” to our own pride, greed and lusts, learn how to walk in the Spirit and finally focus on what is right and good.

This might be the most difficult phase of the battle. At the very least, we need to put on the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness and our gospel shoes in this category. We need to focus on doing God’s work and not be self-absorbed. The other pieces of armor are also vital, but we often don’t think they apply to the inner war. But if we don’t win the inner war, we will be slaughtered in the outer battles. We are about to discover that the whole panoply is needed for each front in the battle.

But what about the second enemy? How do we stand firm against the relentless onslaught from the world? We certainly need the belt of truth, the helmet of salvation to guard our thoughts and mind, the shield of faith to combat doubt, ridicule and the critics, the breastplate of righteousness with its moral standards of purity and a sense of right and wrong, and the Word of God. Then again we need to recognize that this is our mission field and put on our gospel shoes and step out in faith. Are you trained, equipped and ready for this battlefield?

Finally, how do we face the unseen enemy of Satan and the demonic realm? Again we discover that each piece of the armor is important. But how the soldier employs the armor against this enemy might be unique. For example, the way we deploy the sword of the Spirit and the arrows of prayer against this enemy might be different. Truth against this enemy will be employed to expose His deception and the shield of faith will be needed to deflect the fiery darts he shoots our way. We also need to be skilled in the Name, Blood, and Cross of Christ with authority. Hmm, this is a different use of the Gospel of truth.

But what do we do when the evil day comes? How do we stand firm when our flesh is weak and being tempted, the world is luring us into all kinds of temptations and doubts and Satan is using his whole bag of tricks against us all at the same time? I would suggest it is time to join shields and form a wall of resistance with other believers. It is time to stand firm by standing together.

I trust this post helps you see the battle from a different perspective. I hope it helps you understand that the armor is not optional and it is deployed in different ways depending on the battle we are facing.

The bottom line is that we can “stand firm.” We don’t need to turn tail and run. We need to be like David and face Goliath. David’s courage breathed new life into the army of Israel. Soon they rallied and joined the battle as well. The tide can turn quickly in warfare. What starts as an evil day can turn into revival, awakening, and unparalleled victory.

Never forget God is on our side and wants to do the fighting for us on every level. It wasn’t David who defeated Goliath and the Philistines, he was merely willing to stand firm and call the bluff of Goliath. It was David’s keen strategy of focusing on God that rallied the troops and ultimately won the day. I believe God joined the battle the moment David acknowledged Him.

The First and Foremost Layer of Armor. Ephesians 6:14

“14) Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness.”

Standing firm is essential in battle. Ephesians 4:27 briefly mentions the idea of not giving any ground or a foothold to the devil. With each new piece of ground the enemy gets in our life the more schemes he can employ against us. Defining and defending our ground is important.

Paul now introduces what is often called “the belt of truth.” But Paul was actually referring to more than a belt. He was talking about the first layer of clothing under all of the other body armor. It was secured by the belt and tied all of the other armor together. Without this inner layer the other pieces of armor would be intolerable to wear, especially in battle. In other words, Paul was saying “Put on the first layer of your armor, which is truth.” Why is this important? Because truth is essential on all three fronts of the battle.

When it comes to inner war, truth is the basis of renewing the mind (Ephesians 4:22-25), gaining and maintaining personal freedom (John 8:31-32) and is the essential ingredient of the gospel itself. (Ephesians 1:13) Apart from truth, you will never see or acknowledge the grip of a personal sin or bondage, understand the devastation of an addiction, recognize you are being exploited in an abusive relationship, or see a pathway to a new life. Telling yourself the truth is both powerful and essential. It would be possible to write an entire book on this subject alone.

When it comes to our battle with the world, truth exposes false philosophies and religions (Colossians 2:8), pulls down fortresses and strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:4-5) and is the basis of our message of hope and life to the world as we share the gospel. (Ephesians 1:13) I would argue that words of truth are more important to warfare than spears, swords, javelins, arrows, or any other weapon. Words of truth not only rallies our troops but also sets out the basis for the engagement. The truth David spoke in the hearing of all the people when he faced Goliath was

essential to the victory that followed. (Review 1 Samuel 17:45-47) His words of truth turned the tide of the whole engagement.

Finally, when it comes to our warfare against Satan and his cohorts, truth is even more essential because lies and deception are his primary weapon and scheme. (See John 8:44) The plans and purposes of the enemy are always advanced by deception. One of the most powerful and effective avenues of intervention for those who are being traumatized by the enemy is called "Truth Encounter." It was defined and made popular by Neil Anderson in his classical books "*Victory Over Darkness*" and "*The Bondage Breaker*." It is a systematic and step-by-step approach to walk people to freedom based on exposing the lies of the enemy and replacing them with truth. I highly endorse and use "Truth Encounter" when helping people come to freedom.

The belt of truth is often skipped over and minimized by the casual reader, but I would argue that Paul mentioned it first because it is the foremost piece of the armor. Truth has both a defensive and offensive role in the battle on all three fronts of engagement. I urge you to take truth very seriously and make it foundational to your salvation, personal growth, and freedom, and view it as your most essential piece of armor. Without truth the battle is lost on all three fronts before it begins.

Breastplate Repair and Maintenance: Ephesians 6:14

"14) Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness."

The second piece of the armor that Paul identified was "the breastplate of righteousness." This covered the midsection of the body that is home to nearly all of the internal organs.

The breastplate has evolved over the years from thin leather to copper and later to three layers of alloy metals that could stop arrows. In modern days both soldiers and police officers wear Kevlar vests that can stop many kinds of bullets. Throughout history, great lengths have been taken to protect this vulnerable part of the human body.

When it comes to spiritual warfare, I have coined a phrase that observes the biblical principle that "purity is power." This is based on Scriptures like Romans 6-8, I Corinthians 6, Galatians 5, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, 1 Peter 1:13-2:3 and 1 John 3:1-12. This is where the doctrines of justification through faith in Christ and personal sanctification producing holiness and a clear conscience are woven together to form the breastplate of righteousness. Let's briefly look at how the Breastplate of Righteousness applies to each of the three battlefields of life.

The inner war is often waged in the arena of pride and overconfidence. No matter how long we have been a Christian, we are still vulnerable to our flesh. A clear conscience and moral freedom are priceless and worth protecting. This is enhanced by continual renewing of the mind with Scripture, communing with God daily and putting protective boundaries of accountability

around our life. We need both our new identity in Christ and a clear conscience to win the inner war. Guilt and self condemnation can be devastating to the defeated Christian. Many have thrown in the towel and just given up the battle for personal freedom. Not quitting is the number one principle for success in any endeavor.

The outer war with the world seeks to entangle us in every form of lusts, fantasy, addiction, and sinful bondage. It wants to make us a slave to sin and lead us into ongoing bondage. Those hiding secret sin or compromise have an inner compulsion toward sin and temptation in the heat of the battle. Jesus Christ wants to bring us to freedom and moral purity. He is the bondage-breaker. No matter how old you get, the world never stops its relentless enticement into sin. 1 Corinthians 10:12-13 have been a personal refuge for years in my life. God always provides a way of escape.

The war with the invisible world is more subtle. Ephesians 4:27 warns about giving the devil an opportunity, ground, or a foothold in our lives. When we live in moral defeat, sin, or compromise, the enemy knows our weakness and vulnerabilities and has every right to exploit that area of our life for his devious schemes. He is the tempter and custom designs each temptation for our weakest point and hurls it at us in our most vulnerable time. He is also the accuser of the brethren, and as such he rubs our face in any moral failure. (See Revelation 12:10). He wants to torment us with self condemnation, guilt, and failure.

I personally believe when we put on Christ and live in freedom and moral purity with a clear conscience, our breastplate is teflon-coated. The temptations will come and the accusations will be hurled against us, but they will no longer stick. They slide off like eggs in a teflon pan. Coming to this point is a process. It takes time. But this is one of the fringe benefits of holiness and personal sanctification.

Another point must be mentioned: Satan plays by no rules and has no allies. At some point he turns on everyone. Hypocrisy will ultimately be exposed and we will face the consequences of our own actions. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 is an amazing text of Scripture. It warns against an ongoing lifestyle of sin, but then applies the power of sanctification, justification, and the inner work of the Holy Spirit to personal transformation. God does not give up on us or forsake us.

Over the years in my personal journey to freedom, I have also embraced Philippians 3:12-16. I have learned that losing a battle is not the same as losing the war. God gives His grace to forget the past, confess our sin and failure, and get back up and “press on.” I have learned the value of “breastplate repair and maintenance” on a daily basis. Christians are not sinless, but they do sin less and less as they grow more and more in Christ. Learn to apply the polish of grace to your armor daily.

The Proclamation of Victory: Ephesians 6:15

“15) and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;”

Paul now focuses on the feet. It was important in battle to have good traction and foot protection. Not infrequently, an enemy would spread the battlefield with spikes and sharp objects almost like landmines in a modern war. The soldiers who did not have proper footwear were cut and wounded. They lost their ability to stand.

But more often, a king would send out a delegation to discuss terms of peace to avoid battle altogether. Though sometimes unavoidable, war is never good. This verse makes it clear that God sends us out as His messengers of peace. We are His couriers. As you shall see in a moment, we are armed with a proclamation of peace. How does this play out on the three fronts of the war?

First, Jesus came to win the inner war that rages within each of us. He not only paid for our sin, but He purchased our salvation. Through His death, burial and resurrection, Jesus broke the curse of sin and paved the way for forgiveness, healing, and a new life. He came to end the inner war and bring peace.

Second, when it comes to the world, the Bible says, “16) For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17) For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” (John 3:16-17)

Finally, the truth of the gospel is powerful in our warfare against Satan and his cohorts. It is the simple but authoritative announcement that he has been defeated. He has been rendered powerless. I relish in Colossians 2:13-15. It clearly states that on the cross Jesus literally disarmed the enemy. 1 John 3:7-8 proclaims that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. It has already been accomplished. Let me illustrate:

The story is told of a Japanese commander at the end of WWII who was in charge of a prisoner of war camp. He knew the truth but continued to enslave many. Then one day an airplane landed and a courier walked up the fence and asked, “Who is the ranking officer among the prisoners?” As one man came forward, the courier handed over the proclamation that Japan had unconditionally surrendered. That proclamation changed everything. The war was over. They were no longer prisoners. It was “Good News.”

The ranking officer promptly read the proclamation to the Japanese commander and “disarmed him.” With that proclamation, all of his men laid down their weapons and surrendered. That is the same role the gospel plays in confronting our enemy. Satan knows he is defeated. It is the name, blood, cross, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that we must proclaim in the hearing of the enemy. This is the basis of our victory. Philippians 2:10-11 states clearly 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.

When confronting the enemy our role is that of the courier. We proclaim the victory that Jesus already won on the cross. When that truth is boldly proclaimed the enemy is disarmed. His games are over. The war is ended. All the demons in the realm of darkness know they are defeated and boldly proclaiming this truth changes everything. This is why we shod our feet with the gospel. The proclamation we have been entrusted with is more powerful than any other weapon. It is the message of unconditional surrender. It is the Proclamation of Victory.

Take up the Shield of Faith: Ephesians 6:16

“16) in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

The shield was an important piece of armor. It is still used by riot police today. It has been said, "Fear knocked at the door, faith answered... and no one was there." Satan works through fear. He is like a roaring lion that works his prey into fear and panic. Peter tells us to resist him firm in our faith. (Read 1 Peter 5:8-9)

An ancient shield could stop flaming arrows, deflect a spear or javelin, help protect against rocks thrown from walls or from a sling and even deflect a sword blow. History shows that there were many shapes and sizes of shields. Some were large and could be linked together to form a wall. An advancing army carrying shields was an intimidating sight. Others were smaller and lighter. This version covered the forearm and was used during sword fighting.

The Marvel character “Captain America” is featured with a shield that has both an offensive and defensive purpose. Though highly exaggerated by Hollywood, the smaller ancient shields could be effectively used against an enemy. Never minimize the importance of faith.

No matter which version of shield was used, they were for both protection and intimidation. In 1 Kings 10:16-17, King Solomon made a total of 500 shields of beaten gold. 200 were large and 300 were smaller shields. They were impressive and were carried by his best soldiers. They undoubtedly had a psychological effect on the enemy and were featured during ceremonies. They brought glory and honor to the king.

Faith grows through use and is strengthened through trials. 1 Peter 1:6-7 says, "6) In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7) that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;" Do you want to carry a gold shield? Do you want to bring glory and honor to your king?

Gold shields were earned the hard way. They came through battle tested faith on the front lines and through many trials. Soldiers trained hard, practiced often and fought courageously. They lived grueling lives. Being a soldier was a noble calling. (1 Timothy 2:3-4) Let me stress an important point: The shield was not to hide behind, it was to advance behind. The soldiers carrying the shields were the front line. Faith always leads the charge for the glory of God.

It may be redundant to stress at this point, but the shield of faith is equally important on all three fronts of warfare. We need it in our personal lives. We need it in our ministry to the world. And as mentioned earlier, faith is vital as we resist the enemy.

Let me encourage you to step up and step out. If you are a Christian, you are a soldier whether you like it or not. Romans 10:17 says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Pick up your Bible, start studying, and get out there in real life and exercise your faith. Stop retreating to the easy chair and hiding behind your remote control, video games, or smartphone. It is time to take up the shield of faith and advance for the glory of God!

Wear Jesus Well: Ephesians 6:17

"17) And take the helmet of salvation..."

The helmet served two purposes. First and most obvious, the helmet protected the head from injury. Stop and think for a moment, the head is not only the location of the brain, it is also the exclusive home to four of the five human senses. It is where we see, hear, smell, and taste. The head also shares the sense of touch with the rest of the body.

But the head is also the location of our sense of balance and reason. It controls the rest of the body. The head is also where the tongue is located, not only for taste but more important for communication. Your head is worth protecting.

Notice that in this text salvation is identified with the head not the heart. Why? Because salvation affects everything about you. Salvation changes the way you see the world and the way you think. The Christian literally puts on the Lord Jesus Christ the way a soldier puts on a helmet.

But the second purpose of the helmet was for identification. It showed which army you belonged to and which king you were loyal to and served. It made it easy to distinguish friend from foe. The helmet marked you! It was to be worn with honor and prized with a sense of pride and dignity. It marked a soldier in times of war and times of peace. The helmet was a proclamation of loyalty.

Don't be ashamed to be publicly identified with Jesus Christ. Represent Him to the world with truth, honor, and dignity. Don't leave your helmet at home or hidden away where no one knows you are a Christian. Wear Jesus Well!

The Incomprehensible Weapon: Ephesians 6:17

“... and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.”

The word of God is like a sharp sword. This includes both the written word and the spoken word. Hebrews 4:12 says, “12) For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” The Spirit of God always uses the Word of God when accomplishing His mighty work.

This was the pattern of creation. In Genesis 1:3 it says; “And God said, let there be light, and there was light.” When God speaks the Spirit moves. What God says the Spirit does. The Word defines the parameters within which the Spirit of God moves and works.

This is the reason Paul identifies the weapon of the sword with the word of God. He says it is living and active. It is sharp and powerful. It can cut and divide. It works in the physical realm of joints and marrow. It works in the spiritual realm of soul and spirit. It provides wisdom and discernment. God’s Word is the basis of life. God’s Word is the basis of judgment and eternal death. The universe was formed by the Word of God and it is held together by the Word of God.

The inherent problem in this text is limiting the Word of God to the analogy of a sword. God’s Word is so much more than what a sword could ever illustrate until you bring in the understanding of the King of Kings. Revelation 19:11-16 pictures Him coming back to earth. Notice that verse 13 says His name is called “The Word of God.” Then verse 15 says “from His mouth comes a sharp sword.”

Though I will argue in my next post that there is another weapon in the text, the Word of God in this verse represents much more than a sword, it represents the sovereign will and authority of God Himself. It embodies the “ways of God” as revealed throughout Scripture.

Becoming skilled in the use of God’s Word unleashes the power of the Holy Spirit and declares the sovereign will of God. It places the battle in His hands. The divine power of the Holy Spirit is beyond the scope of any weapon, ancient or modern.

Do not be shy or timid of the Holy Spirit. Learn to walk in His divine enablement and power. Study the Word of God because it unveils the secrets of walking the ways of God and in the Spirit of God. They go hand-in-hand. As a Christian, you have been entrusted with a sword that represents much more than a physical piece of steel. This is an incomprehensible weapon.

The Powerful Long Distance Weapon of Prayer: Ephesians 6:18-20

18) With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, 19) and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of

the gospel, 20) for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."

I believe verse 18 introduces prayer as another weapon for our warfare. Did you notice from Ephesians 6:16 that Satan shoots flaming darts or arrows at us? Does it make sense that we only have a sword to fight back with? Arrows are long distant weapons, but a sword is for face-to-face combat. Why would God send His army out to be pounded by arrows with no way to counter? Where is our long distance weapon in this context of Ephesians 6:10-20?

I believe prayer is our long distance weapon. In fact, I believe prayer is like an ICBM. (Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile) You can pray from any location and at any time and impact lives around the world. Prayer is a powerful and very effective long distant weapon! Let me try to explain how this works in the unseen realm.

During the Ronald Reagan administration, the United States adopted what was called "The Doctrine of Deterrence." This doctrine prevented nuclear attack through strength. It theorized, and I believe correctly, that we needed a "second strike capability." In practice that meant if we were attacked by a first strike from an enemy, we had to be strong enough to absorb the attack, survive, and launch a second strike that would inflict equal or greater damage on our enemy. It was theorized that the second strike capability would deter our enemy from launching the first strike. Reagan built a strong military not to wage war but to prevent war.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. I call this concept "Prayer Targets." Let me get practical. When I have flashes of anger, irrational relational tremors with people in my life, strong temptations, weird and distracting thoughts, or random fears come my way, I try to view these as arrows from the enemy. Most days are not front line battles, rather they are brief encounters with the enemy who fires random darts at us. Rather than reacting to these in the physical realm and getting all bent out of shape, I try to launch a counter-attack in the spiritual realm.

I do this in two ways. First, I pray for the salvation of a non-Christian who is in a position of influence. I try to identify a person in advance and use them as my prayer target for several months. Saul of Tarsus was most likely a prayer target for the early church. Second, I pray for a Christian ministry or segment of the body of Christ to be strengthened and thrive. For this target I am praying for God's kingdom to be advanced through revival or awakening.

When I pray this way consistently in response to the darts that come my way, two things happen. First, the frequency of the fiery darts from the enemy decreases. And second, the intensity of the attack diminishes. It is absolutely profound how quickly these two things happen if I am consistent to launch these prayer targets every time a dart comes my way. I now believe this is the best and most practical way to "resist the enemy" strong in our faith.

The early church consistently used the sword and prayer together. Acts 6:4 says the apostles devoted themselves "to prayer and the ministry of the word." They prayed and they preached.

They preached and they prayed. The early church used the Sword of the Spirit and the Arrows of Prayer together strategically.

I believe Jesus trained them in this powerful approach to Christian living and ministry. He started His public ministry with forty days of fasting and prayer. Then He preached and ministers to people with great power and anointing. Then again He would slip away for extended times of prayer, especially when the demands of ministry increased and fruitfulness abounded. He modeled how to use the weapons of preaching and prayer together in His ministry. God wants us to be armed with both the Word and prayer.

Go back and review 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. Notice that Paul talked about “the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but are divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.” I could elaborate for a long time on these verses, but sufficient for now to point out the plural word “weapons.” God’s army has been equipped with more than one weapon. May I also tickle your mind by asking how ancient armies destroyed fortresses? History tells us that invading armies had weapons much stronger than swords and arrows. Do not minimize your understanding of prayer and fasting and what they contribute to spiritual warfare.

Ambassadors of Heaven: Ephesians 6:19-20

“19) and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20) for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

Many verses contain profound nuggets of truth that can radically impact our lives. Such is the case with these two verses. We are about to explore a concept of vital importance that is tragically unnoticed and therefore unrealized by most Christians.

I am talking about seeing ourselves as Ambassadors of Heaven. Paul consciously worked hard at stepping into this role in his life. He saw himself as more than just a Christian, he viewed himself as God’s Ambassador. Both his prayer life and public ministry were radically impacted by this stunning revelation.

But you say, “Yes, but Paul was unique. He was an Apostle. This doesn’t apply to me!” So then, how do you explain 2 Corinthians 5:17-21? In these verses Paul bestows this role of an Ambassador of Heaven on every Christian. Seeing yourself in this role will change both the way you approach God in prayer and the way you approach people in ministry.

I must confess, I was a Christian for years and even in ministry and was totally ignorant of what it meant to be an Ambassador of Heaven. Then something providentially happened in my life that opened a whole new sphere of insight and understanding into Scripture and what it means to be an Ambassador of Christ.

My role as a State Representative in the Iowa Legislature has shattered my Christian identity box. The insights and parallels to the Christian life are amazing. First, it has radically influenced my understanding of prayer and my access to God. You see, as a State Representative, I had access to the Governor, the Lt. Governor, the Secretary of State, and the heads of every State Department in ways others do not.

The same is true for every Christian in the spiritual realm. Seeing yourself as an Ambassador of Christ will affect your prayer life. This is what gives you and me bold access to the throne of grace that non-Christians do not have. (See Hebrews 4:16) We need to cry out to God on behalf of people.

My goal in this post is merely to crack this ambassador door open for you and let you explore it in depth on your own. But here is a significant clue to the text, understanding the dynamics of this calling helps explain the way Paul called on Christians to pray in Ephesians 6:18. He was describing ambassador communications with those in authority. What an amazing way to pray!

But second, being in public service also impacted the way I see my responsibility back to my people. I was an official servant of the State to them. I needed to serve them well. Let me prompt you with a question: “Who are your people God has placed under your care and within your sphere of influence?” Are you being a good ambassador to them?

This is why Paul was asking for personal prayer in this context. He wanted to get the message right to the people under his care. He saw himself as Heaven's Ambassador and voice to the people. He took this role and calling seriously. He dedicated his life to it. He labored hard at communicating the gospel to people. He lived and eventually died as an Ambassador of Heaven.

Small Actions With Big Results: Ephesians 6:21-22

“21) But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. 22) I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts.”

I cannot imagine living in days without the internet, emails, cell phones, land lines, postal service, television, radio or newspapers. In many ways our world has become much smaller, but tragically less connected. People today are dying from boredom, isolation, and a sense of being disconnected. Why? Because people don't care or take the time to relationally connect.

News in the days of the early church travelled slowly. When Paul wanted to communicate, especially when he was in prison, he wrote long letters. What else are you going to do with your time when you have a “dwell in place order” like Rome put on Paul?

Paul decided to spend his time writing. The Holy Spirit guided him. He wrote to several people and churches from prison. Little did he realize, but the letter he was writing to the church in Ephesus was going to be copied, translated, and read millions of times over in thousands of languages world-wide. It was about to be joined with others and become a collection of letters soon to be recognized as the New Testament.

The letter Tychicus was carrying from Paul to Ephesus has been used by God to change the course of human history. Suddenly that little prayer request from Paul for utterance in communicating the Gospel was about to be answered in extraordinary ways. (Review Ephesians 6:19-20) The moral of the story is that our difficult circumstances can become divine opportunities if we follow through with what God puts on our heart. It's amazing how the Holy Spirit can connect dots through our life and around the world.

Never doubt what God can do through your most humble efforts. Not to be trite, but little can be much when God is in it. Obey those promptings of the Holy Spirit to make a call, write a note, send an email, give a unique gift to someone God puts on your heart, or pray for someone. Kind words and sincere actions can be so profound. Learn the value of good deeds that punctuate small promptings of the Holy Spirit. The fruit is in the follow through. Small actions can have big results when God is in them.

The Tychicus Story: Ephesians 6:21-22

“21) But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. 22) I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts.”

Paul's job was nearly done. He had most likely hired a scribe to record the letter he was sending to the church at Ephesus. Church history tells us his eyesight was bad, so he left the writing to others as he spoke. With just a few final touches the ink on the parchment would dry and then the pages would be put in a pouch and sent on its way.

A man by the name of Tychicus was chosen for the job. There was only one copy of the newly written Epistle. It would be the responsibility of Tychicus to carry it, protect it, and eventually deliver it to the church at Ephesus. He was entrusted to carry a treasure worth much more than gold. His role was every bit as important as that of the Apostle Paul whom God inspired to write this amazing Epistle.

We have no record of the hardship or peril that accompanied his journey, but we can surmise that God was watching over him. Little did he know, but he was on a divine mission. The parchment he was carrying was about to become one of the most prized books in the New Testament.

God often entrusts significant tasks to ordinary people. Sometimes Tychicus is God's hand to the hungry, the weak, or the hurting. Sometimes Tychicus is a Christian teaching in a public school, a nurse, or an AWANA helper. Little is known of the ordinary people whom God used to fill in the vital gaps and help Joseph, Moses, Esther, or Daniel at important times in their journey, but they were crucial to the story.

The bottom line is that most of us are not a Paul, Peter, or John; we are a Tychicus. We are that crucial link entrusted to carry a treasure or fill in a vital gap on behalf of God. Many serve on boards for a church or non-profit organization doing the vital detailed work that makes ministry possible. So are these tasks important?

I believe the Holy Spirit watched over Tychicus and guided every step of his long journey. I can only imagine the amazing story of his long trip from Paul to Ephesus that will be revealed in eternity. Do you think for a moment that Satan had vested interests in stopping him from fulfilling his mission? Most likely invisible guardian angels surrounded him on his journey.

I am as intrigued by the role of Tychicus in delivering this Epistle to Ephesus as I am in Paul writing it. For several weeks this letter was entrusted to the care of one man. God's biggest work often rides on the shoulders of one or two seemingly ordinary people. One of my anticipated joys in heaven will be hearing the amazing Tychicus stories.

The Master Disciple-Maker: Ephesians 6:21-22

"21) But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. 22) I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts."

The big question remains, "why did Paul pick Tychicus for the job of carrying the manuscript to Ephesus?" I believe his selection was not a random decision by Paul. All the clues are in the text.

First, Tychicus was a beloved brother. He had passed the love test. He was part of the family of God. He had mastered the right belief system. He knew what he believed and why. He demonstrated a doctrinal substance in his life that confirmed his salvation.

Second, Tychicus was a faithful man. He had accumulated a track record of keeping his word and completing tasks. I believe he had both moral freedom and a clear conscience. He was a product of the very disciple-making strategy that Paul crafted into the book of Ephesians.

Finally, Tychicus was a proven minister to others. He was more concerned about the growth and progress of other people than himself. Paul knew Tychicus would not exploit them for his own gain or rule over them with his own agenda.

It was for these same reasons that Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus years earlier as the first pastor to this new church. (See 1 Timothy 1:2-5) Paul had a knack of raising up fruitful disciples. He equipped them with good theology and he worked hard at bringing them to moral freedom and trustworthy character.

Both Timothy and Tychicus were living examples of the intended purpose of the book of Ephesians. Chapters 1-3 are devoted to good theology. Chapters 4-6 are devoted to developing godly character. Every Christian needs both a good doctrinal foundation and unshakable godly character.

Let me say this one more time in slightly different terms: The book of Ephesians embodies Paul's personal approach to disciple-making. As a wise master builder, Paul spent equal time laying a solid biblical foundation under people as he did helping them come to personal freedom over sinful bondage. Paul was a master disciple-maker.

The Closing Blessing: Ephesians 6:23-24

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

Paul's conclusion to the book of Ephesians must be weighed in the context of the entire book. I believe Paul was pronouncing a blessing on those who applied the truth and principles taught in the book of Ephesians to their daily lives.

This closing blessing is very similar to what Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:5: "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." He then went on and warned Timothy of the adversity and heartache that come upon anyone who neglected living in godly Christian character and conduct. (See 1 Timothy 1:6-17)

Notice that Paul included his own testimony in the second half of this text. Even though his past conduct deserved God's wrath, his sincere faith in Christ flooded him with God's grace and forgiveness. Jesus Christ gave him a new life and a new identity.

This is the concluding thrust of the book of Ephesians. The gospel has the power to change people. Those who step into the full teaching of the book of Ephesians can expect God's peace, love, faith, and grace to surround them. There are very tangible blessings that accompany knowing Christ, walking in freedom, and maintaining a pure conscience.

David understood this concept. Listen to what he said: "11) But let all who take refuge in You be glad, Let them ever sing for joy; And may You shelter them, That those who love Your name may exult in You. 12) For it is You who blesses the righteous man, O LORD, You surround him with favor as with a shield." (Psalms 5:11-12)

I do not believe Paul indiscriminately pronounced this closing blessing on just anyone who claimed to be a Christian. The blessing was intended for those who stand firm in Christ and cloth themselves with His armor as he taught earlier in this chapter. Paul closed this book with a blessing so that we might know how to live in God's favor and blessings.