

**Excitement
From
Ephesians**

Excitement From Ephesians

Every Spiritual Blessing

The ancient world was just as full of confusion in matters religious as the modern. Thus it was that Paul, having his apostleship stamped by the miracles and signs which attended his progress, in addressing the brethren at Ephesus, introduced himself as an apostle and one who could therefore clear away contradictions, doubts, and fears generated by the devil. "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God," he wrote, "to the saints at Ephesus, and who are faithful in Christ Jesus.' Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:1,2). This exponent of truth, then, addressed the congregation as saints not sinners, and as faithful in Christ rather than as rebellious renegades. This was not an attempt to falsely ingratiate himself with the disciples, nor was it an effort to brush the weaknesses in Ephesus under the carpet and not deal with them; instead it was the Holy Spirit's desire to paint their picture in present positive, affirmative tones, eventually securing thereby that elevated behavior.

The customary, though earnest, sincere, and important, prayers for grace and peace to the brethren, connected with greetings from the Father and the Lord Jesus, being delivered, the apostle hurried on to his introductory notes:

- **Blessed be God** - Christians generally speak of themselves as blessed by God, that the Father is the bestower of blessings. But God Himself is often blessed, or made happy, by what He is able to do for the faithful whom He extracts from the entanglements of earth. When Joseph and Mary brought the Child Jesus to the temple for His circumcision, according to the custom of the Law, old Simon "took Him into his arms and blessed God" (Luke 2:28). "For my eyes have seen Your salvation," said he, "which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles,' and the glory of Your people Israel" (Luke 2:30-32). God was blessed by Simon because of what God Himself was going to do for all the peoples. The Father is blessed because of what He can give! May we become partakers of His divine nature. "Blessed," indeed, "be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).
- **Every spiritual blessing** - Contrary to popular opinion, God has not promised to bless His children with every material blessing. Of the most blessed of all men, chosen by the Lord Himself to be His missionaries, His apostles, Paul wrote, "To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed and are roughly treated, and are homeless" (I Corinthians 4:11). Instead of material blessings, the Father "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing." The spiritual blessings of forgiveness, the indwelling Spirit, fellowship with God, and a host of others belong to Christians as a result of the mercies of God.
- **In the heavenly places** - He "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 1:3). Christians need to recognize that they walk by faith and not by sight. While by sight their bodies dwell on earth, by faith they dwell in the heavenlies with Christ. And only by comprehending their spiritual dwelling places can they begin to put the proper significance of the spiritual blessings derived from dwelling there with Christ.

Blessed is the God who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. And may we count those blessings with the proper emphasis on the spiritual rather than the physical.

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Adopted Into The Royal Family

Many great stories of adoption can be told! Ranging from true accounts of little girls being adopted from desperate situations and raised by Christian families to great classic fictional work of Ben Hur by Lew Wallace, these depictions all carry the message of the underlying love of the adoptive parents and the full rights of the adopted children. What a picture it was when Judah Ben-Hur, taken from the darkened appointment of a Jewish galley slave and elevated to the position of Roman tribune by adoption, stamped the seal of his noble office into fresh wax in the presence of his astonished former friend and current enemy.

But the greatest of adoptions occurs in the spiritual realm. None of the rags-to-riches, low-estate-to-high-rank stories compares with that which God has done through Christ Jesus for His chosen saints. "In love," wrote the former Saul of Tarsus, "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the beloved" (Ephesians 1:4-6).

- **Adopted through Christ** - The rank of Roman tribune did not even come close to comparing with what it means to be a son of God. No title of nobility was ever bestowed in Western Europe, which remotely matches what it is to be one of the royal priesthood. The great love of God for a fallen race is nowhere more exhibited than in His foreordained plan, executed through the message of the Christ, by which he lifts men from the squalid gutters of sin and exalts them to His right hand in Christ Jesus. "In love He predestined us to adoption as sons."
- **So that the greatness of His grace might be praised** - Even earthly kings want to be known for their kindness and beneficence, although they are generally neither kind nor benevolent. How much more, then, the great God and Father of all, who in His great kindness and mercy, has made it possible for "whoever will" to be forgiven for his offenses against His Majesty, and to be adopted as a son of the King! This adoption was the exhibition of "the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace."
- **Grace freely bestowed** - There can be no question with regard to the undeserved nature of God's grace towards those who have received the adoption as sons. Rebellious, hard-hearted, full of envy and slander, they are not fit for service in the heavenly courts in the presence of the King. But when anyone will carry out his portion of the formal adoption proceedings, being immersed as properly penitent into Christ, then all past grievances are forgotten, and a new character as befits the courtiers of heaven is bestowed.

Who, upon the dawning of comprehension of the greatness of this adoption, could not fail to proclaim the glory of the grace of Him who made it not only possible but a reality? Who, in being now fitted in the livery of attendants upon the great throne on high, would be willing to disgrace his new office? Who, in recognizing the great love and risk the King had taken in adopting into the royal family such a sinner, would be willing to overthrow that love and compassion, and be once again enticed into the squalor of his former life? "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Romans 8:14).

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Chosen Before The Foundation

The idea that God can foreknow events is difficult for man to understand. This is particularly true when the concept of pre-determination is coupled with its apparent opposite, free will. "If man has freedom of choice, then how can God predestine?" is one question. And the other: "If God predestines, how can man have choice?" Yet the scripture affirms that both are true. "Choose this day whom you will serve," echo the ageless words of Joshua. Biblical preaching always exhorted the hearers to make the right choice (Joshua 24:15). "Therefore, brethren," proclaimed the apostle Peter, "be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you" (II Peter 1:10). Man exercises free will; God foreknows and predestines.

In Ephesians 1:3-12 Paul specifically discussed the relationship of the apostles of Jesus Christ to the Lord, bringing up such subjects as spiritual blessings in Christ, adoption as sons, redemption, and grace. The rest of the New Testament writings make it clear that these same characteristics by extension belong to all who are in Christ.

- **Chosen in Christ** - Having pointed out that the Father blessed those in Christ with every spiritual blessing, the imprisoned apostle added, "... just as He chose us before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him" (Ephesians 1:4). God has a specific plan in choosing. Those who are of "an honest and good heart," (Luke 8:15), are selected out by God's harvesting process. "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword,...and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12). The Bible is perfectly designed to separate out those who truly love and honor God from those who do not care, or simply pretend to care. Those who obey the gospel and remain faithful are the chosen.
- **Before the foundation of the world** - Man has a hard time comprehending those things which happen within the realm of time, much less those, which occur outside that created dimension. Various explanations have been offered to try to assist the struggling disciple understand the timelessness of God, such as God's being able to see the whole parade of history from beginning to end, whereas man has to look at it through a peephole in a wooden wall. While those illustrations are helpful, they must of necessity fall short. God's eternal plan, "before the foundation of the world," was that the followers of Christ should be chosen through the message of the gospel.
- **Holy and blameless in Him** - The all wise Father does not operate on a willy-nilly, random basis. With Him all has a purpose; every step of His proceeds faithfully to a pre-set goal. And His goal in calling and choosing from the Jew and Gentile a people for His name is that "we should be holy and blameless in Him." The imputed holiness and blamelessness granted in Christ is God's mechanism by which the faithful disciple of the Lord is transformed into one whose conduct is truly holy and blameless. As the apostle John stated: "The one who practices righteousness is righteous" (I John 3:7).

God in His great mercy has made it possible for an alienated sinner to be reconciled to Him through the gospel. Each Christian of a good and honest heart must be in constant remembrance of the love of God, and God's willingness to choose him out of the world, recognizing how special he is to be so chosen. But he must also be cognizant that the purpose of God's choosing, set in motion before the foundation of the world, is that the child of God should be holy and blameless. Step up to the performance line, and be that way!

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Release To The Captives

Kidnapped! Sometimes the headlines snap a nation to attention when the son or daughter of a famous family is stolen away, and a ransom note is delivered. For weeks or months the news media occupy the public with accounts of police efforts to locate the lost child. Banner headlines mark the progress and constant coverage details the delivery of the ransom money, and the whole country breathes relief when the perpetrators are finally brought to bay.

But as heinous a crime as the kidnapping of a child is, it pales to insignificance next to the destruction brought on by Satan the deceiver. Into house after house he enters, carrying off into the land of oblivion those who are exposed for his picking, who are enticed into sin by the combination of their own lust and the devil's whisperings. And they are kidnapped. In the words of the scripture, they are in "the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will" (II Timothy 2:26). But, praise be to the Almighty, a Rescuer has come from Zion, to deliver Jacob from his transgression.

- **The ransom paid** - "In Him," explained Paul to the Ephesian brethren, "we have redemption through His blood" (Ephesians 1:7). The ransom price, or redemption, for the soul of the kidnapped brother is not measured in bank notes, or even silver or gold. "You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers," averred Peter in agreement with Paul, "but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (I Peter 1:18,19). What a price!
- **Forgiveness granted** - "We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." Normally the ransom money covers the amount required to release the captive. But in the case of the blood of Jesus, not only is freedom for the ensnared purchased, but the price for all sins, future as well as past, is paid. The bank account from which these resources are drawn must be deep indeed, especially when all the brethren who most draw on this account are taken into consideration. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for having provided a more than sufficient amount "according to the riches of His grace."
- **Grace Lavished** - This grace, said the apostle, was "lavished upon us." Sometimes brethren wonder if God really can forgive them. While it is true that Christians are not to take advantage of God's deep pockets, the sincere individual who is honestly trying to get it right has as many resources as he needs to cover his indebtedness. The Father in heaven wants His children to have the strength to be out there changing the world, not drowning in their own sorrows. So the grace of God, like lots of extra gravy on potatoes, was lavished upon us.

When Jesus spoke at His home synagogue in Nazareth, He quoted His purpose as prophesied by Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are down-trodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18,19). There are so many blessings in Christ. In Christ a person is a new creation. In Christ there is no condemnation. In Christ disciples have redemption through His blood. In Christ brethren have access to the riches of His grace, and in the strength He provides, in Christ they can overwhelmingly conquer. What an abundant life!

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Knowing The Plan of God

"No longer do I call you slaves,," Jesus told the twelve minus Judas. "The slave does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15). For the first time in the history of the world were the servants of God going to be "let in on" the plan of God so that they could function with initiative on their parts to fulfill the strategy for world conquest. Up to this point even the prophets of old had to flounder, taking orders without knowing the overall purpose of their action and preaching, speaking of the future redemption, but not knowing how it was to be accomplished. "As to this salvation," explained Peter, "prophets who prophesied the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow, It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven - things into which angels long to look" (I Peter 1:10-11). Those who preached the gospel to us by the Holy Spirit are those selfsame apostles.

- **The wisdom of God** - "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (Romans 11:33). When God in His wisdom acts, sojourners of the earth should pay careful attention. "In all wisdom and insight," expounded Paul, "He made known to us the mystery of His will" (Ephesians 1:8,9). Through the inspiration given the apostles, the great God of the universe has made known His long secret plan. Those with an interest in spiritual things will appreciate this condescension from One so great to share with ones so small.
- **The mystery of His will** - The Lord of all does not act without purpose or planning. "He made known to us," Paul referred to himself and the other apostles, "the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which lie purposed in Him [Christ] with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ things in the heavens and things upon the earth" (Ephesians 1:9,10). God's purpose from the beginning has been to bring everything together in Christ. Consider, then, the importance of preaching and teaching the gospel of Christ, and the significance of each person who participates in the spread of the word!
- **The suitable administration** - Like a great general, the Father knows when to execute segments of His battle plan. The Commander-in-Chief knew when to call Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans, and when Moses was to bring Israel out of Egypt. "At the right time," says scripture, "Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). As the church continues to carry out the battle plan, the Lord Himself "has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). God knows when the time is fulfilled.

This mystery was first made known to the apostles, as the apostle Paul indicated to the community of saints in Ephesus. But as their writings, and those of selected New Covenant prophets, were assembled by the Providence of the Almighty, all brethren now hold in their hands the complete revelation of this mystery. May we regard with care and excitement the sacred trust committed to us!

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According to God's Purpose

"In all wisdom and insight" averred the former Saul of Tarsus, "He made known to us the mystery of His will" (Ephesians 1:8,9). By His wisdom, God set in motion a definite plan to carry the message of salvation to all. Having sent His son to die on the cross, and having raised Him from the dead, the All Wise Father then sent the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, who in turn could then explain the significance of the events now recorded in the gospel accounts. God, in His kindness, decided to give man a second chance through the gospel but still was working within in His pre-set parameters of time and conditions under which redemption could take place. And He is determined that all things, voluntarily or involuntarily, will be summed up in Christ, "things in the heavens and things upon the earth" (Ephesians 1:10). These things He made known directly to the apostles of Christ, and through them indirectly to all of us who call upon the Lord from a pure heart.

- **An inheritance for the saints** - When an old rich man dies, there is often a mad dash for his inheritance. But contrary to this earthly scramble, Paul wrote, concerning specifically himself and the other apostles, "In Him also we have obtained an inheritance" (Ephesians 1:10,11). And what an inheritance it is! But because it is a spiritual inheritance rather than a material one, there are no long lines of applicants and no in-fighting at the court house; instead lonely preachers call plaintively into the darkness for anyone to come, and, through the word of the apostles, become a joint-heir with Christ also.
- **Predestined according to His purpose** - God predestines without getting in the way of the free will of man. Thus, while Jesus chose the twelve to be His apostles, each had the opportunity to betray Him like Judas. And as we look back on the inspired history recorded in scripture, we can see clearly the Lord's purpose in choosing the apostles; they were vital stones in the foundation of the church.
- **After the counsel of His will** - The apostles were "predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11). Whose input did the great God request before He set His plan in motion? Whose counsel was sought? The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has been and is perfectly capable of planning to salvage men from the schemes of Satan, and without violating the individual's initiative, He is likewise perfectly capable of executing His plan. And what encouragement here; He works all things after the counsel of His will.
- **The first to hope in Christ** - In the wisdom of God, all information about Christ and His gospel came through the apostles. In this context, Paul continues, stating that to this "end we who were first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:12). The honor and obligation of an apostle were equally matched; while the apostles were privileged to be the first to hear and understand the redemption found in Christ, and to have the hope of the resurrection from the dead, they were also the ones who suffered the most while getting the movement of Christianity off the ground floor in the face of persecution and Jewish resistance.

We must all remember that God has a fixed plan in motion, and that He is executing according to that plan. In His wisdom and insight, the blessings of Christianity flowed first to the apostles, and through them to those of us who faithfully follow their word. To this end modern sons of God pray and work according to the directives established in His written word, and thus also share in the blessings of grace, redemption, and forgiveness, doing our part to sum all things up in Christ.

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Sealed With The Spirit

Fleshly man cannot put the proper appraisal on spiritual matters. Hence God our Father has a variety of teaching tools in motion to upgrade the spirituality of man so that he can increasingly put the proper value on the realm of the unseen. Beginning with a guilty conscience, man is brought to a recognition of his need for redemption through the preached word, and remission of his sins is proffered through the sacrifice of Christ. But the Father's goal in all this is to produce a spiritual people, rather than a conglomeration, who can truly fellowship with God. As the great bondservant John emphasized: "What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (I John 1:3). Once remission of sins is accomplished, the wayward son is granted the indwelling Spirit, by whom this fellowship with God is established and maintained.

After referring to the blessings accruing to the apostles (many of which also are granted to every Christian), Paul focuses his attention on the Ephesian brethren:

- **The gospel of your salvation** - "In Him, you also," Paul reminded the saints at Ephesus, "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" (Ephesians 1:13,14). Note that the message which first came to them was the gospel of their salvation; salvation is God's bridge between the physical and spiritual realms. Inside carnal man is a spiritual hook called the conscience. Through the preaching of the gospel man's conscience is pricked, he is convicted of his sin, and made aware that he has a major spiritual problem. Thus he is moved from fleshly fixation to the dawning of the importance of spiritual truths.
- **The promised Holy Spirit** - Fleshly man, as mentioned earlier, does not put the proper value on spiritual things. As our Lord spoke to Nicodemus of being born from above by being born of water and Spirit, He noted: "if I told you of earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you of heavenly things" (John 3:12). Therefore the wise God established the scheme of redemption to move man to the spiritual state where he can appreciate the value of the indwelling presence of the very Spirit of God. After listening to and believing in the gospel of salvation, the disciple is now informed that he is "sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise." The scripture points out the value of the indwelling Spirit, by whom all of God dwells in the Christian, in a variety of ways. Referring to this indwelling Spirit, Paul apprised the brethren in Rome: "But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him" (Romans 8:9). And Paul similarly explained this to the Galatian congregations: "Christ redeemed us...in order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Galatians 3:13,14).

God sent Jesus to suffer in the great spectacle of the crucifixion, to deliver us from sin, and upgrade our spirituality, so that He could ultimately send forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. Let us with open hearts and open minds try to understand the significance of the greatest gift of all, the gift of the indwelling Spirit

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The Message of Truth

There is such a thing as truth, and there are such things as lies. God is real, and so is the slanderer, the devil. Of Satan, Jesus said, "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" (John 8:44). So the great war goes on between good and evil, light and darkness, truth and lies.

When Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, he referred to the brethren "listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (Ephesians 1:13). There is only one message of truth about salvation; all the other messages are lies. Because each man's eternity hangs in the balance of which he listens to, it is important to note some of the salient points of the message of salvation:

- **Necessity of believing the message or the Christ** - The Bible affirms that Jesus came into the world to seek and save the lost. To accomplish this, He was born of a virgin, lived a perfect life, died on the cross in accordance with Old Testament scriptures, was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, rose from the grave on the third day in accordance with Old Testament prophecies, appeared to witnesses over a period of forty days, was beheld by angels and received up in glory. God, having provided sufficient proof of the accuracy of these truths, requires all men to believe this message as did the Ephesians.
- **Necessity of repentance** - The message of the scripture is also quite clear on this point: repent or perish. The message of the cross and the love of God for each individual must move him to change his ways, to cease to live for himself and to begin to live for God.
- **Necessity of confession that Jesus is Lord of all** - With the coming of the New Covenant, there are no secret disciples of Jesus. "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, " explained the Lord Himself, "of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26). In the process of coming under the terms of salvation from sins, the believer is required to confess that Jesus is Lord before witnesses.
- **Necessity of immersion for remission of sins and receiving the indwelling Spirit** - Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Unless the individual is immersed into Christ, wherein he is immersed into the death of Christ, he does not have his heart sprinkled clean from an evil conscience by Christ's shed blood. There is no way to be saved without the right immersion for the right reason. The apostle Peter, who first proclaimed repentance and remission of sins in Jerusalem, commented, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls (I Peter 1:22). No one's soul is purified in obedience to falsehood. Jesus said, "He who believes and is immersed shall be saved"(Mark 16:16); He did not say, "He who believes and is saved shall be immersed." Immersion by the authority of Jesus Christ is where the penitent believer is granted remission of sins through the shed blood of Christ, and receives the gift of the indwelling Spirit.

This is the message of truth, the gospel of salvation. This is the message the Ephesians believed, and which saved them. And these are the terms of the only message, which will save men today. Satan, in his deception, continues to offer lying messages to the unwary. But you listen to the message of truth.

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The Promised Holy Spirit

God, in His communication to man, wastes no words, and uses no unimportant terminology. Our Lord, during the temptation in the wilderness, quoted from the inspired and sagacious Moses, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Thus when Paul uses the expression "the Holy Spirit of promise" in Ephesians 1:13, the diligent disciple of the Lord will want to know why the Spirit is called the promised Spirit.

- **The Holy Spirit was promised to the Israelites in Old Testament prophecy** - The serious student of the Old Testament in the synagogues could not fail to notice prophecies such as this from Ezekiel: "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh [an open and tender heart rather than one hardened to the gospel]. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances" (Ezekiel 36:26,27). The great promise of God to Judah was that in the last days God's Spirit would be placed within them.
- **The Holy Spirit was promised to the Gentiles in Old Testament prophecy** - Not only did the Father promise His Spirit to the Jews, He also prophesied the coming of the Spirit to the Gentiles, although the prophecies are somewhat more veiled. When God called Abram from Ur of the Chaldees, His words were: "And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"(Genesis 12:3). Again, at the offering of Isaac on Moriah's summit, "And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 22:18). A surface reading and a cursory examination of these scriptures might lead the reader to suppose that Christ in the flesh was the means by which all the families of the earth would be blessed. But Christ in the flesh was never sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It was Christ in the Spirit who came to the Gentiles. As Paul referred to these prophecies in Genesis to the Galatian brethren, he explained that Christ redeemed us "in order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Galatians 3:14).
- **The Holy Spirit was to come to both Gentile and Jew, as emphasized on Pentecost, 30 AD** - The thrust of Peter on Pentecost was not remission of sins, but the indwelling Spirit called the promise. "Repent" said he, "and let each of you be immersed in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children [Jews], and for all who are far off [Gentiles], as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself?" (Acts 2:38,39).

When the serious student of scripture today recognizes that the indwelling Spirit was the promise offered by God in prophecy, he will begin to underscore the significance of this indwelling as he works his way through the Bible. He will note that Christians are children of promise, children of the Holy Spirit as contrasted to those of mere fleshly birth. He will note that remission of sins is the vehicle to receiving this promise. And he will note that the old Testament great men of faith did not receive this promise. Then he will fall on his face before God, confess that he is not worthy to receive such a gift, and arise in the strength of that Spirit and get to work.

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Listening to the Message

God has a plan from which He will not deviate. To be saved, an individual must hear the word of God from a fellow man. Paul, in passing, noted this in his exhortation to the Ephesian brethren: "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation..." (Ephesians 1:13). Man is saved after listening to the message of truth, or as Paul put it in another place, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Note, then, some significant elements concerning the means by which the message comes to a lost and dying race:

- **The word was first given to the apostles by revelation** - When Jesus selected the twelve, plus Paul, He set them aside as those with a special mission, designated as apostles. These were promised that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth, and that the same Spirit would bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had said during the years of His earthly sojourn. Furthermore, He informed them that the Spirit of truth would disclose to these same apostles the things which had not yet occurred, those grand circumstances connected with Jesus' resurrection and ascension to His glorious throne. Thus the Lord prayed before He crossed the Kidron to the Garden of Gethsemane, interceding first on behalf of the apostles, then for the rest of us: "I do not ask in behalf of these [apostles] alone," petitioned He, "but for those also who believe in Me through their word..." (John 17:20). The word of truth never came to anyone apart from its origination through the apostles of Christ.
- **Others were told to hear it from man** - When the Lord was selecting for Himself an apostle to the Gentiles, He reached into the middle of Jewish hierarchy for the most rabid proponent of Pharisaical traditions and snagged Saul of Tarsus. When this same Saul was on the famous road to Damascus for the purpose of arresting disciples of Christ, the Lord Himself blinded Saul and knocked him to the ground. But did the Lord tell Saul what to do? No! The Lord told him to go into Damascus, and Ananias would tell him what to do to be saved. The message had to be delivered by men to men. Similarly, when the Lord had selected the first Gentile to come under the blood of the eternal covenant, the angel sent by the Lord was similarly emphatic: "Send to Joppa, and have Simon, who is called Peter, brought here; and he shall speak words by which you will be saved, you and all your household" (Acts 11:13,14). The message had to be delivered by men to men.
- **Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ** - All who come to believe are going to believe because of hearing the message. A rare individual may come to the faith of the New Testament simply by reading the recorded message of truth (which still originated from the apostles, and is a written form of "hearing"), but the vast majority are going to come from the ranks of those who had some person teach the word of God to them, and explain the one way of salvation.

Thus it was in Ephesus. They came to believe "after listening to the message of truth." And thus it is today. No angel is going to appear in some dank cell, and give some Moslem the way of salvation. No 700 foot high Jesus is going to suddenly arrive at some bedside, and explain the way of salvation. The message of truth is going to be carried by men to men. So get carryin'!

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Redemption of God's Possession

God has worked with mankind as a whole in much the same way a parent interacts with a child. God has provided discipline, experiences, lessons, and a means of increasing the race's vocabulary. He has even provided an all inclusive textbook and handbook in which the lessons are permanently recorded, available for reference or learning.

One of the great lessons from God for man is for man to learn what it means to be spiritual. As often noted, man is generally interested in the directly physical, that which is related to survival, personal comfort, and personal physical pleasure. How will the All Wise deal with this materially oriented creation, and set up a framework in which he, by his free will if his interest can be generated, can become a new creature, with a spiritual orientation? Watch.

- **Adam** - The first of the race was a physically oriented man. "The first man," said Paul, "is of the earth—earthy" (I Corinthians 15:47). Living on earth was the center of his interests, and we have no clear record that Adam is one of those whose names are recorded in the lists of those who live eternally. Of his sons Abel and Seth, we have a positive record, but of Adam himself, we have no indication that his interests ever rose above sweating out his living by hacking away at that early jungle. And those who wear the visage of Adam generally never rise above his interests. "As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy" (I Corinthians 15:48).
- **Israel** - Through the people Israel the All Wise introduced in some detail the concept of salvation. The nation was birthed in the fires of Egyptian affliction, brought forth on the forceps of God's deliverance through the plagues. Thus Israel, in its initial cast, recognized its dependency upon God for its temporal salvation, and was continually reminded throughout its history of its need for redemption from its external enemies. And the great Jehovah, being a jealous God, taught Israel that none of the false gods could deliver, that He and He alone was God and the source of physical redemption.
- **Jesus** - "But when the fulness of the time came," noted the apostle Paul, "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law" (Galatians 4:4). But to the sickened surprise of many who thronged Jerusalem's streets at His triumphal entry on the donkey's colt, He did not deliver Israel from the Romans. Rather than coming down off the cross, He died apparently helpless on the tree. But of course that death introduced the salvation or redemption of the soul. He came, in the words of the angel to Joseph, to "save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). No longer a temporal salvation, but one in the realm of the spiritual. Will anyone's interest be aroused?
- **Jesus' second coming** - Jesus, the great high priest of the order of Melchizedek, "having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him" (Hebrews 9:28). The ultimate salvation or redemption is the changing of the body from a material, corruptible state to a glorious body which in the likeness of Christ is eternal and incorruptible. And this redemption will occur at Jesus' second coming. This is the ultimate in spirituality, and the ultimate hope for those whose interests are no longer earth-centered. As Paul again informed us, "It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" (I Corinthians 15:44).

Thus the Christian looks forward, trusting God to keep His promise of the resurrection of the glorified body, "with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:14). Anyone interested?

Excitement From Ephesians

The Earnest of our Inheritance

This earth is full of daily disasters. The most apparent principle in operation in the world is the law of death and decay. A glamorous, divorced, playgirl princess and her boyfriend leave their bodies behind as a result of a high speed chase (and who knows what other behind the scenes skull-duggery), going to their eternal reward, while the world mourns the death of the woman for weeks. As the great apostle Paul pointed out for us, "For the creation was subjected to futility..." (Romans 8:20). The world, in "its slavery to corruption" (Romans 8:21), has no hope. And earthy residents of this planet have nothing better to do than to spin in their home-made squirrel cages faster and faster, and in frustration occasionally bump them into one another in a futile attempt "to get ahead."

But those who have been redeemed, whose affections have been set on the things above rather than on the things of earth, have one hope. They know, from the everlasting word of God, that one day the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, the Lord shall descend with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the dead in Christ shall be raised from the graves incorruptible. They know, that while everything of this earth can be stripped - their livelihoods, their health, their families, their homes - nothing can separate them from the love of God and His willingness to resurrect them from the dead. Thus they "wait eagerly for [their] adoption as sons, the redemption of [their] body" (Romans 8:23). Having learned the spiritual lessons from the book of God, having seen the earthiness of Adam, having learned of the physical salvation of Israel, having understood the redemption of the soul through the sacrifice of Jesus, and having been trained to look to the salvation of the body at the second coming of Christ, they truly comprehend the words of Paul: "And just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (I Corinthians 15:49).

- **The promise of the Holy Spirit** - The indwelling Holy Spirit, promised beforehand in the sacred writings, accomplishes many things. In being "born of the Spirit," the child of God has become a new creature, created in the likeness of Christ in glory. As Christ, "through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God," so the participant in the death of Christ now has bold and confident access to the ear of Him who is seated in the most holy. Through this Spirit, he is strengthened, refreshed, and made capable of walking in the footsteps of Him who called him out of the darkness into the most marvelous light.
- **The Spirit as the pledge** - "After listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation," reminded Paul, "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" (Ephesians 1:13,14). Here the emphasis of the apostle is on what the Spirit does to establish God's ownership over what He has purchased at the price of the death of His Son. First the "document" is sealed with the Spirit; it is officially stamped for the record, and the notation of the contract is placed in the all-important books. Secondly, to assure the "document" that the Father is going to make good on His contract to take final and ultimate possession of the property, the "earnest" or "pledge" of the Spirit within is tendered as an item of significant value. The Spirit is God's guarantee that He will resurrect the saint to eternal life at the blast of the last trumpet.

The one hope that the Christian has is his resurrection from the dead. And the indwelling Holy Spirit, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27), is the son of God's guarantee of that hope. Will you downgrade the importance of the indwelling Spirit, or will you see with increasingly spiritual eyes His importance in the plan of God?

Excitement From Ephesians

Learning to Pray from Paul

The great men of God without exception have all been great men of prayer. Some prayed from the early stages of their lives; some, as Samson, learned to pray the hard way, petitioning for the Lord to answer him in the last throes of his life in the Philistine temple. Our Lord Himself, during His days in the flesh, was the greatest Man of prayer. I stand in awe of Him, noting situations such as this one that Mark records: "And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there" (Mark 1:35).

The apostle Paul was likewise a man of prayer, and serves as a great role model for anyone who would desire to be truly spiritual. And what is helpful from Paul is that most of his letters contain written prayers, which are instructive for those who would yearn for the spirituality of such regular devotion.

After noting that the Ephesian brethren had listened to the message of truth and had obeyed the gospel of salvation, the apostle continued: "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, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers..." (Ephesians 1:15,16). There are some salient points for us:

- **Thanks for the faith of the brethren** - The apostle gave thanks for the brethren, and implicit in his overall statement is his appreciation for the faith among the brethren. "Without faith," stated the author of the letter to the Hebrew brethren, "it is impossible to please Him" (Hebrews 11:6). The apostle Paul, having dedicated his life to bringing about the obedience of faith among the Gentiles, was truly thankful for the results in Ephesus.
- **Thanks for the love for all the saints existing among the brethren** - Paul, having spoken of the hope of the resurrection, and the faith of the brethren, now gave thanks for the greatest of all, the love of God poured out within the heart of the believer. What good would it have been for the brethren to know all mysteries if they were not fired by the pure motivation of love for God and for man? The congregation in Ephesus was motivated by this love, and great thanks indeed could be given for that.
- **No ceasing to give thanks** - Our Lord Himself was in constant communication with the Father. "Truly, truly, I say to you," He emphasized, "the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing" (John 5:19). Paul, in imitation of the Lord, lived his life in constant recognition that he was continually in the presence of the Almighty, "in Spirit and in truth," and therefore often referring to himself as "not ceasing" to pray or to give thanks.
- **Making mention** - Paul was also very honest. He had a lot of people and situations to pray for, to say nothing of time spent in simply praising and thanking God for His greatness and goodness. So he made "mention" of the Ephesian brethren in those prayers. Not that the "mention" is to be taken lightly. The slightest request from the great and humble apostle carried major significance at the throne and center of the spiritual universe, and angels sprang into flight at the smallest behest from the one who carried a burning burden for all the brethren and all the churches.

Modern Christians must learn from examples such as Paul's. We must learn to be always conscious of our presence in spirit before the throne of the Almighty, in constant communication with Him. We must learn to have the same types of focus in our prayers, giving thanks for the faith and love of others. And we must have so many others to pray for that we just have time to "make mention" of them; under those conditions the mention will have more power than the vain and ongoing pleadings of the merely selfish. Do not cease to give thanks!

Excitement From Ephesians

Paul's Communication Network

How can Christians communicate if they never talk? Is it right to visit about affairs of the church? Or when does such sharing become gossip? or malicious gossip? When Paul wrote to the congregation of believers in Corinth in anticipation of his next visit to that fair city, he expressed some anxieties concerning the church: "I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there may be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances" (II Corinthians 12:20). Right in the middle of all the "church fight" words is gossip. God does not like gossip, or malicious gossip.

Yet in his first inspired missive to the Corinthian brethren, this same Paul notes: "I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you" (I Corinthians 1:11). Were Chloe's relatives a bunch of whispering gossips? Was Paul out of line in entertaining their comments? It is implicit that the Holy Spirit did not condemn the legitimate concern and comments relayed to Paul about the status of the Lord's work in that Achaian center.

Paul had developed an excellent set of communications within the congregations functioning, as he put it, within his "sphere." Thus, as he wrote to the church in Ephesus, in a letter dictated from prison concurrently with the epistle to the Colossian brethren and the note to Philemon also of Colossae, he stated, "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..." (Ephesians 1:15). It was not that the apostle had never been to Ephesus (or that someone else actually wrote this letter); Paul had simply set in motion a communication network by which the continuing growth in numbers, in faith, and in love could be shared with him. Absolute honesty with God, coupled with a bond of teamwork, attached to a great scriptural word - sensible - provide guidelines for what is acceptable or unacceptable communication.

- **Gossip** - Gossip can be best defined as idle or pointless talk about people. Gossip is counter-productive in that talking about people or brethren without some positive scriptural focus is not to further the faith, or "from faith," and is therefore sin (Romans 14:23).
- **Malicious gossip** - Malicious gossip is not just idle chatter; it is chatter with an attempt to hurt or destroy. Malicious gossip is clearly forbidden.
- **Edifying communication** - Those who are "grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts" (Jude 16), continually seek to put others down in a twisted attempt to lift themselves up. The Father of all, however, desires that the brethren "build" themselves up in "the most holy faith" (Jude 20). Edifying conversation does not mean that problems cannot be discussed; it simply means that problems are discussed in an atmosphere where the desire is to find a scriptural solution for those difficulties, and with people who have the opportunity to be a part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

Church leadership, in following the apostolic example, builds communication networks in each local congregation and in what the apostle Peter called "the brotherhood" (I Peter 2:17). The purpose of this network is not only to keep track of the doctrines being taught or to be aware of problems or potential problems, but also to note and credit the praiseworthy accomplishments among the brethren. Paul focused on the praiseworthy in this letter to the Ephesian Christians, stating for all eternity that he had heard of the faith in the Lord and the love for all the saints which existed among them. Let us be excited to spread truly good news along the communication networks.

Excitement From Ephesians

The Father of Glory

There are a number of words which recur in the scriptures, arresting the attention of men, and calling them to listen to the instruction of the heavenly Father. Love, sin, forgiveness, grace, faith, and peace are some which come to mind. All these are key words, and the Lord went to great pain (note the double meaning!) to define each of them. Rather than giving us a dictionary definition of love, for example, He demonstrated His love by the substitutionary death of His Son on the cross. Glory likewise is one of those key recurring words, and the Lord demonstrated its meaning rather than being content to leave us with a mere Greek concept of doxa and its derivatives.

Paul prayed "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 eyes of your heart being enlightened..." (Ephesians 1:17,18). The "you" of whom this prayer was concerned were all the brethren in Ephesus. Not all the brethren - in fact, very few - would receive a spiritual gift of having an apostle's or a prophet's type of revelation. The "spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him" is the kind which is apprehended by any spiritually-minded individual who will learn from the Father of glory. The picture was painted for the apostles and New Testament prophets by inspiration; Christians today come to this spirit of wisdom and revelation by apprehending "the knowledge of Him" through what is written. God sent His Son to define glory.

- **Jesus left glory** - In order for the Lord Jesus to share all the difficulties of overcoming the flesh, "He had to be made like His brethren in all things" (Hebrews 2:17). As evidenced in His prayer recorded in John 17, He had glory before the world was, but in the incarnation was "made for a little while lower than the angels" (Hebrews 2:9).
- **Proof of the crucifixion and resurrection** - Properly understood, the resurrection of the Christ is the most difficult Biblical event to believe. The Lord, in His wisdom, was dependent upon the eye-witness testimony of men who were intimately known to Him, and who would therefore be able to verify that He was indeed crucified, and without shadow of doubt raised from the dead. "This Jesus God raised up again," stated Peter on Pentecost, "to which we are all witnesses" (Acts 2:32).
- **In ascending, Jesus defined glory** - These same witnesses, "who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead" (Acts 10:41), are also the ones to whom Jesus revealed Himself in glory. "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus," averred Peter to the Sanhedrin, "whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things..." (Acts 5:30-32). It is important to remember that the apostles were selected from many others who had witnessed the significant events of Jesus' life on earth, including His bodily resurrection, but they were specifically called to be witnesses, by revelation, of His concurrent glorification and coronation. This is what the apostle John meant when he noted that "we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father" (John 1:14). Through these specific actions, Jesus defined glory for us.

"The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory" is understood by us as we come to have "a spirit of wisdom and of revelation." The Bible, in particular the New Testament writings, gives us the inspired "knowledge of Him" through the successive revelation of Jesus the Christ.

Excitement From Ephesians

Enlightened Eyes

What sort of written prayers will make it to the pages of God's eternal word? Will it be prayers for the cardiac condition of Timothy's dear grandmother Lois, or will it be prayer requests for God to heal Paul's sick colleague Epaphroditus of Philippi? No! no! no! Sooner or later Lois is going to be gathered to her people any way, and sooner or later the carcass of Epaphroditus is going to be laid to rest. The written prayers of God's great apostle, which are going to enter the pages of the eternal writ are going to be the ones which have eternal significance. So what does Paul pray for? What is really, really important?

- **A spirit of wisdom and revelation** - Paul desired, and the Father concurred, that the brethren might have "a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Ephesians 1:17). This spirit, in which all the brethren are to participate, sees "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (II Corinthians 4:6). As the individual Christian beholds in the mirror of God's word the glory of the Lord, he is "being transformed into the same image" (II Corinthians 3:18). As this transformation process works, the Christian sees, as he continues to grow in grace and knowledge, the glory of Christ with increasing clarity; thus Paul's prayer for a spirit of revelation in the knowledge of God is answered. As the brother in Christ matures in his faith, he is able to understand more clearly the will of the heavenly Father and how to carry it out; thus Paul's prayer for a spirit of wisdom is answered.
- **The eyes of the heart** - There are eyes which see the realm of the physical, and there are what Paul and the Holy Spirit called "eyes of the heart" which see the realm of the spiritual. "We look," said Paul in another place, "not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (II Corinthians 4:18). The writer of Hebrews added that we are "fixing our eyes on Jesus...who...has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). These are things, which can only be seen by spiritual eyes.
- **Enlightened** - There are spiritual eyes, which see, and spiritual eyes which are blind. All non-Christians are blind. Our Lord Himself said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). As long as the flesh is not removed in the spiritual circumcision of immersion into Christ, the veil lies over the eyes of the heart, and the "god of this world has blinded" the mind of the unbeliever so that he does "not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (II Corinthians 3:15; 4:4). The Charles Swindoll's and the John MacArthur's of this world are blind, and have no important eternal light to bring. It is also possible for those who once "saw" to go blind again, turning back to the world, forgetting their purification from their former sins. But the one who has been immersed into Christ, truly turning to the scriptural vision of the glorified Lord in the process, has arisen from the dead and Christ shines on him; he is "enlightened."

The earnest desire of the apostle, then, was that the "eyes of the heart" of the Ephesian brethren be truly "enlightened," having received the necessary spirit of wisdom and revelation of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord in the face of Christ. This is what we should pray for, for ourselves, and for all the brethren, that the knowledge of the glory of the Lord indeed fill all the earth.

Excitement From Ephesians

What To See!

Since we live, comparatively speaking, near Yellowstone Park, it is not uncommon for us to take visitors there to see the sights. Having a personal interest in the geysers and other geological phenomena in Yellowstone, I can provide an interesting and efficient tour, knowing the important points of interest, and when best to see them. Someone who has but a vague knowledge of the Park, not comprehending its vastness or knowing how to plan for its special features and problems, is not a reliable guide, and likely to have guests staring off Fisherman's Bridge in the bright daylight, and trying to imagine the awesomeness of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone long after the sun has set.

When it comes to Biblical truths, the apostle Paul is a reliable guide. "Am I not free?" wrote he. "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (I Corinthians 9:1). When the apostle interceded for the congregation in Ephesus, his prayers exhibit His desire for all the brethren to comprehend the spiritual verities that were obvious to this one who had seen the Lord in glory. "I pray," he petitioned, "that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know that is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe" (Ephesians 1:18,19). Paul prayed for the Ephesian brethren, and through them us also, to be able to see three great sights on our journey through Heavenly Park, the Kingdom of God:

- **The hope of His calling** - The son of God has been called out of this world to a higher, heavenly calling. Having burned the bridges with earth, being crucified to the world in the waters of immersion, the Christian is an alien and a stranger on this planet. In the process he essentially foregoes earthly hopes and dreams, fixing his attention on his one security, his resurrection from the dead. This is no uncertain hope; this is an absolutely certain event for which the believer, if he has his spiritual eyes opened, waits for in eager anticipation.
- **The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints** - The word riches conjures up an image of Scrooge McDuck diving into his piles of gold coins. And when an inheritance of such earthly riches is in the offing, even the most distant of relatives show up in hopes of a share. The Christian who has received a spirit of revelation in the knowledge of Christ will not be looking for an announcement of the distribution of mere mammon, but will anticipate the great spiritual inheritance. Paul notes that the inheritance is Christ's; and Christ falls heir to the most valuable of all spiritual riches - the saints! Spiritual eyes will comprehend this glory.
- **Surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe** - All wars, at the core, are power vs. power. In the war of Satan vs. Christ, the devil's greatest tool was fear of death. But our resurrected Lord Jesus, having "the keys of death and Hades," rendered powerless him who had the power of death" (Hebrews 2:14). This power of Christ was not just barely enough to defeat the destroyer, but it was of "surpassing greatness."

These three great spiritual vistas can only be seen by those whose eyes are truly enlightened. No material camera ever caught a glimpse of Christ destroying the power of death in His resurrection. No earthly video will ever record Christ receiving His inheritance in the saints. And no person but those who have seen the kingdom of God by virtue of having been born of water and Spirit will ever see hope of their calling.

Excitement From Ephesians

All Things In Subjection

Who is this glorious Christ? The world does not know Him, for He ever lives in the realm, which cannot be seen by denizens of earth. So how does He have authority? The declaration from on High reads that He has been seated at the right hand of power in the heavenly places, "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" (Ephesians 1:21). Does the world recognize this authority? No, but its refusal to acknowledge the action of God the Father as "He put all things in subjection" under Jesus' feet (Ephesians 1:22) in no way alters or impacts this heavenly coronation. And acknowledge the Kingship of Jesus they shall, for every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall "confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:11).

Although the world is resistant to heaven's having dominion over the earth, it is not so in the church. The body of Christ co-named the "reign of heaven," rejoices in the triumphant announcement from scripture: "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22,23).

- **In subjection** - The condition of the world can be summed up in one word: rebellion. Satan and his angels rebelled in heaven, and the contagion infected and spread through all mankind. Not only did Jesus conquer sin and death through His crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, but He brought all things back in subjection under His feet. The raging fire of rebellion has been contained; all that remains is for the hot pockets of resistance to be stamped out, and the garbage dumped into the eternal trash heap.
- **Under His feet** - Not only are all things in subjection, but the subjugation is total and without contest; the subjection is "under His feet."
- **Head over all things to the church** - While the world seethes and hisses in its rebellion, in the church there is, by contrast, a respectful and obedient spirit. Christ needs someone to go, and the volunteers joyfully step forward. The King needs someone to declare His pronouncements, knowing that as soon as the declamation ceases ringing from the walls, the herald will be jailed; and multitudes of the brethren eagerly press for the spot. The Lord of lords requires someone to finance the next phase of gospel outreach, and hordes of the faithful crowd to the front for the opportunity of liquidating their houses and properties for this great cause. The Apostle and High Priest of the confession needs a martyr for a public spectacle, someone to die preaching sound, scriptural doctrine; and the sons of God throng the rails, eagerly hoping to be picked for this great honor. The result of this spirit permeating each local congregation is that every task has more than enough volunteers, and every function of the church, great or small, is executed with diligence and good cheer.
- **The church as the body of Christ** - What a great picture! The church not only functions with the unity of a body in general, but it functions with the unity, joy, intensity of the special body of Christ.

All things are in subjection under the feet of the risen Jesus. The world, still in rebellion, is step-by-step being acquainted to this unavoidable truth. But in the church itself, each member of the body, in the likeness of the character of Christ Himself, joyfully submits to His Headship, and exhibits this surrender in cheerfully carrying out appointed duties.

Excitement From Ephesians

The Church, the Church, the Church

The general topic of people's conversation is what is important or exciting to them. The latest experience, the exciting story, the intense situation, the lost love, and problems with the kids often dominate the discussion. While men may talk about buying, selling, building, planting, marrying, or giving in marriage, the Lord talks about what is important to Him, and what is important to Him is the church!

- **The church in the Old Testament** - The church was secretly anticipated as the bride of the Lord in Genesis 2. She was contemplated in the bruising of the Serpent-Smasher's heel in Genesis 3, and settled as the recipient of the blessing of Abraham in Genesis 12. She was foreshadowed by the tabernacle of Moses and the temple of Solomon, and typified by the congregation of Israel in the wilderness. She was prophesied as a resurrected army, marching victoriously in the sight of a stationary sun and moon under the command of her Joshua. She was looked to as an experience of great spiritual harvesting, a time of bringing in the sheaves, and pictured as a great family reunion, wherein all her scattered sons and daughters would be gathered from the nations. And, in the words of the sweet psalmist of Israel, she was breathlessly awaited as the queen in the gold of Ophir, her true beauty being that she was all glorious within.
- **The church in the gospel accounts** - The church was the constant center of the parables of the Lord Jesus, during the days of His earthly sojourn. As the crowds would gather, He would introduce His topic with words like this: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to...". The church, the kingdom referred to by Jesus, was pictured as the means by which the souls of men would be harvested, the leaven of God which would work its way through the whole earth, the sheepfold of the Good Shepherd, and the reason why the King gave a wedding feast for His Son. The church was to be the very thing which Jesus' Himself would build, upon the truth of the great confession that by virtue of His resurrection He was the Christ the Son of the living God; and the church would be such that if anyone was cast out of it, he would be as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.
- **The church in the epistles** - The great truths of the church are brought out in the plain teaching of the apostles in the record of the book of Acts and the letter to the congregations of the first century. Here the foreshadows of the Old Testament writings are brought to light; here, the parables and teachings of the Christ are pulled into clear focus. The church is the bride of Christ, the temple of God, the family of believers, the saved from sin, the congregation of spiritual Israel, and the body of Christ. The Father indeed gave Christ "as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22,23). Not only is the church to function as a unit under the headship of Christ, but it is the very fulness of God, the complete filling of Him who fills all in all! What bigger words could possibly be used to describe the church.

Because the church consists of people, and because in the church brethren some times do not yet have the requisite spirituality to carry out the desire of the Lord, person difficulties often obscure the grand truth and great purpose of God, carried out through and only through the church. But never forget: she is the constant topic of the great God's conversation, and the co-center of attention in the greatest romance novel ever written. Duty, honor, eternity; the church, the church, the church!

Excitement From Ephesians

DEAD!

The skeptic or brazen unbeliever often taunts the faithful with these words: "If God is so good, why does He allow disease and death?" The answer is that God uses death as a last ditch effort to reach this same skeptic. While birth comes with joy and hope, death comes to the world with a sense of shock and dismay. The already rotting corpse is there to make all of us recognize that sin has its effects, that sin masquerades as fun and pleasurable but has as its final result loss, separation, and darkness.

- **You were dead** - In his letter to the Ephesian brethren, the good apostle Paul reminds the saints of their dreadful condition before they were in Christ: "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). Dead! Personally dead; not the news that someone else is dead! The judgment of God is not arbitrarily and without warning imposed unfairly upon the lost soul; the destroyed spiritual condition is mercifully announced so that the alienated sinner might act constructively concerning his personal situation. And the Christian is continually reminded of the dire straits of his condition without Christ, that he might continually give glory to the worthy Lamb slain in his stead.
- **Your trespasses and sins** - What caused this alienation from God? What caused this darkened and tomb-like existence on the surface of earth? Perhaps the sin of your parents? or grandparents? Or was it the sin of Adam passed as a hot torch from generation to generation of the sons of men? No, that is not where the responsibility for sin lies. "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world" (Ephesians 2:1,2). No parents, grandparents, or even Adam are to blame. You! You walked.
- **According to the prince of the power of the air** - Out in the spiritual realm the prince of darkness, the outcast angel, Satan the adversary of God, stalks the sons of men. With grubby and rough spiritual fingers he paws and probes the carcass of each victim until he finds a weakness of the flesh. Having found the soft spot, he strikes with the stiletto of temptation, and that which was formed to be in the image of God is now plunged into ruin and rebellion, and conscripted as a slave-soldier in the armies of darkness. The individual, now dead in his sins, from this point on walks "according to the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2).
- **The spirit of disobedience** - The sinner is now dead to God. Deceived he might have been, as was Eve in the garden, or undeceived as was Adam, the solemn truth remains that he has joined the ranks of a rebellious army functioning under the whip hand of the prince of darkness himself. And the distinguishing mark of this cadre is that each marches in the uniform of disobedience to God. A darkened cloud of guilt hangs over these troops, the pall of distrust for even one another is seen at each location, and a brooding sense of simmering revolt pervades the entire camp, "the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2). No wonder the world is filled with deception, lying, hate, and self-seeking passion.

Each person on earth, when old enough to be charged with responsibility for his own actions, is appealed to by Satan through each's fleshly weaknesses, and sins against God and trespasses on forbidden property. The Christian is reminded that he once was in that lost and deadened spiritual state, that once he was in slavery to the rebellious schemes of Satan against God, and that he walked according to the same spirit of disobedience now working in a perverted world. Who would even possibly glory in these despicable associations? Or who could possibly want to go back to the giant sarcophagus of the dead?

Excitement From Ephesians

Self-indulgent Children

Snot-nosed, disrespectful, self-seeking brats are a stench in the nostrils of God. Hateful, hating one another, they are whoremongers, looters, and pranksters whose feet are swift to shed blood, and who have the poison of asps under their lips (Romans 3:13,16). Rebellious and ungrateful children, they have chosen to walk in darkness rather than in light, and have preferred profanity to sanctification, and vulgarity to holiness. Such are the sons of man in their unredeemed state. As Paul reminded Titus: "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another" (Titus 3:3).

- **Our former lives** - Paul often emphasized the condition of the brethren before they were in Christ. Once we were foolish, he noted. "You were dead," he said, and "you formerly walked according to the course of the world" (Ephesians 2:1,2). Christians need to be brought to remembrance of their condition apart from Christ; without that continued recognition there is no proper appreciation for the mercy of God extended through the sacrifice and gospel of Christ.
- **The lusts of our flesh** - "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh" (Ephesians 2:3). There are the big three, said Paul's co-laborer John, "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life" (I John 2:16). The flesh often behaves like a spoiled child, particularly in a self-indulgent society like America. Whatever it wants, it demands it now; and whatever it desires, it throws a temper tantrum until it gets its own way. Fleshliness, or carnality, can obviously take almost an infinite number of forms. Every weird and kinky sexual perversion is a form of carnality, as well as laziness, lust for power, lack of financial self-control, and bad attitudes. "For since there is jealousy and strife among you," illustrated Paul, "are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men (I Corinthians 3:3).
- **The desires of the flesh and the mind** - Not all forms of fleshly perversion are necessarily carried out in action, although the word of God indicates that a fleshly thought pattern will result eventually in overt action. "We too all formerly lived in the lusts of the flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest" (Ephesians 2:3). The non-Christian is a natural, or earthy, man. His imagination can carry over into all kinds of depraved depths, as exhibited in television and movie productions, and video and computer games. But the Christian does not allow himself to play these mind games; he takes "every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (II Corinthians 10:5).
- **Children of wrath** - The judgment of God upon the unredeemed is clearly stated by the inspired apostle: they are "children of wrath." Unless a person is truly repentant, truly willing to surrender to the Lordship of Jesus, is immersed into Christ, and continuing to walk in the footsteps of Christ, he is a child of God's wrath to be executed at Christ's second coming. No exceptions; the judgment will be brought forth on him, "even as the rest."

The darkness of man is not readily apparent to him. The gospel of light, stabbing through the fog of man's confusion, reveals how each person made the choice to indulge the flesh, and become separated from God by his own sins and trespasses. And the Christian is to be mindful of his former state of darkness, that he might be truly grateful to the Savior who rescued him, and might desire to be a living bridge to those trapped in the inky blackness of their own fleshly desires.

Excitement From Ephesians

Our Awesome God

Man sank low, then he sank lower. The spirit of the prince of the power of the air worked and worked on the sons of man, and they became children of wrath, wrath from the Almighty God. And the greatness of our loving God is demonstrated in His rescue of sunken man. "But God," stated the former persecutor of the church, and violent blasphemer, "being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:4-6). Only by first recognizing the hideousness of his sins can man begin to appreciate the goodness of the great God.

- **Rich in mercy** - So how much mercy does man require? Obviously, much. The way the man who described himself as "foremost" among sinners expressed it: "God, being rich in mercy... made us alive together with Christ..." And the rich God expended those riches in getting His mercy to the sons of wrath.
- **Because of His great love** - Throughout the letter to the Ephesian brethren, the greatness of the forgiveness of God through the sacrifice of Christ is hammered home. "We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us (Ephesians 1:7,8), is one of the examples. Again the motivations for the riches of the mercies of God being tendered to His children of faith is a great and abundant love of God.
- **Even when we were dead in our transgressions** - The Holy Spirit continually brings to the fore the dreadful deadness of unregenerated man. As previously mentioned, the grace, mercy, and love of God are communicated against a backdrop of man's abased condition.
- **He made us alive in Christ** - This awesome and miracle performing God accomplishes His most astonishing feats in the realm of the unseen. As powerful and compassionate a miracle as it was for Jesus to raise from the dead the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), it was nothing in comparison to what is done in the heavenly realms. Even when we were dead in our transgressions, He "made us alive together with Christ." The son of the widow was merely raised to a continuing earthly existence; a son of God is raised to a heavenly existence now!
- **Seated with Christ in the heavens** - Not only is the Christian raised with Christ, he is "seated" with Christ on the throne. Each faithful child of God is a king as well as a priest under the new covenant, and is therefore one of the "royal priesthood."

Our God is indeed an awesome God. He reigns in heaven above, in the words of the songwriter, in wisdom, power, and love. This is exhibited in His actions toward those who believe and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ; because of His great love, He called on the resources of His riches to first forgive the alien sinner, the dead transgressor. Not content with merely to forgive, as He often would do under the Old Covenant, He raised the dead to a heavenly standing in Christ. And, in the exceeding greatness of His mercy. He seated each of the brethren on the throne with Christ in those heavenly places.

The question is: can the saint really believe the scripture and the awesomeness of this great God? Can he really believe that God has great love for him? Can he really believe that God is rich in mercy? Can he really believe that he no longer dwells on earth, but by faith dwells in the heavenly realms? Can he really believe that he has been raised with Christ and seated with Him? If the answer to those questions is basically, "No," then he will not live victoriously in Christ Jesus. If the answer to those questions is "Yes!" then he will be an overwhelming conqueror.

Excitement From Ephesians

The Ages To Come

This world is not man's final home, God has a much more glorious place than earth, wracked by the second law of thermodynamics, going slowly to destruction in a dog-eat-dog atmosphere. "In My Father's house are many dwelling places," said the Lord Jesus, nearing the end of His time in the flesh, "If it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). The place Jesus has gone to prepare for His children is a spiritual place, "not of this creation." The challenge for Jesus is to produce a spiritual people who truly desire to see the face of Christ and the glory of the Lord, who comprehend and value that which is not seen and eternal much above that which is seen and temporal. Not only is Jesus preparing a place for His people; He is preparing a people for His place. "And if I go and prepare a place for you," said He, "I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there may you be also" (John 14:3).

The mechanism God has for preparing His people is the church, appropriately called "the kingdom of heaven" or "the reign of heaven" in Matthew's account. Peter used "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:19) on the day of Pentecost. 30 AD, and on the day when the Gentiles first turned to the Lord; and the way of salvation has since been opened for all. The spiritual kingdom provides the opportunity for spiritual growth, as men shed their flesh by faith in the waters of immersion, and progressively lay aside the deeds of the flesh and take on the full character of Christ as sons of light. Some fall away in the process; some finish strong. And those who are faithful until death are those prepared for the ages to come.

- **Trials in the wilderness** - The congregation of Israel under the leadership of Moses serves as a great foreshadow of the church, and the trials, which prepare the sons of God for glory. They were "immersed into Moses," are "spiritual food," and drank "spiritual drink" (I Corinthians 10:2-4). Some were idolaters, some were immoral, some "tried" the Lord, and some grumbled. "With most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness" (I Corinthians 10:5). And the inspired record reads: "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (I Corinthians 10:11). The end of the decision-making ages has come upon the Christian; may he be faithful during his trials "in the wilderness."
- **A taste of the good things to come** - Not only are there times of testing for the brethren, but there are the good spiritual experiences, which are sneak previews of what is to come. Exhorting the brethren to be faithful, the author of Hebrews writes "of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come" (Hebrews 6:4,5). The brother in the Lord has a choice; he can taste of men, find them bitter, and fall away; or he can taste the Lord, find Him good, earnestly desire full fellowship with Him, and "finish the course."
- **Mercy now for great grace later** - It is only by the grace of God that the sons of men have any good gifts. "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). The Christian has been "born from above," distinguishing him from mere men, and by the mercy of God, "even when we were dead in our transgressions, He made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:5-7).

Jesus has put together one awesome spiritual place, and nearly has His people prepared for it through their participation in the church. He can hardly wait for His next big show for His special kids, "the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us." Are you ready?

Excitement From Ephesians

By Grace Are You Saved

Grace generally has to do with God giving man what he does not deserve. It is by the grace of God that there is food in the house, a blue sky overhead, and love of a man for his family. By God's grace a Christian travels safely, and has finances available to help someone in need. By the grace or favor of God, Paul was granted an apostleship, and ability to labor in the word. He scatters His favors abroad, and He gives to the poor (II Corinthians 9:9).

But the grace of God is greatly exhibited in the offering of forgiveness to men through the sacrifice of Jesus the Christ, and thereby granting them the privilege of fellowship with Him and access to the favors of heaven.

- **By grace you have been saved** - "We were dead in our transgressions," wrote Paul (Ephesians 2:5). But the merciful God saved us from our sins, and thus delivered us from the deserved punishment of eternity in the lake of fire, which is the second death. "By grace you have been saved," stated the apostle (Ephesians 2:5). "For by grace you have been saved through faith," he again emphasized (Ephesians 2:8). Man in no sense deserves forgiveness of his sins, yet the wonderful God is willing to provide this great gift to those willing to receive it on His terms.
- **Saving grace is a gift** - Grace is a gift from God; faith is the product of the individual's effort in listening to the word of God, sorting through its claims, and then assenting to its truths. Paul had earlier mentioned this to the Ephesian hearers: "You also," he reminded them, "after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation - having also believed..." (Ephesians 1:13). When the apostle therefore stated, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9), the gift of God referred to is grace. It is abundantly clear through-out the context of this section that the grace of God, in cleansing a man of his transgression, making him alive with Christ and seating him with Christ in the heavenlies, is far beyond the reach of what any man could earn, "not as a result of works, that no one should boast."
- **Biblical faith includes immersion** - There are those who play games with Ephesians 2:8,9 to try to justify an "accept Jesus into your heart" doctrine. Remember this: correct reasoning from a false premise guarantees a false conclusion. The fake premise in this false doctrine is introduced in this fashion: "Baptism is something you do; therefore baptism is a work." And the conclusion reasoned from this false syllogism is this: "Since we are saved by grace and not by works, we must be saved before we are baptized." The real question is: "Does God define immersion as faith, or as works?" The same apostle Paul answers for us in his letter to the Galatians: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were immersed into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:26,27). It is inextricably clear that a sinner becomes a son of God by faith in immersion into Christ. The faith that saves through grace includes immersion in Jesus' name for the remission of sins, and grants the gift of the indwelling Spirit.
- **Not of works** -When the scripture disconnects works from salvation and justification, it speaks of the works of the law. The Jew tended to rely upon his keeping the ceremonies of the Law of Moses to earn his way to heaven; his defense to God was "I did, rather than I believed." Many today try to be justified in parallel fashion. On the other hand, "I did precisely what You said because I believed" is that which demonstrates real faith in God, and without which God will not justify the sinner.

The true believer in Christ recognizes that he is not worthy of the gift of salvation, which comes as a result of God's grace. Neither is he going to play word games with God's scripture; where God has spoken, he joyfully obeys.

Excitement From Ephesians

We Are His Workmanship

What great and magnificent projects would God still be working on? The earth was formed on the first day of creation, destroyed in the Flood, and in a sense reformed out of the flood waters. The sun, moon, and stars have remained fixed in their orbits since the fourth day of creation. And that which resulted in all plants and animals, "every seed according to its kind," was essentially finished at the close of the sixth day. As the writer of Hebrews put it, "His works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Hebrews 4:3). But God is still working everyday, even on the Sabbath, on His highest creation. And what is His work, that would still so occupy His effort and affection? "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). There you have it; the creation of Christians is God's ongoing work.

- **The new creation** - Each person, when conceived, consists of spirit, soul, and a developing body. The spirit, which God forms within the human rather than pre-creating it (Zechariah 12:1), is in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). But the corrosive atmosphere of earth's spiritual environment soon corrupts the individual, and he is lost from God's fellowship. The Almighty, not to be stymied even in this most impossible of circumstances, performs an entirely new creative act in the waters of immersion. The spiritually blackened, bent, and twisted body of sin is destroyed in the water, and a new creature is formed out of the water. As the worthy authority Paul put it, those who are "immersed into Christ" have the "body of sin done away with," and they are now "dead to sin, and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:3-11). Recognizing this as the only mechanism which places the believer into Christ, Paul also noted that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature" (II Corinthians 5:17). We are "created in Christ Jesus."
- **His workmanship** - This new creature, brought into existence by the exertion of the same power wielded in raising Jesus from the dead and seating Him on the heavenly throne, is unequivocally the workmanship of a loving and powerful heavenly Father. The spiritually-minded individual, who even begins to contemplate the richness and awesomeness of what God accomplishes in the water, recognizes that his obedience to the gospel in submitting to immersion, in no way personally accomplished any measurable work; the new creation is gratefully acknowledged as God's work.
- **Good works** - The devil has works, as the aged John noted: "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (I John 3:8). But Satan is not the Creator; all he can do is take those "very good" things, which God brought into existence from the first, and twist or pervert them. Thus the everlasting Father has created good works, "which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."
- **Created in Christ for good works** - God's delivering man from sin and His creation of a new creature through the gospel were so that this new man could do good works. The Christian was not brought into existence by God's awesome power to sit around and do nothing; like a guided missile he is programmed to lift into action and strike for his preordained target - good works.

As His workmanship, created for good works, the child of faith is clearly not his own. He is a grateful slave to the great King who brought him out of darkness into light, and consequently sets about doing those good works which God has re-created him to do, whether anyone else on earth notices or not.

Excitement From Ephesians

The Lostness of the World

Those who make a claim to being followers of Christ sometimes delude themselves about the condition of the lost. We often hear statements such as, "We don't know how God will judge," or "The only assurance we can confidently give is for a person to repent and be immersed in the name of Jesus, but we can't say what God will do about those who are not immersed." Such statements are delicately phrased attempts by weasel-workers to avoid the thrust the scripture gives concerning the condition of the lost. Loving the approval of men rather than the praise of God, these teachers and preachers blunt the piercing power of the sword of the Spirit and subtly deny the necessity of the sacrifice of Christ.

The apostle Paul discussed, in his letter to the Ephesians, the deadness of an individual in his sins and transgressions and the great grace of God in bringing him to life in Christ. Speaking in general terms at first, he then brings the Gentiles into focus:

- **The Jewish look at the Gentile** - From the springboard of the creative act of God in immersion, where God created "whoever will" in Christ Jesus for good works, the apostle Paul notes: "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." (Ephesians 2:11). The context indicates that the Jew used the term "Uncircumcision" as an expression of derision. The Gentiles as a whole had drifted into pagan idolatry and rampant immorality, and the Jew had a great excuse to look down his nose and view the Gentile with contempt.
- **The Biblical look at the Jew** - While the Jew was busy glorying in the flesh, looking down on the Gentile, he was not doing so well spiritually. The Holy Spirit through Paul calls the Jews "the so-called 'Circumcision'". In addition, the Spirit denigrates the physical operation of circumcision in contrast to the great spiritual birth and spiritual circumcision, which were accomplished when the believer was raised with Christ in his immersion. While the Jew looked with contempt on the Gentile, he was in reality personally no better off.
- **The lost world** - Hear, then, the condition of the Gentiles as Paul called them to remembrance of their former state: "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" (Ephesians 2:12). Listen to the inspired analysis of the Gentiles' lostness: "Separate from Christ," "excluded," "strangers," "having no hope," and "without God. And the Jew who rejected the Messiah was under the same condemnation.

There are always those who work on destroying the absoluteness of God's word, and sometimes they are in positions of great influence. When they tell a person who is interested in Christianity, or some struggling saint, that "we don't know how God is going to judge" simply to soothe the emotions of the prospect and get him through a potential objection to completing "the sale," they have lied. God has told us the condition of those outside of Christ: "Separate," "excluded," "strangers," "having no hope," and "without God." Anyone who says there is a possibility that some of the lost will "still make it to heaven" is a gutless coward who serves his belly rather than God, and is not to be trusted to handle the oracles of God accurately.

Excitement From Ephesians

In Christ Jesus

How important is the sacrifice of Christ? Most who make a claim to being followers of Christ would, at first blush, say that the death of Christ on the cross is all-important in the salvaging of a fallen member of the human race. But when pressed about whether everyone who is not properly immersed into Christ will go to hell, our supposed follower of the Lord starts squirming and weaseling. While the individual pays lip service to the absolute authority of the word of God, his heart really is not in it. The word of God is clear and unequivocal on this issue; Gentiles are "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" (Ephesians 2:12). If they have "no hope," then don't give them a false one!

- **The blood and forgiveness** - Normally no one would try to use blood to clean anything; blood is one of the toughest stains to get out of clothing, much less being useful for cleansing. So the Almighty, in His grand, painstaking, and patient way established animal sacrifices so that first Israel according to the flesh, then all mankind, could make the connection between the shedding of blood and forgiveness, As the writer of Hebrews concluded, "And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22).
- **The sacrifice of Christ** - When the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, prepared as the Lamb of God, the perfect sacrifice. The writer of Hebrews thus quoted from the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament): "Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body You have prepared for Me" (Hebrews 10:5). On the day of Passover, 30 AD, the Son of God expired in a spectacle whose effects reverberated throughout the universe, and soldiers spilt His blood for all mankind. As was written by the prophet, "He was pierced through for our transgressions" (Isaiah 53:5).
- **His blood cleansed the heavenly places** - Christ's ministry was not completed at His death on the cross; in fact, it really had only just begun. Following His resurrection, Christ ascended to glory, and, as High Priest of the order of Melchizedek, began His intercession in behalf of the saints. But, before He could begin His intercessory ministry, He had to cleanse heaven with His blood. The copies of the heavenly things - the Old Testament tabernacle, the people, and all the implements for sacrificial use - were cleansed with the physical blood of physical sacrifices, "but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these" (Hebrews 9:23). The "better sacrifices" were those offerings connected with the death of Christ and His spiritual blood sprinkled to cleanse heaven itself.
- **Jesus' blood first cleanses an individual when he is immersed into Christ** - "Do you not know," Paul reminded the brethren in Rome, "that all of us who have been immersed into Christ Jesus have been immersed into His death?" (Romans 6:3). It was in Christ's death that His blood was shed.
- **Brought near by the blood** - The gospel is open to all, Jew and Gentile alike. Having described the lost condition of the Gentiles prior to their immersion into Christ, the apostle then states their glorious present condition: "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13). What a great thing, for those who once were "excluded" to be brought into the very presence of God by the precious blood of Christ.

Again, notice that the blood of Christ is only applicable to those who are in Christ. Those who are outside Christ are still strangers, without hope, and without God. But, praise God, even the most distant imaginable, if properly repentant and immersed so that they are in Christ, are brought near by the cleansing power of Jesus' blood.

Excitement From Ephesians

The Peacemaker

The history of the human race establishes that it consists of a hateful bunch. It didn't take much of a problem to set Cain off so that he went and killed Abel, and the record of the family hasn't improved any since that time. Generally speaking, when man in the flesh can take an opportunity for hate, he takes it.

So as God allowed the Jew-Gentile split to arise, hate between the two naturally developed. In order to preserve the germ of faith embodied in Israel, God had to set up all kinds of restrictions to keep them a separate people. Dietary regulations, definition of "clean and unclean" and restrictions on the unclean, sacrifices, and regulatory ordinances helped to separate Israel in the flesh from the encroachments of paganism and shameful idolatry. Following the Babylonian captivity from 536 BC, under the definitive leadership of Ezra the scribe, the remnant of Judah learned the lessons associated with intermarriage with the heathen, and became a distinct and segregated people. Thus the Jews looked down on, and often harbored hatred of, the Gentiles; whereas the Gentiles were often suspicious of their peculiar neighbors, and this suspicion sometimes welled up in expressions of hate and violence in the manner typical of a vile and bloody race.

Into this atmosphere stepped our Lord Jesus, whose goal was to reconcile all men to Himself. God's plan was carefully laid out in seed form centuries earlier, long before Israel existed as a nation, in promises made to Abraham. "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed," he was told (Genesis 12:3). Again, the promise was reiterated in these words, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 22:18). Because the split between the Jew and the Gentile had developed, the challenge of the Lord was first to reconcile the men to Himself, and then through Himself to reconcile the men to one another.

- **He is our peace** -The human race is hateful because it is not at peace with God. Sin is what separates and destroys relationships, first between a man and his God, and thence between man and man. Of the Gentiles who had become Christians, Paul wrote: "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13). The Gentile, alienated and excluded, was brought near to God because of the horrific price paid for his redemption, the blood of Jesus. "He Himself is our peace" (Ephesians 2:14). The seething cauldron of God's wrath was calmed by the sprinkling of Jesus' blood, and Jesus Himself stands in the center of the cauldron as the emissary of peace between the man and his God.
- **Into one body** - With peace between the man and God accomplished, step two of mission impossible is about to be effected, the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile to each other. "For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace" (Ephesians 2:14,15). Christ abolished that which promoted the distinction between the Jew and the Gentile, the Law. By having both Jew and Gentile immersed into Christ, whatever fleshly distinctions which previously existed were eliminated when the flesh of each was crucified in the water. Thus "in Himself" the two were now one new man; the barrier of the dividing wall was torn down when the two were immersed into just one body. And one body, because it is only one unit, is at peace with itself.

The Peacemaker has come. By His own blood He purchased calming peace between man and God. Then, by abolishing in His flesh the hate created between Jew and Gentile, the Law being nailed to the cross with His body, Jew and Gentile were reconciled to one another in Christ. And if Jew and Gentile can be reconciled to one another, then peace can certainly be established between any two other individuals if they truly are in Christ.

Excitement From Ephesians

The Cross and the Law

The first century church was often confused about the relationship of the Law of Moses to the Christian. The Jewish Christians never did seem to understand until after the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD. The confusion arose because the law had some positive aspects, and if the individual did not comprehend the bigger picture, then he tended to fall back on these first principles embodied in the Law.

Firstly, the Law truly originated with God. He thundered the commandments from Sinai, wrote the laws on stone, instituted moral and sacrificial ordinances, and established memorials. Secondly, the laws were good. The morality enjoined by the commandments and the love for God and for fellow man brought forth in the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) were all wonderful principles to be incorporated into the life of each man of Israel. Thirdly, the traditions, which arose in connection with the Law, such as meeting in the synagogues for weekly reading of the Law and the Prophets, helped keep the Jewish people together.

But there were some problems associated with the Law, which could only be rectified through the gospel of Christ, and these needed to be understood by the brethren of Jewish background.

- **The Law could not redeem fallen man** - Law, by definition, only acts when it is broken. One of the major themes of the Galatian epistle is that, if a man were to keep the Law, he would live, but if he broke the Law, he came under a curse. "Christ redeemed us," then wrote the apostle Paul, "from the curse of the Law" (Galatians 3:13).
- **The Law could not produce a people who could keep it** - The Law had no mechanism for changing the heart of man. The Law could expose the wickedness and deceitfulness of man's heart, but the Law could only touch the external part of man and could not alter the inner man. The Law was "weak" through the flesh, so through Christ the Father implemented the means by which the flesh could be buried with Christ and a new creation brought forth from the waters, "in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:4).
- **The Law was not complete** - The Law laid down foreshadows to prepare for Christianity, for the redemption of the soul and the reception of the indwelling Spirit. The Old Testament sacrifices and other cleansing rituals did not produce forgiveness of sins nor clean consciences. The Old Testament tabernacle and its regulations simply laid the groundwork in a physical way to make the spiritual sacrifice of Christ and His spiritual priesthood comprehensible. The Law had only "a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things" (Hebrews 10:1).
- **The Law did not reconcile Jews and Gentile** - The Law imposed a set of physical regulations upon the Jew, which separated him from the Gentile. This separation was necessary because the Law did not produce a people strong enough to overpower paganism. Thus segregation occurred, and a natural "enmity" developed between the two.

The details of Christ on the cross abolished the Law for those who would come under the government of Christ. The Law is still in effect in one form or another, to bring lawless man to a recognition of his condition apart from Christ. But for all who have submitted to the obedience of the faith, Jesus "by abolishing in His flesh" the Law, took the barriers down. He redeemed man from the curse imposed through man's breaking the Law, becoming a curse for us by "hanging on the tree," and those who "were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." In the process the Jew was delivered from dietary and ceremonial restrictions, which would be an unnecessary yoke to the Gentile, and the Gentile was delivered from the pagan lifestyle which made him so odious to the God-fearing Jew. Therefore in Jesus provision was made that "He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity" (Ephesians 2:15,16)

Excitement From Ephesians

The Preaching of Jesus

Jesus is a preacher. Not only was Jesus a preacher during the years of His earthly sojourn, but Jesus is a preacher, in fact the most effective preaching of Jesus has been done since He ascended to glory, and He continues to preach from that exalted position. In a reference back to Moses as the prophet, deliverer, lawgiver, and judge of the time of Israel's covenant with God, Peter brings the scripture of Deuteronomy 18 forward and applies it to Christ: "Moses said, 'The Lord God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed in everything He says to you. And it shall be that every soul that does not heed that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people'" (Acts 3:22,23), The interesting thing about this Prophet is that He speaks to every soul!

- **Jesus speaks from glory** - Porcius Festus, Roman governor of Syria and Judea, shouted that Paul was crazy when he closed his inspired witness before the governor and King Agrippa with this significant point: "And so, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the prophets and Moses said was going to take place; that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He should be first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:22,23). Notice that the resurrection of Jesus came first, then came His proclamation. Note further that the proclamation came following His ascension to glory, because what He is proclaiming is light both to the Jew and to the Gentile.
- **Jesus speaks from heaven** - When Moses prophesied that God would raise up a prophet like himself, he was speaking of the raising of Jesus from the dead and seating Him in the position of authority in heaven itself. The writer of Hebrews concurs, of course. Paralleling Moses as the mediator of the Old Covenant and Christ as the mediator of the New, he writes, "See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those [of Moses' day] did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven" (Hebrews 12:25).
- **Jesus speaks through His inspired word** - The writer of Hebrews, in his opening gambit, states: "God, after He spoke long ago to the Fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son" (Hebrews 1:1,2). Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them "into all the truth" (John 16:13). This disclosure of "things to come" in the realm of the unseen was such that the apostles were witnesses, in the Spirit, of the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of power "as a Prince and a Savior" (Acts 5:31). Thus, through "His holy apostles and prophets" Jesus speaks "in the Spirit" (Ephesians 3:5), whose message has been now handed down to man in written form.
- **Jesus preaches when His word is faithfully delivered by faithful men** - It still pleases God that He "through the foolishness of the message preached" saves those who believe (I Corinthians 1:21). When the unadulterated, unperverted, untwisted word of God is delivered straight, then Jesus preaches to the lost.

"And He came," wrote the apostle Paul, speaking of the action of Jesus following the cross, "and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father" (Ephesians 2:17,18). The same Jesus, who was first to proclaim light both to the Jew and to the Gentile, also is the One who proclaims peace to the Jews (regarded as "near") and to the Gentiles (regarded as those "far away"). And since this exalted Jesus is the One who proclaims peace to the reconciled Jew and Gentile, who can separate them from their God or from one another?

Excitement From Ephesians

Equal Temple Stones

Jesus preached peace to the Jew, and He preaches peace to the Gentile. Since it is He, the risen Christ, who proffers peace and welcome both to the reconciled Jew and the reconciled Gentile, who is he who would try to deny equal access? "For through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father" (Ephesians 2:18).

The Gentile Christian was to feel in no way inferior to the brethren from the ranks of the circumcised. At the big showdown in Jerusalem, where the central issue was whether the Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses, Peter declared in the presence of all, regarding those of Jewish background, "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they [the Gentiles] also are" (Acts 15:11). The Gentile salvation through the graciousness of the Christ was so clear that it stood as a beacon to help the Jew understand that this same grace saved him. "So then," the apostle encourages the brethren from the Gentiles, "you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household" (Ephesians 2:19). What a blessing! Gentiles no longer have to stand longingly at some distant threshold; they are fellow citizens with all saints with all the rights pertaining there unto, and are now part of the family with the same comfortable coming-in and going-out as the rest. And this household is also the temple of the living God, as the apostle Peter stated, "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" (I Peter 2:5).

- **Foundation of apostles and prophets** - As the foundation of Solomon's temple was laid carefully by the skilled workmen, so the foundation of the spiritual temple was exquisitely laid, square and true, with the most finely chiseled living stones. This foundation was "the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20). A building is only as stable as the foundation. The apostles and prophets of the new covenant (such as Luke, Mark, James, and Jude) preached and taught the messages whose truths were eventually provided in written form by the Holy Spirit in what is called the New Testament. "How firm a foundation, / Ye saints of the Lord, / is laid for your faith / in His excellent word."
- **Jesus the cornerstone** - The most important stone, by far, in any building, is the cornerstone. "Behold," said the Lord through Isaiah, "I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious cornerstone, and he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed" (I Peter 2:6). Our Lord Jesus is that stone, and worthy of all honor.
- **A holy temple** - The Jews of the Old Testament profaned the sanctuary. They replaced the altar of the Lord with the facsimile of a pagan altar of Damascus and installed chariots of the sun in the courtyard. And even when the outward forms were correct, their heart was still far from the Lord. But because the new covenant is based on individual faith rather than physical inheritance, those under the new covenant will be holy or they will not be under the covenant. "The whole building," then, in Christ, "being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:21).
- **A home for God** - God, careful planner that He is, produced a blueprint of a permanent home for Himself in the pages of the Old Testament. Man, in one sense a physical being, builds a physical home for himself. But God by contrast, a spiritual Being, builds a spiritual home for Himself. Having laid the foundation, and fitting each spiritual stone properly into the spiritual temple. God has assured all Christians, whether from the ranks of the Jew or the rabble of the Gentile, whether from the rarified atmosphere of the free or the stench of the slave, that they are "being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22).

God is building an eternal habitation for Himself of the most valuable materials in the universe. From the Jew and the Gentile, from the slave and the free, He gathers those who will obey the gospel from a pure heart. And the living stones, from any background, are equally treasured; they are "built together" into the temple of God in the Spirit.

Excitement From Ephesians

Introducing the Mystery

There are those, who because of a pre-millennial view of the Lord's second coming, regard the church age as a temporary stop-gap until God can get His real plan finally on track again with Israel according to the flesh. The word of God, however, teaches just the opposite. Israel was a stop-gap God used to set the stage for the church, wherein He set in motion His previously stated plan to save those who would believe from the ranks of the Gentiles. "Why the Law then?" asked the apostle Paul in this context. "It was added," he explained, "because of transgressions...until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made" (Galatians 3:19). The Law, which established Israel as a covenant nation, was a stop-gap until Christ, the seed of Abraham, should come to establish the church, the new and living way. "The prophets," said Peter of those who spoke forth Israel, "prophesied of the grace that would come to you" (I Peter 1:10). "And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken," averred the apostle in public in his second proclamation, "from Samuel and his successors onward also announced these days" (Acts 3:24), "These days," the age of the church, was what the Law and the prophets pointed to.

One of the great characteristics of "these days" is that the barriers which separate men from men are torn asunder in Christ. Jew and Gentile are reconciled to God through the peace offering of the cross, and therefore reconciled to one another. The artificial distinctions men in the flesh make between slave and free, rich and poor are extinguished before the blaze of glory emanating from heaven's throne. Male and female, Barbarian, Greek, Jew, and Scythian are spiritual equals, "being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22).

- **For this reason** - God was working on His great plan, conceived before the foundation of the world, to draw all men to Himself in one body. "For this reason," Paul begins, as he goes on to expound on what he calls "the mystery." The mystery is going to have something to do with both Gentile and Jew being built together into "a dwelling of God in the Spirit."
- **Paul the prisoner** - One of the problems God has to deal with in the distribution of His word is the teaching of false teachers who pervert the word for personal gain. Thus true teachers and preachers have always been allowed to undergo slander, persecution, and affliction in order that it might be evident to truth seekers that the motive of these proclaimers is simply to deliver God's message. The aging Paul, a true blue Jew by heritage, was emphasizing that he was in jail because of his insistence that the Gentiles were equal participants in the mystery, as he noted, "I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles" (Ephesians 3:1).
- **A point of clarification** - Some of the Gentiles came into Christ in Ephesus following the time that Paul had spent in Ephesus, and thus might not know of his history. He quickly brings them up to date with the rhetorical comment "if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you" (Ephesians 3:2).
- **The great stewardship** - To be entrusted with the affairs of a rich and powerful man is to be entrusted with great responsibility; to be entrusted with the affairs of God is immeasurably greater. "By revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:3,4). The apostle Paul was regarded by the Lord as responsible enough to be trusted to deliver the mystery of Christ; this was the great stewardship that he, particularly as the apostle to the Gentiles, could carry out.

The mystery of Christ is obviously of extreme significance, considering the build up Paul gave it. So we as well as they need to pay close attention to the apostle's insight into the mystery, that we may assume our stewardship of the mystery, and carry on!

Excitement From Ephesians

The Mystery Revealed

What man can determine by reason and observation, God generally leaves to man. But because spiritual truths lay beyond the pale of what man may observe, they must be given to man by revelation.

Truth-seeking man is intelligently skeptical; Satan is a deceptive and confusing adversary; and man in the flesh does not readily comprehend spiritual truths. Thus the revelation from God had to be carefully progressive so that truth-seeking man can see the intelligence of a supernatural being in the design and pattern; it must have some complex intricacies so that the deceiver cannot readily twist the translation or the meaning of the Word; and it must meet man at a level where he can comprehend initial spiritual truths and draw him step-by-step into the heavenly realms where he can have real fellowship with the Father. In new covenant preaching and writing, the progressive revelation brought the message and purpose of God into clear view for those who were born again so that they could see the kingdom of God, so that the things which were not yet revealed during Old Testament times might become part and parcel of New Testament understanding. "Things," then, "which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered into the heart of man" (I Corinthians 2:9) in Old Testament times have now been revealed by the Spirit of God through the apostles and New Testament prophets.

"When you read," wrote Paul, "you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 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; 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" (Ephesians 3:4-6).

- **Not for other generations** - As great as the Old Testament heroes were, men such as Abraham, Moses, and David were not let in on God's great secret; this was reserved for His very special children. So even though these men earnestly desired to know, it was not made known to those generations.
- **Through the apostles and prophets** - The Father has to guard constantly against the introduction of false doctrine. There are always false teachers who claim that they had a vision or revelation from the Lord. Thus the Almighty in every age is very specific through whom He communicates. In the new covenant era, He has revealed the mystery through "His holy apostles and prophets." And because a Christian could become a prophet only if an apostle of Jesus Christ laid hands on him; therefore there are no prophets today, and anyone claiming to be one is an "unholy" pretender.
- **Welcome to the Gentiles** - What is this great mystery, kept secret for ages past, now known by special people through a carefully guarded message delivered through the apostles and prophets? The mystery has to do with the acceptance of the Gentiles, and not only their acceptance but their equal standing as "fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise."
- **Fellow sharers in the Spirit** - "You were sealed in Him." expounded the apostles earlier in this epistle, "with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). The tremendous secret, the great mystery, was that the Gentiles also were to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God!

Whether this mystery has major significance to man is questionable. But it is obviously of major significance and of great delight to the great God who has worked His great plan throughout the ages. And it is therefore of major significance and delight to His children, who by definition are going to share the same desires as their heavenly Father.

Excitement From Ephesians

Paul's Privilege

There are occasions where someone is honored by being singled out to perform a signal public duty. The individual who lights the Olympic torch is an honored dignitary, ask the one who cuts the ribbon for the opening of a new shopping mall. But what is the honor of lighting an Olympic torch compared to taking the torch of salvation to the Gentiles? And what is the cutting of a shopping mall ribbon compared to the opening of God's harvest fields?

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, and specifically apostle to the Gentiles, was greatly privileged to explain the mystery of God, and to bring the specifics of this great secret to the Gentiles. These specifics are of major significance to God, and consequently worthy of great emphasis to His spiritual family.

Gentiles are fellow heirs - Isaiah had prophesied that Christ, the victor over Satan and evil, would "divide the booty with the strong" (Isaiah 53:12). Through the agency of the indwelling Spirit, all Christians are children of God, joint-heirs with Christ, and thus sharers in the "booty." "For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" (Romans 8:15). One of the key points in the revelation of the mystery is that Gentile Christians are participants in this joint inheritance.

- **Gentiles are fellow members of the body** - The only body which will be raised to glory on the last day will be the body of Christ. What a privilege and honor, then, to be a part of that body! By the action of the Spirit Gentiles are made a part of the body of Christ by being "born of water and of Spirit" (John 3:5), and thus entering the kingdom of God. For in one spirit we were all immersed into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slave or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:13).
- **Gentiles are fellow partakers of the promise** - The great blessing for the Gentiles is to be partakers of the promised Holy Spirit. The prophet Ezekiel had looked forward to the church as spiritual Israel dwelling in a spiritual promised land. "And I will put My Spirit within you, declared the Lord through the prophet, "and you will come to life, and I will place you on your land. Then you will know that I have spoken and done it" (Ezekiel 37:14). What was hidden - the mystery - was that the Gentiles were to be a part of the Israel who would have God's Spirit placed within. Similarly God promised Abraham, "in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 22:18). Christ in the flesh never came to the nations; He was sent only to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." This is another place where the mystery was hidden; it was Christ in the Spirit who was to come to the Gentiles!

The Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promised Holy Spirit only if they obey the gospel of Christ. One of the great privileges of Paul was to proclaim this gospel, "of which," said he, "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. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things" (Ephesians 3:7-9).

Paul, blasphemer of the name of Jesus and persecutor of the church of God, was honored as the least of all saints to be an apostle to the Gentiles. He counted it a great privilege to preach those "unfathomable riches of Christ" to the Gentiles and thus "bring to light" the carrying out of God's mystery which had been hidden for ages. Would those today who preach have the same understanding of the mystery as Paul revealed in his portion of the written word, and may those who preach have the same blazing desire to get the mystery to today's Gentiles.

Excitement From Ephesians

Administering the Mystery

God created all things. That is awesome to contemplate seriously in and of itself. But the God who created all things had a bigger plan in mind than a comparatively simple material creation. The God who is Spirit has desired to produce a set of spiritual children who will worship Him in Spirit and in truth. And while the creation of the material realm required only six days to complete, the production of truly spiritual offspring is a much more complex operation requiring thousands of years to bring to fruition. This bringing of spiritual offspring into existence through the long term plan of God is called "the administration of the mystery."

- **From Adam to Noah** - The entire human race has by degrees been prepared for the coming of the spiritual age called Christianity. God executed His wrath on the ancients, and all moderns are expected to learn the lessons. The holy and righteous God reduced Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes, making "them an example to those who would live ungodly thereafter" (II Peter 2:6). Man's flesh, in his early state, was merely pitted against his conscience, and the lesson of the Flood is that man's conscience by itself is not strong enough to enable man to do what is right. Man is to see the rainbow, and remember!
- **From Noah to Moses** - Following the Flood, man started into the same pattern of descent as followed prior to the Flood. But God began to intervene, selecting Abraham as His chosen servant, making promises to him and beginning to communicate what would become God's written revelation to man. Through Abraham's descendants God brought the nation Israel into existence as a separate and numerous people, prepared for His purposes.
- **From Moses to Jesus** - With Israel now prepared, God gave them the Law through Moses. In progressive degrees Israel shed her idolatry, became knowledgeable of the word, faithful in attendance at the synagogues, and distributed throughout the Roman world and beyond. "When the fulness of the time came," then, according to the Holy Spirit through Paul, "God sent forth His Son" (Galatians 4:4).
- **Christ to the Jews** - The gospel of salvation and promise of the Holy Spirit was preached first to the Jews on Pentecost, 30 AD. For a decade or more the word of truth went only to the Jews and their half-breed relatives, the Samaritans.
- **Christ to the Gentiles** - God, operating in accordance with His plan, selected Paul as an apostle to the Gentiles. Recognizing the tremendous resistance there would be to the Gentiles coming in, the All Wise reached into the middle of the Jewish High Council and converted the most rabid Jewish traditionalist with the idea that he would be the point man in carrying the message of God to the nations. Having first selected His apostle to the Gentiles, the Lord then sent Peter, apostle to the circumcision, jingling the keys of the kingdom, to open the way of salvation to the Gentiles. God then confirmed many times over the coming of the word to the uncircumcised by concomitant signs and wonders and miracles.

Paul, then, "the very least of all saints," was given grace by God when the fulness of the time came, "to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 3:8-11). God, "who created all things," worked assiduously to recreate both Jew and Gentile in the image of the risen Christ. And Paul was privileged to "bring to light" the administration of this mystery, to explain in written form the great long-term plan of God.

Excitement From Ephesians

The Manifold Wisdom of God

Some unsuspecting brethren somehow have the impression that God is only concerned about salvation. Or that the teaching of the church is only concerned about salvation. The scripture, however, speaks of the "manifold wisdom of God" (Ephesians 3:10). Manifold has to do with many openings or ports; the manifold wisdom of God is multi-faceted, giving guidance in all aspects of life, "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who has called us by His own glory and excellence" (II Peter 1:3).

Among the nearly infinite topics the manifold wisdom communicates to God's children, taken from the "unfathomable riches of Christ," are the following:

- **Salvation from sin** - "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (I Timothy 1:15). Christ, the Redeemer of the world and Savior of mankind not only died on the cross but also rose from the dead to save those who believe, and made provision for the message of salvation to be preached to all creation. "Immersion now saves you... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ," wrote the apostle Peter, noting that it was not the removal of dirt from the external flesh, but that the cleansing was the appeal to God for a good conscience in immersion.
- **The indwelling Spirit** - Forgiveness cleanses the body so that it is a fit dwelling for God in the Spirit. "Christ redeemed from the curse of the Law," wrote Paul, "...so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Galatians 3:13,14). The Spirit strengthens the Christian, who was born of the Spirit in the first place. By the Spirit he puts to death the deeds of the flesh, and the Spirit guarantees his resurrection to eternal life on the last day.
- **The functioning of the church** - The local congregation must function as a unit to carry out the desires of Christ. As part of the manifold wisdom of God, complete instructions for the functioning of the local church are given in the word of God.
- **The mission of the church** - Not only does the church need to know how to function together, but the church needs to know what that functioning is for. The decree of the King is that His body is to carry the message of the gospel to all creation under heaven.
- **Calling the world to repentance** - In the judgment of God, the word of God preaches to the lost as well as edifying the saved. The Almighty foreknew that the Bible would be the most widely distributed book; therefore the scripture cries out to the wealthy as an example: "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you" (James 5:1).
- **Laying the foundation for a sound economic system** - The scripture establishes the stability of a money system based on a gold or silver standard, "according to the shekel of the sanctuary" (Exodus 30:13), and proscribes the pre-printing press version of inflation - the carrying of two different sets of weights in the bag. And the wisdom of God opposes socialism and calls for the private ownership of property.
- **Offers a republic as the model government** - Israel was a republic, the rule by law. The ideals of the republic continue to be set forth, in accordance with the wisdom of God, in both the Old and New Testaments.
- **Establishes the family** - God created the family unit in the beginning and provides instruction for its functioning and the raising of its children.

Many more points could be brought forth in regard to the manifold wisdom of God. What is important to recognize is that this manifold wisdom of God is being made known through the church to the rulers and authorities, even in the heavenly places.

Excitement From Ephesians

The Eternal Purpose of God

Many claim not to know what God's purpose is. "It's all a big mystery," they say. By keeping God's purpose a mystery to themselves, they can subtly duck their responsibilities to God by claiming they did not know what He wanted them to do.

But what says the word of God? "He has made known to us the mystery of His will," rejoiced the apostle Paul. The final result of this mystery, he noted is "the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth" (Ephesians 1:9,10), which He accomplishes through the Holy Spirit, Christ in the inner man. Again, as Paul rephrased it, the preaching of the gospel was so that "the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known." The mystery of God has been proclaimed throughout the earth; no man can hide behind the claim that he did not know God's will and thus escape condemnation.

The wisdom of God is made known through the church - God, the absolute and all powerful Sovereign that He is, could make His wisdom known by any means He chooses. His choice is that "the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church" (Ephesians 3:10). Those who down play the church's role in the plan of the All Wise deny the wisdom of God. On the other hand, those who really pay attention to the word of God know that the church is the most important element on earth in God's eternal purpose, and order their lives so that God's wisdom is manifest through them. Their personal spirituality, their commitment to prayer and devotion to the word of God is evident, and is exhibited in their personal productivity, good attitudes, fiscal responsibility, behavior of their children, and commitment to the local congregation. These well-ordered lives in the physical realm provide a hint as to what blessings lay in the spiritual realm for those who are truly in Christ Jesus.

- **To the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places** - While man is prevented from seeing the hosts of heaven or the minions of Satan, these dwellers of the spirit realm are not precluded from knowing what is going on at the surface of the earth. The demonic spirits are working assiduously to sear the consciences of men and the angels of God render constant service for those who will inherit salvation. While the manifold wisdom of God is being made known to the sons of men on earth, it is also being "made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."
- **God's eternal purpose** - How hard it must have been for the Almighty when rebellion was first found in Lucifer, When the covering cherub reached for what was not his, desiring the worship reserved for the worthy God, and fomented revolution among the other angels of God, the Creator who allowed them to be there when the morning stars sang together must have been deeply wounded in His soul. But when man, lower than the angels and therefore weaker and more vulnerable, was coerced into the revolt, how the heart of God must have been stabbed as the creature, led astray, lost fellowship with the loving Father, and therefore had to be cast from the Garden. But God, in accordance with the great love which He has for mankind, sent the Spirit of His Son into the hearts of those immersed into Christ and thus restored the fellowship with the lost and Himself. This is the mystery of the indwelling Spirit to restore fellowship with God, and is the eternal purpose of God.

Through the church, then, this eternal purpose of God is being made known throughout the world, so much so that even the "'heavenly realms" of Satan are being shaken with the proclamation. And no man can claim that he did not know what God wanted him to do. The purpose of God is no longer "a mystery."

Excitement From Ephesians

Boldness and Confident Access

Christians are very special. Those who are disciples of the Lord, having obeyed Jesus in immersion to receive forgiveness of sins and the gift of the indwelling Spirit, and who walk faithfully, are the great objects of the Father's affections and the product of his earnest desire for spiritual fellowship. Thus heaven's gates swing invitingly open for those who are clothed with Christ, and prayers of the saints are ushered instantly to the magnificent central court of Heaven. "In accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord," the redeemed can joyfully claim fellowship with God, and receive a warm welcome in the presence of the King through the Spirit of God. Thus in Jesus Christ "we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him" (Ephesians 3:11,12).

- **In Christ** - God's eternal purpose is carried out "in Christ Jesus our Lord." There are only two spiritual locations: in Christ and outside of Christ. Because the purpose of God is carried out in Christ, those who remain outside of Christ will end up in the eternal garbage heap "away from the presence of God and from the glory of His power" (II Thessalonians 1:9). Therefore immersion "into Christ" is of paramount significance; there is no other means by which the fallen soul may come into the blessings reserved for those in Christ, "in whom" we have access to God.
- **Access to God through faith in Christ** - The scripture emphasizes and re-emphasizes the great privilege of being able to come into the presence of the Father. The doorkeeper of the house of the Lord under the Old Covenant could only wistfully desire to "draw near" to the temple as was the privilege of the priesthood. Because of the "nearness" of the priests, they were the intercessors for the people. But in Christ every Christian - Jew, Gentile, slave, free, male, female - has access to the throne of God in a "nearness" untouched by the Old Testament priesthood. However, it is important to remember that this access is "through faith" in Christ. The Christian must always be in remembrance that his appearance in the courts of heaven is through the glorified Christ through the High Priest of the order of Melchizedek, whose face is "like the sun shining in its strength" (Revelation 1:16).
- **Boldness and confident access** - God, as a loving Father, welcomes conversation with His kids. The grace of God is extended and made clear so that the child of God knows he does not have to stand "far off," distant, shy, and trembling, but that he may have "boldness and confident access." For those who have a flippant and generally disrespectful attitude, it seems to them to be "no big deal" to come into the very presence of the terrifying God; they have no real concept of who He truly is. But the Jew or Gentile who is called by the preaching of the gospel is first of all "God-fearing," and is therefore ecstatic about the prospect of being able to have boldness and confidence in the presence of this awesome God.
- **Confidence in overcoming discouragement** - The great and impossible challenges which lay before men are but small things in the sight of God. The son of God who knows he has bold and confident access to the Infinite Power through Jesus Christ is not discouraged by the persecutions and tribulations he or the brethren encounter. "Therefore," exhorted the apostle, "I ask you to not lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are for your glory" (Ephesians 3:13). "Don't be discouraged," is the exordium of God's apostle to the Gentiles. "I am willing to suffer that you may attain glory.

The mighty God will not fail nor forsake His children. The purpose of difficulty is to produce a consciousness of dependency. And this all fits into the matrix of the love of God whereby the justified have boldness before the Father and confident access to the intimacies of the throne.

Excitement From Ephesians

Attitude Adjustment

Sometimes it is hard to remember that Paul's letter to the Ephesians was written from prison. Because he was confident in his fellowship with God, he could not only be thankful in incarceration, but he could also encourage those outside the prison bars. "Therefore," he said, "I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are for your glory" (Ephesians 3:13). The Biblical expression "lose heart" means to get discouraged, and discouragement and weariness are two of the main internal battles a Christian fights. "And let us not lose heart in doing good," the apostle wrote the Galatians, "for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary" (Galatians 6:9). "Therefore, my beloved brethren," he encouraged the church at Corinth, "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord" (I Corinthians 15:58).

Modern American Christians tend to want to go to heaven without suffering or encountering any difficulty. These powder puffs who claim the name of Christ grow weary after more than a few minutes of sustained effort. They hump their shoulders at the very thought of toil, and they lose heart at the slightest challenge. And rather than undergo the scripturally mandated attitude adjustments, they petulantly demand a change in their circumstances. A passage from Colossians comes to mind: "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful" (Colossians 3:15). Be thankful.

- **Boldness and confident access** - The basis for all true security in Christ, and therefore being able to have a praising and thankful attitude in every circumstance, is that the child of God is able to prove from the scripture that he in fact is in Christ. "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Christ Jesus is in you - unless indeed you fail the test?" (II Corinthians 13:5). If the individual can prove to himself from the Bible that Jesus Christ lives in him, then he has the same confident access to the throne as did Paul.
- **Therefore not losing heart** - If the Christian knows that he actually has access to God's throne, then he does not get discouraged because he knows that the loving Father is positively involved, that all things are going to work together for good, that the circumstances are, by one means or another, going to work out for the furtherance of the gospel. He further knows that the suffering of another, particularly a leader in the church such as Paul, is likewise not a cause for discouragement, but rather the saint is to recognize that such suffering is for the glory of the brethren.
- **Source of attitude adjustment** – The apostle knew that the brethren might have a tendency to lose heart and grow weary over the tribulations rolling in as seemingly unceasing waves over the early church. He therefore prayed on their behalf: "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man..." (Ephesians 3:14-16). Attitude adjustment begins from within, from being strengthened in the Inner man!

Attitude is a critical [watch the pun] spiritual matter. People with bad attitudes are "grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts... These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit" (Jude 1:16,19). By contrast, the brother in Christ who heeds the injunction of scripture will be strengthened in his inner man by the Spirit (of whom the others are devoid) and will be able to develop praising and thankful attitudes regardless of external circumstances. Heed!

Excitement From Ephesians

Strengthened With Power

What does God do, and what does He not do? The atheist does not believe God exists; therefore He obviously does nothing. The deist believes that God is there, but is not involved, and would not have performed the miracles attributed to Jesus, for example. Then on the other extreme are the enthusiasts who look for miracles and healings and all kinds of signs. Another way of asking the question is, what does the supernatural power of God do, if anything today? Supernatural is defined as something He does outside His normal laws.

This small article obviously cannot treat this question in extensive detail. But let us briefly exposit the following points:

- **The age of miracles and signs is past** - In the language of the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, the word "was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will" (Hebrews 2:3,4). Once the word was confirmed, and salvation was extended and confirmed successively to the Samaritans and to the Gentiles, then the signs and miracles passed.
- **God's intent has been to get man to see the unseen** - Moses was recommended to the faithful as one who endured, "as seeing Him who is unseen" (Hebrews 11:27). "We look," noted the apostle Paul, "not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen" (II Corinthians 4:18). This perception of happenings in the spiritual realm is called faith; thus "we walk by faith, not by sight" (II Corinthians 5:7).
- **God uses the physical to communicate the spiritual** - This general principle is stated by Paul: "However, the spiritual is not the first, but the natural; then the spiritual" (I Corinthians 15:46). Thus the lepers were cleansed, the lame walked, the blind saw, the deaf heard, and the dead were raised by Jesus, so that brethren in spiritual Israel might understand the nature of the Jubilee sounded at Peter's proclamation recorded in Acts 2. Those separated from God by sin (worse than leprosy) could be cleansed, the spiritually crippled could be made whole, those blind to the unseen realm could be given insight, those deaf to the calling of God would be able to hear the voice of the Son of God, and those dead in their trespasses could be raised from a watery grave to walk in newness of life.
- **God's supernatural power still works in the spiritual realm** - The law which applies here is the law of sin and of death; the individual sins, and the individual dies. But when this same individual repents of his sin at the preaching of the gospel, confesses Jesus as the Christ, and is immersed by Jesus' authority for the remission of his sins and to receive the gift of the indwelling Spirit, God accomplishes a miracle far beyond any that was ever seen in the natural, material realm. God overpowers the law of sin and death supernaturally, and causes a miraculous and powerful new birth, bringing the new creature forth from the realm of the dead.
- **God strengthens with supernatural power** - Man, operating under his own power, is spiritually weak and easily overcome by sin and the forces of darkness. Paul's prayer was "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man" (Ephesians 3:16). This supernatural power, flowing from the glory of God, is capable of strengthening those who wear the name of Christ so that they can overcome sin and the evil one.

Praise the Lord! Jesus is not merely a historical figure who died and rose long ago! He is a living and acting God who strengthens each of His spiritual children so that they are overwhelming conquerors - overcoming sin in their personal lives, and overcoming Satan in their combat with the world.

Excitement From Ephesians

Power in the Inner Man

The glory of God is seen in the face of Christ only by faith. No one can see flat glory or derive any strength from it unless the veil of his flesh is removed upon his being immersed into Christ. But when that glory is visible to the spiritual eye of the believer, a powerful spiritual transformation begins to occur and continues to occur so long as the member of Christ's body fixes his eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, whose radiance shines from the throne. The prayer of the apostle, thus, was that each of the Ephesian brethren would be granted, "according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man," so that Christ would dwell in their hearts by faith (Ephesians 3:16,17).

The riches of His glory - There are not enough superlatives to describe the glory of God. The Christian is greatly blessed to be able to apprehend, in the present age, that glory by faith, preparatory to being able to behold that glory "face to face" in the age to come. The awesome power of God flows from that glory or as Paul described it, "according to the riches of His glory."

- **Strengthened with power through His Spirit** - The power of God exhibited here is not raw physical power; it is the strength of character exuding from the inner man. A brutal man may glory in his physical prowess, but a little lady with a Colt "equalizer" is more than his match. In a parallel fashion, Jesus, armed with spiritual power, was more than a match for the bristling mob who arrested Him in the garden of Gethsemane. Likewise, Paul in chains was the overwhelming conqueror before Festus, Agrippa, and the dignitaries who had come to hear his defense. But none of this spiritual power can be effected apart from the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit works supernaturally in conjunction with the written word. Even our Lord Jesus "through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God" (Hebrews 9:14); much less shall Christians be able to be strong or accomplish much apart from that Spirit.
- **In the inner man** - The contrast between the outer and inner man was illustrated in a written comment by Paul to the brethren in Corinth: "Therefore we do not lose heart," he remarked, "but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day" (II Corinthians 4:16). The inner man was formed in the image of the risen Christ when the penitent God-fearer was raised from the waters of immersion, and step by step takes on the full character of the divine nature. As the inner man is strengthened, the "inside of the cup" is cleansed, sin is driven from the behavior of the Christian and imputed righteousness becomes actual righteous behavior.
- **That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith** - The thrust of the scripture is that each disciple of Christ subjugate himself to the Christ within, that his character with its faults and foibles decrease and the character of Christ increase. "It is no longer I who live," wrote Paul, "but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). Christ dwells in the heart of each true child of God; the operative principle is the faith of the individual who believes it because God's word told him so.

This section from Ephesians is one of the great power passages from the word of God. But the power is not something to be seen by those who judge according to the flesh. The rulers of the world through physical strength crucified the Lord of glory, but through spiritual strength He arose and ascended. And this same spiritual strength is at work in the Christian through the Spirit in the inner man.

Excitement From Ephesians

To Know the Love of Christ

We are sometimes falsely accused of preaching the Holy Spirit instead of Jesus. The Spirit of God who dwells in the Christian, however, is also designated Christ in you (Romans 8:9,10). Apparently Jesus and the Holy Spirit do not have a competitive spirit over this. The High Priest, Jesus, who ministers on behalf of spiritual Israel in the true sanctuary, ministers as the Holy Spirit in the hearts of Christians, who together constitute the sanctuary.

The apostle Paul then prayed for the members of the congregation at Ephesus "to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God" (Ephesians 3:16-19). The Spirit in the inner man is the Christ who dwells in our hearts through faith.

- **Christ dwells in our hearts through faith** - The Biblical concept of faith is based on what God has said in His word; faith is not some sort of mental hype that God somehow is supposed to honor. Biblical faith is produced in the hearer when a reasoned presentation of the history of Christ is brought forth from the word of God, and when he is now motivated enough to act upon what he has heard (Romans 10:17). There is no such thing as "inviting Christ into your heart;" that concept comes from the same source which convinced Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. When someone "obeys the gospel" (Romans 10:16), then Christ in the Spirit comes to dwell in his inner man. The words of the apostle Peter still stand unchanged: "Repent, and let each one of you be immersed in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). There is no visible change when this cleansing occurs, and there is no detectable manifestation of this new indwelling Spirit. Christ dwells in the hearts of Christians by faith; this is believed because the scripture has said it is so, and the follower of Christ has obeyed the scripture. There is no other way to know this all important truth.
- **Rooted and grounded in love** - The display of God's love was the crucifixion of Christ, This spectacle, carried out in the sight of millions in Jerusalem, "not done in a corner," and recorded in the words which shall never pass away, is the clear demonstration of the great love of the Shepherd for each lost sheep. This is the beginning of understanding, the rooting and grounding, of the love of God.
- **Comprehending the love of Christ** - The inspired prayer of the apostle is that the brethren would be strengthened with power through God's Spirit in the inner man and that they would be able to comprehend "the breadth and length and height and depth" - the all-encompassing - love of Christ. This obviously comprehensible love surpasses knowledge, and it provides the security and comfort of the disciple of Christ as well as his motivation to seek and save the lost.
- **Filled up to all the fulness of God** - The result of being strengthened with power in the inner man and comprehending the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge is that the individual Christian is filled up to all the fulness of God. So how much is all the fulness? Is it possible for regenerated man to take on all the fulness of the sinlessness and holiness of God? Notice that the power here comes from the Spirit in the inner man and the love which emanates from Christ.

To come to know the love of Christ the saint is going to have to suffer as Christ suffered; he is going to have to carry his cross. To be strengthened with power, the son of God is going to have to encounter significant spiritual barriers; he is going to have to be able to quote the Bible, and overcome through prayers and fastings. The rest of this process is that it is no longer the individual who lives; he has died to himself and it is the Christ who lives in him; and thus he is filled up to all the fulness of God.

Excitement From Ephesians

Exceeding Abundantly Beyond

What is God able to do? And what will He do? And how will He do it? The answers to those questions provide major directives in the lives of God's people, that they might know how to conduct themselves in the church of the living God, that they might know their full capabilities in carrying out the will of God.

Take the issue of sin, for instance. "My little children," appealed the apostle John, "I am writing these things to you that you may not sin" (I John 2:1). "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourself for the same purpose," encouraged Peter, "because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God" (I Peter 4:1,2). "Become sober-minded as you ought," exhorted Paul, "and stop sinning" (I Corinthians 15:34). The inspired testimony of the apostles John, Peter, and Paul is that Christians are to cease from sin. "Can't be done," you say. Well, what is God able to do?

But overcoming sin is to some degree a secondary issue. The things from which the brethren in Christ are to cease and desist are of less significance than those things which the saints are to begin and implement. The focus of the way of life in Christ is not the land from which modern offspring of Abraham went out but the heavenly country to which they are going. Those who walk by faith, in fulfillment of the shadows which flitted through Old Testament scriptures are doers of extremely great works, greater works than Jesus did during the days of His earthly sojourn (John 14:12). In fact the Christian is being transformed into the image of Christ - not just Christ in the flesh, but into the image of Christ in glory (II Corinthians 3:18). So, really, what was the wooden tub of Noah's day compared to that which the saint builds? What were the millions Moses led out of physical slavery compared to a follower of Christ leading even one person out of slavery to sin? What was the anointing of David compared to the anointing which abides in the Christian? Even Abraham, father of the faithful, believing that God was able to perform what He had promised, could only stare off into some incomprehensible distance in hope that he would become a father of many nations, while the citizen of Christ's kingdom is right now making disciples of all the nations. Christians are powerful through Christ; those who have gone before are pikers.

- **God is able** - As Paul closed his prayer in this section of the Ephesian epistle, his doxology was to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20). God, of course, will not operate outside His voluntarily imposed confines of His written word. But He is able to help the Christian stop sinning, to accomplish the great transformation into the image of His Son, and to bring to pass the great things necessary to distribute the gospel throughout the world.
- **Beyond all we ask or think** - The great and awesome God, who exerts more power on behalf of His children daily than He did when He brought the creation into existence, can do awesome things. The apostle runs out of descriptive terms - "exceeding abundantly beyond." God does all this in excess of all that the saints of God can ask or think.
- **According to the power that works within** - In God's sovereign will, He accomplishes His great and mighty deeds in the spiritual realm through the church, the body of Christ. His great power, then, is operative through the Spirit who indwells the single Christian, and who also dwells His spiritual temple as a whole.
- **To Him be the glory** - The eternal spotlight focuses on the Director and Performer of earth's drama and the great and powerful God, who operates through the church, is the One who receives "the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:21).

The apostle's prayer really was that all generations of Christians would be strengthened in the inner man and would comprehend the unfathomable love of God directed toward each one. And the great God is the One who can and will do exceeding abundantly beyond what any can ask or think. But ask and think.

Excitement From Ephesians

Walking in a Worthy Manner

The great God can do more than Christians can ask or think. By His sovereign will He has seen fit to exercise this great power through the Holy Spirit, who not only dwells in each individual child of God, but who also inhabits the church as a whole. It is upon this foundation that the apostle Paul predicates his therefore: "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:1-3). Each saint is to remember that he is a personal representative of the corporation of Jesus, and that he is to conduct himself at all times in accordance with company policy - to walk in a manner worthy of his calling.

- **With humility** - There is no place in this corporation - the body of Christ - for big egos. There is one corporate Head, and He dictates all corporate policy; furthermore He has placed a complete copy of policy directives in the hands of each member for his personal perusal. Each member of Team Jesus willingly submits to the will of the King and weal of the body; he eliminates self to serve corporate interests. This is humility.
- **With gentleness** - The people to be served by this corporation include both workers for the body and non-members. It is corporate policy to deal with both in gentleness. This gentleness listens with understanding, answers questions clearly, orderly, logically, and truthfully, and smiles to maintain person-to-person connections; but at the same time this gentleness presses unyieldingly for both the Christian and the lost to comply with the stated procedures of the Chief Executive Officer.
- **With patience** - Sometimes the brethren are cranky or unruly, or not handling their personal challenges with appropriate aplomb. Sometimes the lost sinner is angry or confused about the claims of Jesus preferred against his soul. In all cases the corporate representative of the Lord designated to handle the situation conducts himself with patience, calming others down, getting them rational if possible, and pointing them in the right direction.
- **Forbearance in love** - Forbearance is encouragingly shaking someone's hand when he deserves to be smacked in the mouth. Corporate policy requires that all people be treated with this form of tolerance, recognizing the intrinsic value of each created in the image of God, though sometimes greatly disfigured by sin. Each, in the church of the Lord or out, is a precious and high-strung thorough-bred to be put up with until broken to do the will of the Lord.
- **Preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace** - Company policy dictates that all members of Team Jesus recognize that different sectors of the corporation are not in competition with one another. The Head of the body created a spiritual and peaceful atmosphere which He expects to pervade all activities and functions of the church, and He furthermore requires all units to work hard to generate and sustain that peaceful and unified spirit.

The spiritual Head of the church of Christ implanted His Spirit within each member of the corporate team. In other words, the Lord Himself works to produce in each Christian the personality and temperament of Himself so that each carries out his personal responsibility as if Jesus Himself were personally standing in that position. Each member of the corporation additionally has his own personal copy of corporate policy, and is directed to walk accordingly. The Head knows how important it is that His way of doing things be carried out at all levels; He therefore entreats each Christian to function properly and with the correct attitude, that the corporate atmosphere and mission be accomplished.

Excitement From Ephesians

Unity of the Spirit

Mere organizational union is not unity of the Spirit. The unity for which our Lord earnestly prayed before crossing the Kidron was a spiritual unity, a pre-created oneness to which each individual Christian is to attain and to preserve. Man's attempts to produce unity through the meeting of de facto heads of apparent sectors of the body of Christ are not only ineffective but are long-term counter-productive to the spiritual union since they preserve a subtle denominational and structural outlook. The unity for which the Holy Spirit appeals, through the writings of the apostle Paul, is a spiritual unity; there is no external structure which can produce this union of heart-to-heart spiritual fellowship between brethren. Humility, patience, forbearance, and diligence "to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" can only be acquired and exhibited on an individual basis. The responsibility of carrying on this preservation therefore continually falls on each saint, and he is to uphold and maintain the following cardinal pillars of the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:4-6):

- **There is one body** - The apostle had previously noted that the church was the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23). One church - one body of believers - is all there ever has been or ever will be. Any "communion" which is "another communion" apart from the one which Jesus established as recorded in the second chapter of Acts is not the body of Christ, and there is absolutely no fellowship in the spiritual realm between them, any more than light can have fellowship with darkness.
- **There is one Spirit** - There is just one Spirit inhabiting the temple of God, and He is a holy Spirit; there is no unholiness about Him. He hovered over the surface of the waters when earth first took form; He was the Wonderful Counselor in fleshly form in the incarnation of Christ; He wrote the Old and New Testaments; and He comes as the Spirit of Christ to indwell those who are immersed into Christ at the time of their immersion.
- **There is one hope of your calling** - All earthly hopes can be stripped of the individual at any time; "health, wealth, and happiness" can all be gone in less than the blink of an eye. But there is one hope, which will not be taken from the faithful saint - his resurrection to life, to fellowship with the eternal God. "Hope that is seen is not hope," noted Paul (Romans 8:24). There awaits, then, in the future, "our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body," our resurrection from the dead (Romans 8:23).
- **There is one Lord** - In the process of becoming a Christian, each must confess that Jesus is Lord. And at the end, every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall "confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:11). Jesus is the one Lord; there is no other.
- **There is one faith** - There is just one confession, just one body of beliefs, revealed in the writings called the New Testament, which constitute the one faith. Any attempt to alter, confuse, or refuse to transmit the truths contained therein results in a breach of faith, and the coverage of the redemptive blood of Jesus is not applied or abrogated in such cases. There are not many "faiths" or "variations of faith," there is only one faith.
- **There is one immersion** - The world, especially those of denominational persuasion, does not like this pillar in the temple of the unity of the Spirit, and it does everything it can to confuse the issue. But there is only one immersion common to all Christians - their immersion which granted them remission of sins, entrance into the body of Christ, and the indwelling Spirit.
- **There is one God and Father of all, over all, through all, and in all** - All things, including the unity of the Spirit, come from the will of the Father, for whose good pleasure all things exist. This God is revealed specifically through the Bible, and known intimately only through His Son Jesus. Any other who would claim to be God is no god at all.

These seven, then, constitute the unity of the Spirit. One is a small number, but it is definite and specific. May each who desires to follow Jesus come to be of the same mind and judgment, intent on one purpose, attaining to and sustaining the specified unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Excitement From Ephesians

Controversy Over Unity

Man has his scams and schemes, often in the name of some sort of religious fervor. Incited by the prince of the power of the air, men even twist the Lord's desire for His followers to be united; that which should be humbly acceded to becomes a means by which Satan's rebellious agenda is forwarded. That is why this exordium proceeds from Paul's pen: Be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Brethren must be diligent - must take pains - to preserve that which is based on an individual response to the gospel plea, and which never can be achieved when perceived to be some sort of organizational union. The Lord's results can only be achieved in the Lord's way; man can never achieve the Lord's results by doing things his way.

Those who truly desire scriptural unity need to consider the following issues. Those who will not are engaged in a scam.

- **Controversy over one Spirit** - In order to be united in Christ, all involved need to be Christians. The defining indicator, by the will of King Jesus, is whether the individual is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. "However," wrote Paul to the church in Rome, "you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him" (Romans 8:9). The name Christian signifies that the man belongs to Christ; it is manifest that if the Spirit does not indwell a certain person, he is not a Christian. Any individual connected with the church in Rome who was not indwelt by the Spirit was not a Christian, and was excluded from spiritual union. Any individual connected with a contemporary church of Christ who is not indwelt by the Spirit is likewise excluded from spiritual union. (Likewise all the histrionics connected with modern "Pentecostalism" have nothing to do with the Biblical Holy Spirit.)
- **Controversy over one immersion** - Just because a person is a member in good standing of a modern Christian church or church of Christ does not mean he has obeyed the gospel. Spiritual union is above all in Christ, and the scripture is emphatic about the mechanism by which men die to themselves and become joined to the eternal Husband. Being in Christ is the result of being immersed into Christ (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27). Unless the individual has repented and been immersed in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and to receive the gift of the indwelling Spirit, he is excluded from the commonwealth of spiritual Israel. Such a one, who has maybe tried to be saved by "accepting Jesus into his heart" or by some other strange doctrine, is by definition still in the flesh and by nature disruptive to spiritual unity.
- **Controversy over one faith** - Most modern "Christians" connected with churches of Christ are universalists or relativists. They deny the Biblical tenet of there being one confession - one great body of doctrine and practice which constitutes what the scripture calls "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). In consequence, their concept of the "unity of the one faith" consists of a mumbled "as long as Jesus is glorified, it doesn't matter what you believe." Those who comprehend that the Bible is a book of absolutes and has one correct ("private") interpretation, to be found and universally understood, have no meaningful dialogue with the relativists who infest modern churches "of Restoration Heritage."
- **Controversy over false brethren** - Just because someone was "immersed into Christ" does not make him a brother. "False brethren" sneak in from the side of the law (Galatians 2:4), and the lawless creep "in unnoticed" from the other side to promote their licentiousness (Jude 4). A brother is one who is proven, not one accepted unproven.

"What fellowship has light with darkness?" (II Corinthians 6:14). There are very intelligent scam artists at work right now promoting union between "instrumental" and "non-instrumental" churches. But the promoted union is perceived to go forward only by ignoring the fundamental issues of personal union with Christ in immersion, personal indwelling by the Holy Spirit, personal submission to the one faith, and personal vigilance against false brethren.

Excitement From Ephesians

Gifts from on High

It is customary for the prince, upon his coronation, to dispense favors to his loyal subjects. David, for example, once he had secured his position as king of all Israel by capturing Jerusalem and despoiling other enemies, dispensed favor or grace to Mephibosheth by granting him the property of his grandfather King Saul and allowing him a place at the king's table (II Samuel 9:6-13). It is only fitting, then, that the Great King, upon His accession to the heavenly throne, having secured his position by saving Jerusalem and despoiling Satan's realm, should dispense favors to His loyal and faithful subjects.

But when did our Lord accede to the spiritual throne of David? Certainly He was anointed by Spirit and power at His immersion at the hand of John in the muddled waters of the Jordan. But the rigors of Jesus' own personal suffering had to be undergone before victory brought Him crown and throne. First the persecutions, trials, and calumnies from preaching the good news of the coming kingdom had to be borne in joy and dignity. Then the looming cross and its bittersweet suffering had to be endured to the end, to the final shout, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). But as anxious as He was to return to the Father following His victorious bodily resurrection, He still had to appear to competent witnesses on earth to verify that the One crucified was indeed the One risen from the dead. Finally, after 40 days of guest appearances, He ascended to glory and received "the promise of the Spirit" in his exaltation to the throne, and thus anointed King, was now ready to dispense favors from on high. "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, 'When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men'" (Ephesians 4:7,8).

- **He led captive a host of captives** - His coronation as King was accomplished with the entourage of the faithful from the time of Adam to the beginning of "the last days." Those souls who went "down" to join Jacob in Sheol, who were thus positioned "in the bosom of Abraham," anxiously awaited the ascension of the Deliverer from Zion. When He ascended, He led those captives "up" with Him, where they are now "absent from the body" and "at home with the Lord"(II Corinthians 12:4, 5, 8). He who possessed the keys not only had the keys of death but also the keys of Hades. Having led this host of faithful upwards, He was now prepared to dispense grace to the rest of the brethren.
- **Grace was given** - The favor of King Jesus certainly makes Him worthy of honor, praise, and thanksgiving. In the first place, forgiveness to His obedient subjects is granted for all past iniquity, and provision is made for remission should future thoughtless transgression worthy of the King's wrath occur. Secondly, the Spirit of grace is granted to each immersee to assist the citizen of the kingdom to grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord. Thirdly, His gracious word and provision for its study and understanding are granted by His grace. Fourthly, He grants to each one a special position in His spiritual body, the church, as it is written, "But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired" (I Corinthians 12:18).
- **According to the measure of Christ's gift** - The King, being King, decides who gets what. "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand" (Romans 5:1,2). By this King's will, justification and grace to stand are granted to all from every tribe and tongue who will come to Him on His terms. Other gifts are dispensed on a personal basis by His gracious choice.

Praise to the Lamb! Worthy is He, slain, ascended, and glorious, for He purchased with His own blood men from every nation, granting them grace and giving gifts of His favor to His chosen people.

Excitement From Ephesians

The Ascended King

Under the cover of night Nicodemus dared to approach the already controversial Jesus. Based on signs which he had seen Jesus perform during the 26 AD Passover, he came to his conclusion: "Rabbi, we know that You have come as a teacher from God" (John 3:2). Jesus then bowled this man over, whom He even called "the teacher of Israel," by speaking of a second birth as being necessary to see or to enter into the kingdom of God. This second birth was being "born from above."

The now-humbled Nicodemus responded, "How can these things be?" (John 3:9). The Lord incarnate proceeded to knock him down several more pegs, one pin at a time. "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things?" Wham! "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak that which we know, and bear witness of that which we have seen; and you do not receive our witness." Wham! "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" Wham! "And no one has ascended to heaven but He who descended from heaven, even the Son of Man." Wham!

And what a wham! that last one was. All the authority to speak and teach was embodied in the One who descended from heaven, for He was the only One who was going to be the One Ascended. "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men" (Paul's Holy Spirit-inspired quote of Psalm 68:18 from the Greek Old Testament). The Gift-giver was the Ascended One.

When did Jesus go down? - Because Jesus was in glory before the foundation of the world, the apostle clearly reasons that if the Christ was referred to prophetically as "ascended," He must have descended first. "Now this expression, He ascended, what does it mean except that He had also descended into the lower parts of the earth" (Ephesians 4:9). He indeed descended to man's level, "made for a little while lower than the angels" (Hebrews 2:9). His descent started when the Word became flesh.

- **How low did He go?** - Jesus, in emptying Himself, did not just sink to the level of man. He descended low enough to be regarded as a criminal. He descended even lower in being crucified. He went down further in bearing "our sins in His body on the cross," dying "for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant," for "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness"; indeed, "Him who knew no sin" was made to be "sin on our behalf" (I Peter 2:24; Hebrews 9:15,22; II Corinthians 5:21). But He really went to the depths in the next step: He descended to Hades, where He had the hope that He would not be abandoned there, and that He would not be there long enough for His flesh to undergo decay (Acts 2:26,27). He descended to the lower parts of the earth.
- **How high did He rise?** - "He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above the heavens" (Ephesians 4:10). This Christ not only rose from Hades to earth, but He ascended to heaven. Not only did He ascend to heaven, but He ascended far above the heavens! This Christ is hugely exalted, and is more than worthy of all praise which can be heaped upon Him. "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (I Timothy 1:17).
- **Why did He rise?** - One of the recurring themes of Paul's epistle to the Christian community at Ephesus is that Jesus "fills all"; that is, He completely engulfs, on a voluntary basis, that which He fills. And He fills all "in all"; all who are immersed into Him are open to His complete filling whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. The purpose of His exaltedly awesome ascension was "that He might fill all things."
- **No one ascended but He who descended** - There are no "ascended masters" to give spiritual information.

There is only one Ascended Master who can speak about how to be "born from above" through repentance and immersion in His name. In being thus born "of water and Spirit," the individual Christian might now be filled with the glory of the Christ who has ascended far above the heavens.

Excitement From Ephesians

Gifts from Christ

Christ is exalted far above the heavens. And having taken His seat on the throne, He is now ready to give "gifts to men." So what sort of gifts is this highly exalted One interested in bestowing? Will it be special kick-backs on the railroad for His favorite uncle? Will it be the favorite jewel of His grandmother to be granted to His secret girl friend? Will it be the Prime Minister spot for His cousin who was of great assistance in overcoming the opposition so that He could be seated in His present office? May it never be! Those types of gifts, while typical of mere earthlings and their petty rivalries, are insignificant at best and despicable at worst in comparison to the high, holy, and eternal King. He did not descend so low, nor was He exalted so high as to engage in such sniveling trivialities.

No, this King is interested in bestowing gifts to responsible saints who will use those gifts to strengthen individual Christians and who will build His church.

- **He gave some as apostles** - What an honor it was to be one of the apostles of the Lamb! To be chosen from among all the disciples, to be set apart from a mother's womb, even, so that the great and dangerous mission of Jesus on earth could be accomplished, was a signal elevation reserved for a few men. These men, who were regarded as the scum of the earth, need to be honored in every household claiming the name Christian, and children need to know their names and deeds far more than they need to know the monikers of football heroes, movie stars, or sitting Presidents.
- **He gave some as prophets** - These brethren (including some women) were given the ability to know things as yet unwritten in the New Testament scriptures. They, along with the apostles, brought the significance of the cross, the subsequent resurrection, and the ascension to glory to the masses, and the writings of some of them help constitute the completed works of the New Covenant. And it was thus on the foundation of the apostles and prophets that the church was built.
- **He gave some as evangelists** - Evangelists come with special abilities to proclaim the message of the Christ to the lost, and to edify the saints. These men are warriors of the first wave of the onslaught, and shake the nations with their teachings and preachings of the gospel of the glory of Christ. It is significant that the apostle Paul noted that not only was he set aside as an apostle, but he was also appointed a preacher (I Timothy 2:7). Because a preacher of the church in the first century proclaimed the gospel of God, preacher and evangelist were regarded as equivalent terms.
- **He gave some as pastors and teachers** - Pastor means shepherd. Preachers are not pastors, unless they also meet the qualifications of elders as described in the New Testament, and are set aside to do that work also. One of the sickest indications that many in Israel want to be like the pagan denominations around them is the use of the term Pastor as a title for a man who is supposed to be a servant evangelist in the Lord's church. But true shepherds are those who lead by example, being able to teach aptly in sound doctrine, to refute those who contradict the truths of the scripture, to be good men with households under control and with believing children, and who can deal wisely and scripturally with the people problems which exist within any congregation. These are men who carry on the burning desire of the Great Shepherd of the sheep in seeking and saving the lost, ensuring, in themselves and in the church as a whole, that the vision is not lost but kept in the forefront.
- **Teachers** - The apostle Paul indicated that he was appointed a teacher, and Luke notes that among the leadership of the church at Antioch of Syria there were prophets and teachers. Teachers also rank among those who are given gifts by the great King.

Our Lord Jesus is interested in giving gifts to the church, and these gifts consist of specially gifted brethren who can perform special functions for the body of Christ. If you are one of those who is so gifted, perform! If you are one of the body as a whole, let those who are so gifted perform!

Excitement From Ephesians

Equipping for Work

Work! Who wants to work! Don't brethren come into the church to be ministered to? Doesn't the church hire a minister to come around every so often and inquire about their needs? Isn't the minister to visit them in the hospital? Isn't the minister the one who solves their problems over the telephone, and who sits down and counsels them through their marriage difficulties? Doesn't the minister come rushing over when there has been a death in the family? Isn't the minister the one who does the preaching in the "worship assembly" and does all the Bible teaching in the homes? Doesn't the minister get paid to do all these things? Sick-ola!

Anyone making a claim to be a follower of Christ is to be an imitator of Him. When James and John budged ahead in the line of those who wanted to sit at Jesus' right hand and at His left, the other ten became indignant at the unfair advantage they thought those two had possibly gained in bucking for the positions. Jesus took the children aside and explained that the kingdom of God did not operate on such a mundane basis, where men crawled over other men's bodies to get to the top. "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:26-28). People who want to become Christians need to know up front that disciples of Jesus, by comparison, hate even their own lives, and pick up their crosses to follow Jesus. Selfishness, and a "serve me or I'll find a better restaurant" mentality has no place in Christianity.

"He gave," then, "some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ ..." (Ephesians 4:11,12).

- **For the work of service** - Brethren come into the body of Christ to find out where they can serve. "What can I do to help?" they ask. "Since Jesus has washed away my sins by His blood in the waters of immersion, how can I show my gratitude in some meaningful service for His body?" The church of God has many areas where service is needed. There are comparatively simple tasks such as mowing the lawn or shoveling snow which must be done. There are people who are sick and need someone to do some repairs in their houses. There are those who need someone to talk to at 11:00 PM to help them stay out of the saloons. There are the lost who need someone to show them video presentations. There are Monday-Friday educational ministries which need assistance. There are those who need help in getting their marriages on a scriptural basis, and there are many who need Bible studies to help them move to the next step. And there are those who need leaders to take them with them on Bible studies so that they can advance to the next step in their spiritual growth. The work of service is huge and nearly endless. God needs workers to go into His harvest.
- **For the equipping of the saints** - This is what Jesus gave the leadership in the church to do - to equip the saints to do the work. That means the elders and evangelists of the modern church, working with the teachers, are to train the brethren to do all the tasks undertaken by the local congregation. This includes the training of future teachers, evangelists, and elders, with a particular focus on helping the saints to have a track to run on while spreading the good news of the risen Christ.

The vision of the Lord Jesus is that each congregation is capable of doing its own training, and that the saints are willing to submit to the training and to do the work. Only in the Lord's way will the body be built up, from the ground up.

Excitement From Ephesians

Spiritual Unity

Unity again! The Lord is extremely concerned about the development of unity within His body. It's almost as if He knows the church has a war to fight, and the church is only effective when there is an atmosphere of unity pervading the ranks. But let's get the whole sentence from the Holy Spirit through Paul: "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13). Implicit in this passage is a unity that is to be attained on an individual basis as one by one the saints begin to mature. Because it is a spiritual unity, fleshliness is a block or hindrance to that unity. "For since there is jealousy and strife among you," Paul pointed out to the brethren in Corinth, "are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?" (I Corinthians 3:3). The only way to achieve visible union among the "churches of Restoration Heritage" is to sink to some fleshly lowest common denominator. Those who try, well-intentioned though they may be, are working from the wrong end, and are destined to fail.

The Lord's plan focuses on the local congregation. Period! That's what evangelists develop and set in order; that's where elders govern in spiritual wisdom and insight. Unity develops on a Christian-to-Christian basis as one-by-one the saints follow through on the Lord's plan for their lives. The demonstration of spiritual power exhibited in fruit generates a mutual respect and true fellowship among the spiritually like-minded.

- **Attaining to the unity of the faith** - There is contained in the word of God a solemn common confession, a common set of beliefs which constitute "the faith." Many claim to be of "the one faith;" many claim that it may be there but cannot be found. Each, of course, will be tested against the word of God, and found faithful or treasonous. The leadership of the congregation has a tremendous responsibility to His Headship to follow the instructions, to equip the saints for the work of service, to build up the body of Christ one by one, as each comes to an increasing knowledge of what constitutes "the faith." and, in the process of laying aside the flesh, to unity with other brethren who are doing likewise.
- **Of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man** - This unity, which comes with maturity, is focused on the Lord Himself. "The faith" is not merely a set of New Testament regulations imposed in place of a set of Old Testament regulations; the new covenant is "not like" the old. Neither is "the faith" some vague set of guidelines which can always be manipulated by those who are going to do what they are going to do anyway under the line that they "follow the spirit rather than the letter." Unless an individual really understands what New Testament faith is, he has no choice but to go "law" or "lawless." This faith centers exceedingly the knowledge of the Son of God, knowledge attained by the "mature man."
- **The measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ** - What the scripture reveals in progressive fashion is Christ in glory. One of the purposes of the entire plan of salvation is to walk fleshly man through various steps to make him no longer fleshly but spiritual. In the process, he begins to see with his spiritual eye in increasing clarity the radiance of the Christ upon the throne, and desire to be transformed into that same image - this is faith. And it is easy to see that the transformation produces a stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ in this glory!

When the leadership concentrates on what the Lord told them to do - to bring the saints one-by-one to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of the radiant Christ - then unity will result Anybody listening out there?

Excitement From Ephesians

No Longer Children

Where is the evangelist? Where is the elder? Where is the teacher who will bring disciples to maturity in Christ? Where are those who believe that scriptural knowledge of the exalted Christ produces a measure of stature among brethren which belongs to the fulness of Christ? Small teaching produces small people; scriptural teaching produces a scriptural people who attain the perfection fore-ordained of the Lord.

When leaders in the modern church of Christ - built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Himself being the cornerstone - labor to bring each Christian to the maturity and completeness which is exhibited by Christ in glory, then Biblical unity is also achieved by these individuals who through suffering in the flesh have ceased to sin, and who focus entirely on their respective roles in the distribution of the gospel. Having noted this maturity, the apostle then writes, "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; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the Head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:14,15).

- **No longer children** - The continuing emphasis of the gospel is maturity. The whole human race had to be upgraded to a certain level of development before God could send His Son to inaugurate the new and living way. Before the faith came, all mankind, Gentile or Jew, was held in bondage as children to the elemental things of either the law of conscience or the law of Moses. "While we were children," said Paul, using the normal physical development of a child to bring forth a point on spiritual development, we "were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world" (Galatians 4:3). But when everything was ready, the called-out members from the human race could assume the mature responsibilities connected with sonship in Christ, and no longer had to have every move checked by the guardian of the Law.
- **Doctrinal storms** - Satan is going down, and he knows it. Not only is he going down to the pits of eternal fire, but his malevolent nature is exhibited in the sucking maelstrom of destruction wherein he attempts to involve the race of man. From the center of this violent spiritual storm blow fierce winds of confusion, cross currents of contradiction, and a deadly undertow of despair and spiritual suicide. The son of God is no longer to be a child, bewildered by such confusion; rather he is to be mature enough to keep the doctrine of God in clear focus, and to be able to expose and refute false doctrine.
- **Doctrine is important** - There are those who discount the value of "doctrine." But the importance of Biblical doctrine is established in this text of Ephesians; "every wind of doctrine" is the means by which the prince of darkness marches against even the souls of the saved.
- **Tricky men** - The outcast angel, who disguises himself as an angel of light, can only mount his assault inasmuch as he has the cooperation of men. So what kind of men are these? They are men who engage in "trickery," who use "craftiness in deceitful scheming." In other words, these men sit around and deliberately think up spiritual scams to defraud those who might otherwise believe in the doctrines of God, robbing them of both material possessions here and now and a mansion by and by.

No, Christians are to be mature, no longer children, stretching for the full growth which belongs to the fulness of Christ. This required maturity includes a solid understanding of sound doctrine, and the spiritual capacity to see through doctrinal schemes proposed in the church by Satan's agents. Hence cometh the exhortation: "grow up!"

Excitement From Ephesians

Truth In Love

The antidote to error is truth. The men who engage in trickery, those crafty scammers who devise false doctrine, have a deeply vested interest in their lies, and oppose truth with every fiber of their beings. A slick politician, a head of state perhaps, might even go to the extent of having some of those who supported him eliminated because they knew too much, and might, under oath, divulge such information as said head of state would rather have concealed. The point is clear: those whose bellows produce "every wind of doctrine," those who engage in "the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming," will confuse the issue, attack personal reputations, terrorize and otherwise intimidate, and kill to keep the lie going. But there is a powerful antidote to error, and a certain cure for confusion: TRUTH!

- **Jesus is the truth** - The aged John, looking back over the history of the church up to the end of his life near 100 AD, comprehended the importance of truth in combating error and confusion. The inspired stylus struck, and the Spirit eternally immortalized these words: "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth" (III John 4). The aged apostle called Jesus the Word - the means by which the great God is revealed to the sons of men. The only begotten Son, "who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (John 1:18). No marvel, then, that John the aged, looking at the confusion and error sweeping into the church of his later days, would quote the Lord's signal comment about Himself: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).
- **The church consists of truth-lovers** - "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice," noted the Lord Jesus (John 18:37). Thus even in the church Christ periodically allows false doctrine to cascade through so that only lovers of truth remain; He sends, so to speak, these deluding influences "with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved" (II Thessalonians 2:10). Hence it is that the church, which consists of truth-lovers, is periodically purged of those who are not, and truly is "the pillar and support of the truth" (I Timothy 3:15).
- **Truth is what is to be spoken** - The gospel of the Christ does not need to be peddled, haggled over in the market place of ideas, or cheapened until somebody finally buys. Terms of pardon are announced with clarity and not snuck in as a quiet afterthought. The members of the body of Christ are not to be tossed about on the seas of doctrinal confusion nor swept away by the tides of men's philosophies; rather they are to speak "the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Truth; always the truth. "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Truth about heaven, truth about hell, truth about sin, truth about salvation ... all truth is to be step-by-step spoken.
- **Truth in love** - Love is really defined as caring about someone else's eternity. John 3:16 illustrates it; so does the death of Jesus on the cross. Truth in anger won't do. Neither will truth spoken with the motive of glorifying the speaker, or simply proving that the speaker is right. If I know all truth but do not have love (in a slight paraphrase of Paul), I am nothing. The truth-speaker has to desire earnestly the salvation and edification of his hearers. Otherwise he is in as much violation of the scripture as the scammers and schemers.

Love and truth are opposite sides of the same coin. Love without truth does not exist; truth without love is a colossal waste. The public relations image of the church of the Lord is not generated by new carpets or exciting youth programs; what is to be recognized in the community is not that church meets "heart-felt needs" or engages in other fleshly promotional nonsense. But if the twin beacons of truth and love shine brightly, every truth-seeker in the community will eventually be found.

Excitement From Ephesians

Grow Up In All Aspects

The major challenge in raising kids is getting them to grow up. They can turn from one birthday to another, simply by letting the calendar flip twelve times, but helping them arrive at adult-level responsibilities is another story. And God the Father has somewhat the same problem with His spiritual children. His plainly stated desire is that each of the brethren come to "a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). Indeed, the purpose of church leadership, as it works inside the body, is to bring each of God's favorite children to that level of maturity.

Brethren in Christ are not to be a bunch of pampered, spoiled brats. "Grow up!" is what they are told.

- **Grow up in doctrine** - Kids, because of lack of experience, are more easily taken in by con artists than mature adults. Not having this backdrop of experience by which to gauge the truthfulness of salesmen, they are often sold a "bill of goods." Little children in Christ oft have the same type of difficulty; unaccustomed yet to the meat of the word, they are more open to be taken in by the variegated offerings of flesh-pleasing doctrines available in a religious free market. The leadership of the church is obviously to instruct extensively in sound doctrine and teach these children so they become skilled in the word of righteousness. They are to be "no longer children"; they are no longer to be tossed about by doctrinal waves or towed away by subtle undercurrents.
- **Grow up in character** - Childish immaturities are to be laid aside. Lying, stealing, anger, malice, and general foolishness are to be replaced by sensibility and sensitivity, concern for others and the reputation of the good name of Jesus the Christ. Development of this maturity of character does not happen by osmosis; each of the children is going to have to discipline himself for the purpose of godliness. General negative attitudes and critical spirits are to be put away and be replaced by tender-hearted openness and edifying fellowship. Such character change is the result of consistent effort, assisted by the Holy Spirit in conjunction with His word. And such character change is real; while not developed overnight, it is steady under all circumstances and challenges, and it is not just a false front for "lookin' good" while amongst church people.
- **Grow up in service** - Children tend to be selfish and self-centered. "Mine!" is the oft-heard scream from the toy room. Spiritual infants exhibit similar childish behavior, complaining about others, unreasonably defending their "bailiwicks," and desiring to use the church to carry out their personal agendas. But "we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the Head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joints supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:15,16). Note several points:
 - The whole body, because it is Christ's, has priority over the desires of the individual member;
 - Every person has something important to supply;
 - Every Christian is to work;
 - Every Christian is to work properly, with a good attitude, a willing spirit, and a desire to do the job right; and
 - This causes the body to grow and be built up in love.
 - Every child of God is indeed saved to serve.

Normal children want to grow up. The five year old wants to be ten. The ten year old wants to turn sixteen and get his driver's license and a job. The sixteen year old wants to grow up and be out on his own. The challenge is getting the child to take the real preparatory steps and learn the real lessons so he is ready for adulthood.

Normal "children" in Christ want to grow up in all aspects into Christ. Who is holding you back?

Excitement From Ephesians

Futility of the Mind

The Bible contains the answers to life's questions. The Bible reveals God to men through Jesus Christ. And the Bible exposes the members of the human race for what they really are. Not only, then, does the Bible teach Christians about God; it also teaches Christians about men. Learn both lessons well. "Beware of men," warned Him who knew what was in man. "Be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:17,16). "See to it no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception," His apostle sounded.

So what about the enlightenment quotient (EQ) of our great universities? How much great truth is there in psychology and psychotherapy, and their ability to deal with "psychos"? How fare the marriage counselors and their handle on the affairs of the heart! And how about the experts on child-rearing? Or the great accomplishments of the educational establishment? Man, for all his pomp and circumstance, is bluster and folly.

Hear, then, the wisdom of Paul: "This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you no longer walk just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 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; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness" (Ephesians 4:17-19). Note what the Holy Spirit calls "the Gentile walk":

- **Futile minds** - A mind is a terrible thing to waste. But the thrust of minds of the Gentiles, of those outside of Christ, is wasted in trivial pursuits. The buying, selling, building, and romantic games of the pagan world all end up in futility; it was there, now it is gone.
- **Darkened understanding** - The political ramifications of humanism and the scientific ramifications of evolution, and the moral ramifications of both, illustrate the pervasiveness and destructive power of darkened understanding. Surely understanding is darkened when "gangsta rap" and Marilyn Manson are turned loose on the kids, and then no one can figure out where school violence comes from.
- **Excluded from the life of God** - This issue is the key one. To be excluded from God's life, to be excluded from love, joy, peace, patience, etc., to be excluded from the happiness and contentment of His fellowship, and to be bereft of His comfort and protection stagger the mind of anyone who has an inkling of who God is. But such is darkness, such is ignorance, and such is the callousness and hardness of the unregenerated heart.
- **Given over to sensuality** - The Gentiles of the world really have no hope of life after death, and have shut down the section of their brains which indicates an accountability to God for deeds done in the flesh. Consequently, each is essentially a humanist, pursuing whatever sensual fantasies "turn him on." From pornography to pop culture, from fast women to fast foods, from music to muscle cars, from shopping to shipping ... anything that becomes the driving force in the life of Homo Sapiens other than the desire to please God fits the category of sensuality, pleasing the flesh. Businesses spring up, not only to meet legitimate need, but to cater to sensuality, while the sensual businessmen themselves, often groping for money and power, promote the fleshly rebellion to achieve these ends. They all "have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness." The freighter ships headed for Babylon, heavily laden, sitting low in the water, carry their "cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones... and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives" (Revelation 18:12,13).

The Christian, though he once was essentially a Gentile and operated from that futile framework, is to grow up and grow past the sensuality of the world. The command comes from the Lord Himself: "Walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk."

Excitement From Ephesians

Learning Christ

The three pound brain of man does not create a very big god when it charges off into its vain imaginings. The prophets of old chortled at the ancient pagans, and reeved on Israel, for the stupidity of the gods they worshiped and served. Isaiah, for example, tells how a man uses a part of a tree to warm his house and some of the wood to cook his food. "But the rest he makes into a god, his graven image. He falls down before it and worships; he prays to it and says, 'Deliver me, for you are my god.'" (Isaiah 44:17).

But there is the one and only, the truly big God. "It is I who made the earth," said He, "and I created man upon it. I stretched out the heavens with My hands, and I ordained all their host" (Isaiah 45:12). This is the incomprehensible God, the God who is and who always was and who is to come. The three pound brain of man did not conjure Him up - the three pound brain of man generally thinks so small that it does not notice the handiwork of the Almighty; it focuses on the scuff mark on the bark of the tree, and never notes the grandeur of the massive forest.

So God has to reveal Himself to man; He has to teach man about Himself. Hence, enter Jesus, the Word. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:1-4). When the Word became flesh, then the three pound brain of man had something it could comprehend and thus could be upgraded spiritually (enlightened). Curious and interested man learns Christ, sitting humbly at the feet of teachers who can show him the way until he can maneuver accurately through the scriptures on his own.

Because the pagans worship gods of essentially their own creation, their gods encourage the Gentiles to follow sensuality. Whether man worships the Baals of the past or the Hindu gods of the present, the result is always personal corruption and the consequent degradation of society. Writing to the brethren in Ephesus, the apostle Paul thus notes, "But you did not learn Christ in this way" (Ephesians 4:20).

- **If you have heard Him** - The apostle, not being personally acquainted with all the influx of new Christians, puts forth a challenge: "If indeed you have heard Him" (Ephesians 4:21). God, having spoken to the Israelite fathers through the prophets, has now spoken to spiritual Israel through His Son, the great prophet who speaks from heaven. The Lord Jesus, during the days of His earthly sojourn, noted what would happen: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27). Looking to His onrushing new covenant, and conscious of those dead in their sins and transgressions, the Lord promised, "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live" (John 5:25). The challenge was: Have you heard Him?
- **If you have been taught in Him** - It is one thing to have heard the voice of the Lord calling the lost sheep out of darkness and into the light. It is another for the sheep to be taught a whole new way of life. That is why the Lord is so emphatic in what is called The Great Commission; not only were we told to make and immerse disciples, but we are also to teach them "to observe all" that Jesus commanded. Implicit in the challenge given to the Ephesian brethren was that the evangelists, prophets, shepherds and teachers were doing their jobs; the question was: Have you been taught in Him?

Learning Christ is more than learning about Christ. Learning Christ draws on all the good things taught about Jesus and being able to make the spiritual applications. Therefore "the truth is in Jesus," and that truth crucifies the old man of sin in Jesus' crucifixion. That truth buries the old man with Jesus in the waters of immersion. That truth resurrects the new creature to walk in newness of life, raised with Jesus and seated with Him in the heavenlies. That truth pervades the entire life of the true believer, giving him grace and glory.

Excitement From Ephesians

Lay Aside The Old Man

The American way of life is not the Biblical way of life. There is still a surface acknowledgment of God, and an occasional public reference to Jesus in America's public life, but below that surface is a raging riptide of sensuality and incoming waters of a rampant paganism. The modern American, if he really learns Christ, if he really hears Him who speaks from heaven, will note the words of the apostle Paul to the brethren from Ephesus: "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" (Ephesians 4:22). The modern American, if he has heard the truth which is in Jesus, will do much more than merely add regular church attendance to his lifestyle.

- **Your former manner of life** - The American way of life, because it has at its core a set of values based on the Bible, perhaps has the least contradictions of any on earth with the new way of life brought from heaven through our Lord Jesus. The new creature in Christ, however, must systematically review the basic values which he assigns to his activities and the foci of his attention. Just because men in Georgia go 'coon hunting during the full moon or men in Montana skip assembly on the opening day of elk season doesn't mean that is what a brother in Christ does. Just because the ladies of New York all have jobs or California women dress in trendy styles does not mean that is the standard for chaste and respectful Christian women. A good work ethic, respect for others, common courtesy, and disciplined habits, on the other hand, are not to be left behind simply because they were a part of an individual's upbringing. "But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil" is the injunction from the word (I Thessalonians 5:21,22). The Christian, now "born of God," is to remember that these things constitute his "former manner of life," and whatever needs to be done away with must be eliminated without regret.
- **Lay aside the old self** - The old self had its distinctive personality quirks, its likes and dislikes, prides and prejudices, faults and foibles. The new self, in the image of Christ, willingly lays aside the old self. Those offensive personality quirks, the moodiness and irrational behavior, are gone with the Spirit wind. A new standard for evaluation has come in; likes and dislikes are now measured by the word of God rather than an arbitrary set of fickle and ephemeral whims. Pride in ancestry and racial and social distinctions disappear in the blood of the cross. And faults and foibles which cause a brother to stumble rather than be edified are hastily shelved, that the name of Jesus be not dishonored.
- **Corruption in accordance with the lusts of deceit** - Those who contemplate the nature of the old man must recognize first of all that he was in a deceived condition. Sin entered the old man stealthily. "Sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me" was the notation of the former Saul of Tarsus (Romans 7:11). The old man was corrupted when destructive lusts draped themselves in come-hither packaging, and when the luscious apple turned out to be poisoned fruit. The new man needs to recognize that the old man's carcass was crawling with the maggots of malice, blighted with bitterness, crippled with complaining, and the shudder of spiritual death had already racked that frame.

The command from heaven is clear: lay aside the old man. Whether a man's background is from the fetid atmosphere of Western Europe's socialism or from the jungle juju of darkest Africa, whether it is from the aboriginal cultures of any of the six inhabited continents or from the steel and glass climate of modern civilization, the message is the same: lay aside the old man. He has nothing much in the way of treasure to bring to the kingdom of heaven.

Excitement From Ephesians

Put On The New Self

The truth is in Jesus. And that truth needs to be learned from the objective word of God, for which there is "no prophecy of scripture [that] is a matter of one's own interpretation" (II Peter 1:20). You, then, said the apostle those who have been taught thusly, are to "lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (Ephesians 4:22-24). There is a "new self" and that "new self" is to be put on every day.

- **Creation of the new self** - The power of God is an integral component of the gospel of God. "The gospel," averred Paul, "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). "The word of the cross is ... to us who are being saved," he announced in another place, "the power of God" (I Corinthians 1:18). Satan's snare has clenched jaws, and Hades' prison barred walls, but God, strong and mighty to save, can extricate the trapped and set the captive free. But this power not only frees the prisoner; it reforms him. A "second birth from above" indeed occurs in the waters of immersion. If any man is in Christ, he is the product of an entirely new creative act by the power of an Almighty God. He is a new creature, secure enough to be truly humble, lofty enough to serve.
- **In the likeness of God** - "The first man, Adam, became a living soul." In this way the apostle quotes Moses. The first man, formed of the dust of the ground, was from the earth, and in consequence was earthy. "The last Adam," signified Paul of Christ, "became a life-giving spirit" (I Corinthians 15:45). The One from heaven is spiritual; the one from earth slouched his way to destruction. The One from heaven is strong; the one from earth was weak. The purpose of the covenant, which came through Christ is to efface the weak likeness of Adam and to replace it with the spiritual visage of Christ, who is the image of God. "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29). Against this backdrop Paul noted that the new self was created in the likeness of God. The parallel in Paul's Colossian letter emphasizes the same point. The brethren, he said, "have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according the image of the One who created him" (Colossians 3:10). And, as was noted earlier in the Ephesian epistle, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works ..." (Ephesians 2:10). The new self, or the new creation, is not a mere re-enactment of Genesis Chapter One in which it was stated that in the image of God He created "them" as male and female. This new creation is a mega-spiritual event in which "there is no male nor female" (Galatians 3:28). Adam, in the freshest innocence of Eden, was still of the earth, earthy. Those formed in the image of the second Adam from above bear, and will bear, the image of the heavenly.
- **Righteousness and holiness of the truth** - God is righteous. God is holy. Man, by contrast, and in the steps of Adam, slumps into unrighteousness and worldliness, deceived by falsehood. The new self is the opposite, created through immersion into Christ, "in righteousness and holiness of the truth." The new self is capable, because of God's power, of walking righteously and blamelessly always before the Lord.

The concept of the new creation in Christ Jesus is a major theme of the sacred oracles. The new creation is not a mere Adam, redeemed but with the same weaknesses. The new self has the triumph song of Jesus' resurrection resounding throughout his inner man, and he marches in victory over sin and death, strengthened indeed by the Spirit of Christ and through the words which are spirit and life.

Excitement From Ephesians

Renewed in the Mind

The Wesleyan "holiness" doctrine of perfection was based on the Calvinistic foundation of "total depravity." This foundation, rooted in earlier Augustinian and even earlier Gnostic teachings, essentially stated that natural man cannot think one good thought or grasp one spiritual concept. Once that assumption is granted, then the conclusion is that the Holy Spirit must perform an extra-Biblical [outside the Bible] operation on the mind of the totally depraved, cause him against his will (he is totally depraved, remember) to be born again; then he can repent and believe the gospel. Having thus been "saved" against his will, he cannot therefore lose his salvation.

This supposed regenerated is now "saved," but he is still carnal. He still has a fleshly mind, according to this teaching, and must still continue to act like a sinner; he is a sinner, just forgiven. The problem John Wesley, Charles Finney, and others of similar ilk encountered was the strong injunction from the word of God to lay aside every encumbrance and sin, to stop sinning, to be holy, and to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. Having resorted once to a supposed extra-Biblical operation of the Holy Spirit, they could easily return to that dry well for another. Enter, then, the "second work of grace," a falling of the Holy Spirit a second time to produce sanctification and sinlessness from which the "born again" likewise cannot fall. Many songs, from contemporary music as well as those from the nineteenth century, reflect this underlying false theology. Examples: "Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me." "Mercy drops 'round us are falling but for the showers [of blessing, a prophetic reference in Ezekiel 34:26 to the coming indwelling Spirit] we plead." The result is the current mega-church, Promise Keepers' atmosphere in which "religious experience" easily tosses aside the word of God and rushes far outside the banks of reason and revelation.

But because these spiritual lemmings scurry to their destruction, shall those who claim to follow the Bible revolt in a mad scramble in the opposite direction? Or shall those who are rooted and grounded refuse to be tossed here or there by winds of strange doctrine. Wesley and Finney were correct in noting the perfection, holiness, and blamelessness which the Father desires; they were far abeam as to how this is to be accomplished.

The scripture always appeals to the reason of man. God will never save or change man apart from his willing participation, and the Holy Spirit never strengthens the inner man apart from His written word. But God does indeed have mechanisms in place by which His sons and daughters can become partakers of the divine nature and sharers in His holiness.

- **Born again through the word** - Unregenerate man can reason, and unregenerate man does make moral decisions. Therefore God broadcasts His word into the darkness, and those who hear the words, follow the reasoning, and make the correct moral decision are those called out of darkness into His marvelous light. "You have been born again," said Peter, "through the living and abiding word of God" (I Peter 1:23). Through the individual's informed decision to repent and be immersed in the name of Christ, heeding the call of God, he is now a "new self," created in the image of Jesus, with full potential, accomplished through the tremendous power of God.
- **Renewing of the mind** - It is one thing to have potential; it is another to bring the potential to reality. Here again, God has provided the mechanism, involving once more reason and revelation. "Be transformed," He has said through His bond-slave Paul, "by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). The mind must undergo the rigorous process of being renewed, or reprogrammed with the word of God. Whenever the scripture speaks, it emphasizes the responsibility incumbent upon the Christian: "You lay aside the old self," "you be renewed in the spirit of your mind," and you "put on the new self" (Ephesians 4:22-24). And as in the initial new birth, then the tremendous power of God will step-by-step transform the new creature in the image of the Lord.

Because of the huge amount of labor involved in renewing the mind (memorizing both Old and New Testaments, for example), do not deny the potential. And because of the greatness of God's power, do not deny the work of renewing the mind.

Excitement From Ephesians

Speak Truth

The whole purpose of God is predicated on truth. Children of God are brought forth by the "word of truth." Those who number the ranks of unbelievers turn their ears away "from the truth." Even that great umbrella, love, "does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth" (I Corinthians 13:6).

The devil, of course, runs the counter program. His whole scheme is predicated upon lies and deception, smoke and mirrors, illusion and broken promises. It is worthy of noting periodically the words of our Lord concerning Satan: "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" (John 8:44). Hence it is that those who drift over to Satan's camp take his nature, become liars likewise, and he is therefore the father of lies.

"Put on the new self," exhorted Jesus' apostle to the Gentiles, "which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another" (Ephesians 4:24,25).

- **Lay aside falsehood** - The habit of telling "fibs," "fudging just a bit," or otherwise prevaricating does not miraculously go away. Like all other bad habits, it has to be systematically attacked, and the thought patterns in the brain altered so that the Christian always tells the truth (or under certain conditions says nothing at all, as Jesus did before Pilate).
- **Speak truth** - It isn't enough to believe the truth; the exordium from the Highest is to actually speak truth. Truth is not only to be spoken in the smallest arenas of interpersonal relationships, but truth is to be spoken in regard to the great affairs of eternity. If a Christian man were to be known for his honesty in business dealings, known to tell the truth in personal matters, but silent about the way of salvation to the lost, and unwilling to take a firm stand for righteousness within the church, he would be a colossal failure. A failure to tell the whole truth here is still to engage in lying.
- **With his neighbor** - In a discourse with one of the Jewish authorities on the law of Moses, Jesus pressured the scribe. This lawyer had just quoted from the Old Testament about loving God with the whole heart and loving your neighbor as yourself. Jesus responded, "Do this, and you will live." Luke, the gospel writer, is interesting in his commentary here: "but wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor' " (Luke 10:26-29). He wanted to weasel about the neighbor, loving only those whom he chose. Jesus clarified the issue by telling the parable of the good Samaritan to illustrate that a neighbor is anyone from the human race. The apostle Paul leaves that general principle in place, requiring that Christians speak truth in all their dealings with men, and carries it one step farther.
- **We are members of one another** - Unless an individual is insane, carried away by strange religion, or having to deal with injury or disease, one part of his body is not going to deliberately inflict pain on another part. One of the most painful things one Christian can do is to lie to another part of the body of Christ. Truth needs to be spoken especially in the church.

Truth is foundational to all of God's other workings. Satan the destroyer is the father of lies. Men and women who claim to be of the faith above all else need to be truthful to all men, and especially honest in their dealings with one another.

Excitement From Ephesians

Handling Anger

Road rage isn't the only kind of rage. Anger of every kind, frustration, "losing your cool," and "flying off the handle" are as old as the human race, and deadly or destructive to the rest of the family. Whether anger comes as a flash-in-the-pan tempest, or a simmering, brooding, inner sulk plotting revenge, someone else is going to be hurt by the verbal outburst or pounded by the physical abuse. And the angered individual himself is going to be destroyed on the inside.

But there is time for a certain type of anger; there is an anger that is not destructive, that is indeed necessary for the maintenance of order and a sense of right. "Be angry," says the Holy Spirit to the new creature, created in righteousness and holiness of the truth, "and yet do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity" (Ephesians 4:25-27). James adds. "But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1:19,20). God and the devil are both involved in the general handling of anger; this should cause us to pause and reflect.

- **Do not let the sun go down on your anger** - Anger held in the crucible of the human heart, sloshed around and occasionally inspected, turns into an acid lake called the gall of bitterness. The writer of Hebrews warns, "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled" (Hebrews 12:15). This bitterness not only destroys the one who has harbored anger in his heart, but it works to ruin all who come in contact with the one so poisoned. That is why anger must be handled today; the situation must be dealt with, and the child of God must move on. When we were first married, my wife and I were given this advice: Never go to sleep until you have settled your differences. It made for some late nights and not much sleep on occasion, but the advice was good, and prevented the formation of bitterness. "Do not let the sun go down on your anger."
- **Do not give the devil an opportunity** - One of the major character traits of Satan is that he is violent. "He was a murderer from the beginning," was the sober exposé of the Lord (John 8:44). As the devil worked in Cain, bending and twisting his thoughts, Cain's anger welled up and burst into the violence which left Abel's blood crying from the ground. Anger handled improperly or not derived from scriptural grounds gives the devil the opportunity to turn that wrath into the violence in which he so fiendishly delights.
- **Be angry, and do not sin** - There is such a thing as righteous anger. The Father, of whose divine nature all His children are to partake, has a wrathful side. He has a righteous anger; and that anger breaks forth at the proper time to teach lessons, execute justice, and quell violence. Such anger is a totally selfless, carefully controlled and reasoned anger, which only acts after great patience. That is why the notation from James to be slow to anger is of such great significance. There is a time to be angry with children, but it is to be a controlled patient wrath expressed as a result of defiance or rebellion. There is a time to be angry with injustice in the political arena, or unfair treatment of a co-worker. But in every case, in the likeness of God, that anger is to work to teach a positive lesson or provide a constructive long-term solution. Sinful anger is a slap in-the-face response to a problem rather than a careful, controlled action leading to some sort of resolution of the difficulty.

Disappointments in people, difficulty in circumstances, unrighteous behavior in others, and failure in self can and often do result in feelings of rage or anger. The new creature will heed very painstakingly the advice of the Spirit and handle with great care the explosive package called ANGER! "Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.

Excitement From Ephesians

Labor With Your Hands

The curse has not been lifted. When the sentence was pronounced from heaven, all Adam could do was to hang his head and longingly remember the blessed days in Eden, the days before the words were hammered with the gavel of God's justice: "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the dust of the ground..." (Genesis 3:17-19). If man wants to eat, he is going to have to work, and to work hard.

At the core, then, all men know the principle that they are going to have to earn their living, and pay for what they get. They know that here is no such thing as a free lunch, and if something looks too good to be true, it usually isn't true. But that natural desire of something for nothing is there, and it makes men susceptible to various con-artists who compose sundry tunes centered about that something-for-nothing theme. The whole modern gambling industry, whether it involves a state-run lottery or a Vegas-style private casino, plays on man's desire to break the curse and not be burdened with sweating out a living; and in the process it extracts a percentage of the fruit of each participant's labor while holding in full view the very, very few who are actually winners.

Government gets into the scam in a big way through welfare and other entitlement programs. The largest section of the federal budget in the U.S.A. is called "transfer payments." While it is not legal for me to steal your wallet and use your money to pay my friend's rent for a month, it is legal for me to vote for a Congressman who does exactly the same thing, with the tax collecting and distribution sectors of the government serving as middleman.

But what says the word of God? "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" (Ephesians 4:28). The new self in Christ enjoys working.

- **Steal no more** - No more pilfering company tools. No more wasting time on the job. No more food stamps, grants, or welfare benefits. No more stealing, whatever its form.
- **Labor** - The old self might have been L-A-Z-Y, but the new self is not. The new self, in the image of the glorified Christ, likes labor, knowing that, until the curse on Adam and his descendants is lifted in the age to come, the working environment is where God helps His children to learn discipline. The competitive climate of the business world, coupled with the saint's recognition of his dependence upon the Father, causes him to develop Biblical attitudes of quality production and smiling service, as well as a disciplined prayer life. Under these conditions, the curse is transformed into a blessing.
- **Performing what is good** - Not all labor is for good. Terrorists slave away to prepare and execute their schemes. Top bankers often work 80-hour weeks to carry out their grandiloquent and worldwide fraud. But the Father wants His kids to labor in what is good, to carry on production at a basic level, to engage in the sales and service of that which is honorable, and to build up society in general rather than destroy.
- **So that he may share** - God not only expects the Christian to labor to provide for his household, but He requires the man of God to share with others. Part of this sharing is for those who disseminate the gospel as preachers and teachers; part of this sharing is for brethren in need; and part of this sharing is for people of the world - orphans and widows, for example - in their distress.

Quit your complaining, and get to work!

Excitement From Ephesians

Edifying Comments

So goes the old saying, "Slings and stones may break my bones, but names can never hurt me." That proverb from the past is actually a defense mechanism set in motion by someone trying to be creatively positive; the truth is that name-calling in some senses hurts worse and can be more destructive than slings and stones. Of the name-calling tongues, James says, "Behold how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire" (James 3:5). It isn't so much the hand that rocks the cradle that rules the world, but the tongue that shapes the image of the one in the tiny bedstead.

Hence it is that God's word expresses great concern about the tongue and what it says. Whether it is the next generation of human beings to inhabit earth or the next generation of spiritual disciples to take its proper place in the kingdom of God, each is powerfully affected by words - words which stab and destroy, or words which strengthen and encourage. "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth," states the former blasphemer, the former Saul of Tarsus, now Paul the apostle, "but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Ephesians 4:29). This is a powerful and important exhortation from the holy word of God.

- **No unwholesome word** - God wants no name calling. No one is to be denoted a fool or an idiot. Kids are not allowed to call others names, whether it be nerd, dork, or worse. Parents are not to label their children monsters, shy, trouble, or ne'er-do-wells. In the church there is to be no malicious gossip. Unwholesome words are slashing stilettos to the heart, and, if our Lord Jesus is to be believed, equivalent to murder (Matthew 5:22).
- **From your mouth** - The natural tendency of the tongue, when the individual is faced with pressure to conform to God's standard, is to misdirect the attention elsewhere, to another's mouth. The Holy Spirit emphasizes here whose mouth He is concerned about: your mouth. There is probably plenty to work on: "If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well" (James 3:2).
- **Only good words, for edification** - All good words do not necessarily edify; sometimes perfectly good words are used to cover for, to wrongly sympathize with, or otherwise to excuse a person when he should not be justified. Edification stands at the summit of conversation; sometimes the good words here carry the sting of cleansing salt spray on a wound, to be followed with healing discourse. Thus it is that every word spoken by a Christian is to be carefully weighed and packaged before it is dumped into the traffic of conversation. There is to be no careless palaver; the edification of all hearers constitute the rule of order.
- **According to the need of the moment** - The right moment is here, then it passes forever. The saint must needs be equipped with a ready tongue, and that tongue must be pre-programmed to give forth words which help someone on the way to heaven. Otherwise, when the moment for injecting words for edification arrives, the representative of Christ will be dumbstruck, or loose his tongue in a string of destructive comments.
- **Grace to those who hear** - Grace has to do with giving to others and forgiving others. Grace in conversation is that extra effort made to encourage the struggling and motivate the straggling. Grace is getting involved positively when it would be easier to remain uninvolved.

Words are powerful. When a torrent of invective is unleashed, who knows what the unchecked and unbridled flow will damage. Gracious words, however, carefully arranged to stack up building blocks in another person's life, lead him to eternity. God saves and destroys by His word; to a lesser extent, so do His children. Make sure the words edify.

Excitement From Ephesians

Grieving the Spirit

God is a jealous God. He is not insanely or unreasonably jealous, but He created all men carefully, individually in the first place, and redeemed each who obeyed the gospel in the second. Thus He rightfully has a vested interest in continuing the fellowship which he produced by greatly extending Himself, and He is rightfully grieved when some distraction begins to pull the Christian away from that intimate companionship. The plea comes from the very heart of heaven: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30).

- **Put them away** - There are attitudes, actions, and statements which drive others away; after all, who wants to be close to a thorn bush or intimate with a spiky cactus? "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice" (Ephesians 4:31). These are all destructive toys and ploys, and sound like a description of many families' chaotic and disorderly lives. The acid of bitterness shrivels the marrow of compassion, produces the poison of criticism, and spreads the stain of destruction through all interpersonal relationships. Unbridled wrath and explosive anger are the grenades of a still violent pagan personality, with no one around knowing for sure whether or not the pin is pulled. Clamor and shouting are the immature extension of childishness, the pounding on pots and pans in a strident demand for attention. Slander and malice are the result of Satan's desire to cause trouble in Paradise, saying destructive things when nothing needs to be said, planning to create difficulty where the waters could remain smoothly and swiftly flowing. These destructive toys and ploys, which sound like a description of many families' chaotic and disorderly lives, need "to be put away."
- **Implement these** - Those who make a claim to godliness are given a list of qualities to integrate into the fiber of their lives: "And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). There is a bumper sticker, which encourages others to "commit random and senseless acts of kindness." This is typical of the irrationality of the modern liberal, essentially anti-Christian world view. The very essence of kindness is rooted in creative thoughtfulness; there can be no such things as "senseless acts of kindness." God wants His people to be very considerate of other's feelings and needs; God wants the saints to be tender-hearted toward one another, recognizing how easily the other can fall into temptation or be carried off into wrong thought realms through Satan's influence; and God wants His children to be gracious and forgiving toward each other, in imitation of the big-heartedness and gentleness of the Christ who so graciously welcomes all who will come on His generous terms.
- **Don't grieve the Spirit** - It is a basic scriptural principle: if someone does not love his brother whom he has seen, he cannot love God whom he has not seen (1 John 4:20). If someone claims to walk in the light, but is bitter or wrathful rather than tender and forgiving, then he has no fellowship with spiritual brethren and consequently no fellowship with God. And the Holy Spirit grieves over this, since love was the purpose for which He was initially sent into heart of the believer (Romans 5:5).

The indwelling Spirit is the pilgrim's guarantee of the resurrection to eternal life at Jesus' second coming. If He remains grieved over the condition of him who was once called out of darkness, then the guarantee is off. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

Excitement From Ephesians

Imitators of God?

"For we are His workmanship" avouched the apostle Paul to the Ephesian brethren, "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 2:10). The workmanship referred to here is not the initial forming of man at his conception; this workmanship is that which results from the washing of regeneration, the spiritual rebirth at immersion (Titus 3:5). This new creature, created in the image of Christ rather than Adam, has a powerful potential for carrying out the will of God. That which was born of woman has a limited potential, limited by that which was transmitted through the gene pool of the father and mother; that which was "born of God" has the potential of the Father. While that which was brought into existence in the image of Adam was weak through the flesh, that which is created in the image of Christ Jesus comes in the strength of the Spirit of the living God.

- **The apostle exhorts the brethren, and not unreasonably** - "Lay aside the old self," he says, and "put on the new self" which was created in the likeness of God. The exhortation goes on: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma" (Ephesians 5:1,2).
- **Imitators of God?** - The words of the apostle for the brethren to be imitators of God brings up some interesting questions: Does God expect more of Christians than what the saints can really accomplish? Are this statement, and similar statements, such as "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48), merely goals to strive for, but which can never be achieved? Or maybe "imitators of God" means something less than "imitators of God"?
- **Imitators of God!** - While others may be of post-modern persuasion, and quibble over whether "is" means "is," faithful brethren operate on the basis of sound doctrine and that God communicates clearly through words which He carefully defines when it is necessary for Him to do so. Thus the Almighty has pronounced that partakers of the divine nature are not vaguely exhorted to be some sort of general "perfect" but they are specifically commanded to be "perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect," or to be "imitators of God." Furthermore the character of the Father has been clearly and completely communicated through the Son of God who is "the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature" (Hebrews 1:3). The point is clear and simple: Christians are to be imitators of God, to be holy as He is holy, to be sinless as He is sinless, to be righteous as He is righteous, to be loving as He is loving, and to be forgiving as He is forgiving. Furthermore, God has the mechanism in place to move an individual from the pew to perfection, in the **Process** of renewing the mind, the **Experience** of suffering, studying and living the **Word**, and strengthened through the **Spirit** within (PEWS).
- **Walk in love** - The imitator of God foremost loves as God loves, exhibited in the demonstration of Christ's death on the cross. The one who claims to love others but who will not sacrifice time, convenience, or energy to save the lost is full of hot air. The word says to "walk in love," not "talk" in love. As Christ loved the brethren, and gave Himself up for them, so also imitators of God will pick up their crosses and get walking.
- **An offering and sacrifice** - He who thinks that he would be an imitator of God without suffering is out of touch with reality. The attitude of each man and woman in Christ is to be the same as expressed by Paul: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Colossians 1:24). Those who suffer as Christ suffered, walking as He walked, offering themselves as living and holy sacrifices, are thus a fragrant aroma to God.

The scriptures call the disciples of Christ to be imitators of God. This is not out of reach, but it requires the same sacrificing desire to save the lost and preserve the saved as was resident in the Lord. But since the love of God has been poured out in the hearts of the brethren through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5), then the cross-bearers can joyfully suffer in carrying the message of the gospel of the glory of Christ to a darkened world, knowing they are "beloved children," and coming to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.

Excitement From Ephesians

None of These "Diseases"

There is no such thing as sin these days. Alcoholism is a "disease." Uncontrolled anger is "chemical imbalance." Criminal behavior is the result of "social injustice." And sexual immorality stems from "a bad gene" which is no doubt currently being isolated by some politically correct chemist. While there are genetic factors involved (it has something to do with being descended from Adam), and while body chemistry and upbringing play a part in behavior, God solved the basis of these problems by having the "old man" buried. And the all-knowing Father doesn't "tush-tush" His children about bad body chemistry or a poor gene pool; He knows the problem is sin and He speaks in terms of "the body of sin" being done away with (Romans 6:6).

The new creature in Christ, then, is to "lay aside the old self" and "put on the new self" (Ephesians 4:22,24), and as such he is to be an imitator of God Himself. The responsibility for his action and attitude is laid squarely upon his shoulders; there is no "social injustice" or "drinking disease" to fall back on. "But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness or silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 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. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 5:3-6).

- **Not even named among you** - God wants the moral level of Christians so high and holy that no one would even think that there would be any possibility of immorality. The Father wants the thought patterns so pure that there is no public hint of stain. And the Holy One of Israel wants the brethren's business dealings to be so honest and enough on the generous side that no one would even consider calling one of the saints greedy. But while immorality and, to a little lesser extent, impurity are fairly easy to prove, greed sometimes is hard to identify. God wants everyone of His kids to engage in honest introspection, and roust out immorality, impurity, and greed so that they are not even named amongst brethren.
- **No filthiness** - The natural tendency of man is to let his thoughts descend to the gutter and toilet level. And what a man or woman thinks about sooner or later begins to come out of the mouth. There are to be no off-color jokes, no double entendres, no raunchy remarks or bar-stool behavior. For the saints to possess the mental purity necessary to produce a spiritual level of conversation, they have to remember the GIGO principle: Garbage In, Garbage Out; or, positively, Good stuff In, Good stuff Out. To have a mind that thinks of God rather than sexual innuendo, the brother is going to have to replace TV time with prayer time, and movie time with Bible time.
- **Certain types will not go to heaven** - "This you know with certainty," stated Paul. Strong, clear words. No immoral man is going to inherit the kingdom of God. No impure person is going to heaven. No covetous man, who is defined as an idol worshiper, will enter eternal glory. This is known to the brethren now, with certainty.
- **Let no one deceive you** - The flesh is tricky, and, with Satan's help, comes up with some ingenious self-justifications. The flesh also has a tendency to look around and pick up on someone else's clever excuses. This is why the warning from the Holy Spirit is so strident: "Let no one deceive you with empty words." The wrath of God will definitely fall upon those who are not brought to the obedience of the faith.

God has given Christians all the strength they need, when coupled with scripture and scriptural principles, to overcome sin in their lives. This passage from Ephesians in particular focuses on immorality, impurity, and greed, and is very emphatic that these are not "diseases" which someone caught from viruses floating in the atmosphere. These are fatal sins, which the brethren in Christ can lay aside so completely that they are not even named among them.

Excitement From Ephesians

Children of Light

As hard as it may be to believe, the God of the New Testament is going to execute wrath on the sons of disobedience. God did not undergo a great personality change between the writings of Malachi and Matthew; He is the same consuming fire that He has always been. Immoral and impure people, the covetous and swindlers, even if they are immersed into Christ, are going to end up in a Christless hell for all eternity. "Therefore do not be partakers with them," was the pleading of Paul, "for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:7-10). Thus the apostle reintroduces the great and transforming theme of the Bible: God is light!

- **You were formerly darkness** - Earlier in the epistle, the grand exposition of God's truth had described the condition of the lost: "Dead in your transgressions," "having no hope and without God in the world," and "darkened in their understanding" were all expressions the apostle used. But now, in describing the past of these brethren, Paul flatly says, "You were darkness"; not that they just lived in darkness, but that they were darkness itself.
- **Light in the Lord** - The brethren do not merely walk in the light; Christians actually are light. Jesus Himself, as recorded by the apostle John, often looked beyond the cross and described His followers in terms of light. "I am the light of the world," He said. "He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). When an individual ceases to be a son of disobedience and is brought to the obedience of faith, a powerful spiritual transformation takes place; he becomes light in the image of the glorified Christ.
- **The light of the world** - Jesus Himself considered it a great honor to be the first to proclaim light, both to the Jew and to the Gentile (Acts 26:23). Jesus, as the great Jehovah, always was light, the brilliant radiance of the invisible God, emanating from the emerald throne. But, in the words of the songwriter, "mild, He lay His glory by," and the glory of God was veiled by the flesh encasement Jesus took as a bond-servant. But in His exaltation, the Son of Man received His kingdom from the Ancient of Days, and was restored to the full glory which He had before the world was. He is the light of the world, revealed to mankind through the word of God.
- **Walk as children of light** - Each Christian has been carefully and lovingly recreated inwardly as light, brilliant and throbbing with power; love, and discipline, in the image of Christ, the immortal, invisible, Almighty God. "If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). The same Spirit who dwelt incarnate and walked in Judea and Galilee now dwells fully incarnate in Christians individually and collectively as the church. Each child of light is fully empowered to carry on in the place of Jesus and to carry out his part in the body of Christ.
- **Fruit of light** - There is transforming power in light, in the glory of the Lord. In fact, that is the only place where power to transform the inner man is found. So the Christian who focuses intently, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, will produce the fruit of light - all goodness and righteousness and truth.
- **Trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord** - The transformation is a process, involving time and requiring reprogramming of the mind. The Bible is a learn-by-doing book, and God designs lessons for each of His children and expects them to learn from their mistakes. But step-by-step, as the metamorphosing power of light works its way from the inner man to the outer, the fruit of light is exhibited in the practices of the Christian.

Christians are light in the Lord. Gone is the one who sank to the level of crude jokes, coarse jesting, silly talk, greed, and immorality. In its place is a personality radiating goodness, righteousness, and truth.

Excitement From Ephesians

Awake, Sleeper!

Darkness and light are direct opposites. But, praise the Lord, light is stronger than dark, and drives darkness from its presence. God's children have been called out of darkness into His marvelous light, and are therefore excited to proclaim His excellencies. But as mother Russia exerts a drawing power on some of her expatriates, so the darkness wields a mysterious pull on some of the children of light. Hence the warning comes: "And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret" (Ephesians 5:11,12). Christians are not only not to participate in the skullduggeries of sin and the intrigues of iniquity, they are in fact to take a stand against them and expose them. A word of caution: because many of the things done in darkness are so shameful, the exposé does not have to revel in every lurid detail; enough facts have to be presented to convince a truth-seeker, but brought forward in such a way as not to arouse prurient curiosity.

"But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says,
'Awake, sleeper,
And rise from the dead,
And Christ will shine on you.'" (Ephesians 5:13,14).

- **Exposed by the light** - Darkness covers evil activity. Just as in the directly physical realm, those engaged in illicit behavior use the cloak of darkness to hide their activity, so in the realm of the less tangible the darkness of confusion is used to hide the schemes of those who work on Satan's side. But when light stabs the darkness, then the cockroaches are exposed momentarily before they scurry for their next dark hole. Light from God's word illuminates evil; that's why those in darkness killed the Lord to start with, and why they persecuted the early church.
- **Everything that becomes visible is light** - While darkness is scattered and disappears at the entrance of light, that which has substance remains. Ultimately all that will be left before the Lord will be the children of light; the children of darkness will have been banished eternally from the presence of the Lord and cast into the outer darkness. "Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 13:43).
- **Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead** - The great God who took the form of a bond-servant and died ignominiously, crucified in a major public spectacle as a common criminal, loves man, and repeatedly appeals to man to turn to Him. The gospel of the glorified Christ is proclaimed from the cliffs of truth into the inky void of despair in the continuing hope that the word of truth will strike a receptive heart. Some sleeper may awaken in hearing the word of salvation and obeying the gospel of the grace of God. Having buried the old man in immersion, the new creature, raised from the dead, walks in newness of life.
- **Christ will shine on you** - The word of God continually affirms that when an individual turns to the Lord in immersion, he can then see with spiritual eyes and the glorious Christ shines on him. This transforming power, in accordance with the Law and what was written in the prophets, cleanses the cup on the inside, so that the outside may put aside the unfruitful deeds of darkness.

The works of the Law were called dead by the writer of Hebrews because they dealt with the external man, and those who promulgated them attempted to force holiness on others from the outside in. Jesus laid down the principle for modern blind Pharisees that the cup has to be cleansed first on the inside before the outside can truly follow. And the only mechanism for cleansing the inside is for Christ in glory to shine inside the radiant new creature. "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you" (Isaiah 60:1).

Excitement From Ephesians

Making the Most of Time

The sleeper has risen from the dead! He has now joined the ranks of the spiritual revolution sweeping over all the earth and knows that time is limited. He is appreciative of the grace that has come to him through his obedience to the gospel, and moves forward joyfully in the knowledge that he walks with the light of the glorified Christ shining on him. But he is also aware that others are perishing while he lives, and desires to do his part that the gospel may be preached to all creation. The words of Paul the apostle ring daily in his ears: "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:15-17). Time is of major significance to this spiritual revolutionary; he senses that the "two-minute warning" for earth has just been whistled, and he knows that he and his fellow teammates must "manage the clock."

- **Walk as wise men** - God doesn't want to raise any foolish children. The brethren often think of someone as wise if he can offer good counsel, and this is true in a limited sense. But the truly wise is measured by how effectively he uses the resources God has given to accomplish good works during the span allotted to him. These major resources include time as a separate entity, and also as an underlying component in the others, which together form the acronym TEMPO.
 - T - Time
 - E - Energy
 - M - Money
 - P - People
 - O - Organization

The truly wise recognizes that personal time, energy, and money are limited resources. Therefore the way to have a maximum impact for Christ is to be able to wisely and honestly organize and motivate volunteers, to make use of people through organization. This is part of the great legacy left by the Lord Himself; His own statement was that "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). Jesus during the years of His time on earth was limited in time, energy, and money, but left in place His organization to make use of people as dedicated volunteers, that His work might go on and His purpose be accomplished.

- **Making the most of time** - When brethren have a sense that "time has been shortened" and they have much that yet needs to be accomplished, then they begin the rigors of disciplining themselves in the use of time. Every Christian needs to learn where he fits in the body of Christ, to learn his purpose in expanding the kingdom of God, as the underlying principle in making good use of his personal time. Under that heading he can form the habits of goal setting for major and smaller projects, and to break the goals down to a daily set of specified and listed activities. Then the disciple of Christ needs to train himself to go down his prioritized list without skipping over difficult items; he must remember that the injunction from on high is to make the most of time, not just be somewhat productive during the day.
- **The days are evil** - Saints of the Most High are continually reminded that they are also soldiers of the cross. The church is at war, and wartime emergency measures are in effect. Those who desire to be at ease in Zion are part of the problem rather than part of the solution; sacrifice of personal comfort is necessary, and great personal discipline and teamwork is required to cooperatively make the most of time.
- **Understand the will of the Lord** - The Holy Spirit again emphasizes, "Do not be foolish." While brethren have a tendency to look in all kinds of places to find the will of God, the Father has already specified that His will is found in the utilization of good time management practices inside the framework of the principles found in scripture.

A Christian who manages his time perfectly will not sin. But, more importantly, he will do his part, as an upTEMPO child of God, to carry the torch of the spiritual revolution and overcome the Satanic forces of the new world order.

Excitement From Ephesians

Filled With The Spirit

If a Christian were to manage his time perfectly, he would never sin. Certainly he would avoid pursuits that kill the day, and he would be especially careful to steer clear of activities which are not only time wasters, but actually counterproductive. "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation," preaches Paul, "but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (Ephesians 5:18-21). The foolish gets drunk; the wise is filled with the Spirit.

- **Do not get drunk** - The real problem with drunks and druggies is not alcohol or dope; the real problem is avoidance of responsibility. People drink or do drugs to artificially feel good; their problems seem to disappear and what is troubling their consciences vanishes for a season. But once the euphoria is past and the high wears off, their problems are back bigger than before, and their consciences have even more to bother them about. And when individuals are ducking their responsibilities, these added burdens set off another round of booze and/or drugs, and the struggling member of the human race is steadily pulled into a cycle of mental and chemical dependency. The eventual result is a dissipated life-style, which leads to the destruction of the family and everything around the man who is so trapped.
- **Be filled with the Spirit** - In contrast to the spirits poured from a bottle, there is the Holy Spirit. The indwelling Holy Spirit comes from heaven at the individual's immersion into Christ, but in order for the saint to be "filled with the Spirit," he needs to take some positive steps following that immersion. The brother who so acts will be filled with the Spirit, will be enthusiastic, and will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. His life will be personally peaceful and will be marked with close and warm family and personal relationships. He will be successful on the job or in business, because those qualities which enable the disciple to be filled with the Spirit also make him a good employee or an effective businessman.
- **Speaking to one another in song** - One of the most effective ways to be filled with enthusiasm and to have a bright spiritual outlook is for saints of the Most High to fill their lives with spiritual music. Music is very powerful; those whose lives are inundated with worldly, unspiritual music will find their attitudes going down and consequently their personal actions becoming increasingly destructive to themselves and the people around them. Modern "country music" consists of generally "down and out" loser and boozier tunes which would send anyone's mind directly into the gutter. Rap, rock, alternative rock, and whatever else beats the air waves at those frequencies are all part of the sex and drugs, rhythm, riot, and revolution culture which has been turned loose to help destroy the next generation of Americans and render them incapable of meeting their civic and spiritual responsibilities. And much so-called "Christian" music has to be carefully sifted as well. But good psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs will strengthen the Christian greatly. The older generations had common songs as they worked or met together. Christians should restore that practice with proper spiritual emphasis.
- **Always giving thanks** - The brother who can be thankful in every situation is going to be very positive and wonderful to be around. An attitude of thanksgiving is a mental habit which can be formed through extensive practice.
- **Be subject to one another** - Those who can serve others in the fear of Christ have a true servant's heart. They likewise are a joy to work with because there is no petty competition and the desire to please Christ permeates the working atmosphere.

Christians should be the ones who have set aside the old self with malice, anger, and destruction. There should be no drunkenness or dissipation; brethren instead are to be joyful, enthusiastic, and overflowing with the good attributes from the character of God. They are commanded to be "filled with the Spirit."

Excitement From Ephesians

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs

This is about the controversy that never should have been. The controversy is about "instrumental music" being "acceptable to God in worship," and it comes under discussion here because of the scripture "...speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19). The Restoration men of the 19th century stated correctly that they needed book, chapter, and verse for every belief and practice of the church, that they were going to eliminate the human elements in religion which resulted in denominations because of additions to the scripture. It is too bad that they did not follow the principle when it came to the subject of worship; they blithely assumed that essentially the Roman Catholic concept of worship was the New Testament concept of worship. As a result they assumed that the church "came together to worship," looked for scriptures which would establish a "New Testament pattern for worship," and then argued whether or not "instrumental music was acceptable to God in worship." And Ephesians 5:19 was and is one of the key scriptures in the discussion.

- **Worship and service** - There is not enough space here to treat the subject of worship and service exhaustively. Simply speaking, worship is internal; Jesus said that His true worshipers would "worship in Spirit and in truth" (John 4:20-24). Worship is the ongoing spiritual prostration of the inner man before the throne of God, and under the new covenant the believer dwells in the spiritual realm where he has bold and confident access to the throne of grace. Service is the ongoing offering of the body to the Lord as a living and holy sacrifice; everything done externally is service to God.
- **Scriptural terminology** - It is important to call Bible things by Bible names. So if worship were the reason that the saints recorded in the New Testament assembled, the writers of the New Testament would have used that terminology. Unlike the Old Testament, wherein the Israelites assembled at the temple in Jerusalem to worship, under the new covenant brethren are always worshipping. When saints assemble under the terms of the new and living way, they offer service to God in the form of spiritual sacrifices such as the Lord's Supper and praising God. This is a part of their continual service to God such as working on the job or cleaning the house.
- **Reasoning from a false premise** - Correct reasoning from a false premise guarantees false conclusion. When the brethren assume that the church comes together "for worship," then all sorts of nonsensical questions arise, such as "Is instrumental music acceptable to God in worship?" Since worship is internal, instruments or non-instruments are not involved.
- **Acceptable service** - The question then arises as to what sort of service rendered by spiritual priests is acceptable. Under the new covenant things are not "holy or profane" as they were under the old; things are holy or unclean depending on the spirit of the user. "To the pure," wrote the inspired Paul, "all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure" (Titus 1:15). All music offered to God is either acceptable or unacceptable service depending on the attitude of him who offers, and it will have to fall in the category of "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."
- **The commands** - Often the "instrumental" could care less about what the scripture says. The strict "non-instrumental" indicates that he cares and tries to argue his case on the basis that singing (which he interprets to mean a capella only) is commanded, and that the reference in Ephesians 5:19 is obviously a reference to the "worship assembly" since the word says speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. The command, however, is "be filled with the Spirit," and only by extension to the singing the saint is already doing does it apply to singing in the assembly. Furthermore the Word literally says "singing and playing" with an emphasis on the attitude by which the singing and playing is done. The idiomatic expression "with your heart" means, as we moderns would put it "with all your heart" or "putting your heart into it."

Neither instruments nor un-instruments is anything. What counts is the new creature in Christ. "And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:15,16). Be filled with the Spirit continually, and continually offer up spiritual songs to God with all your heart.

Excitement From Ephesians

A Thankful Heart

"Be filled with the Spirit," is the command. Because of the nature of the new covenant, it is more directly an exhortation to be implemented one stage at a time. Those who follow this bidding of the Lord are an enthusiastic bunch, who bubble over with joy, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing praises to God even while shackled in stocks in inner prisons. They whistle tunes while glorifying God in the midst of challenging or grueling work, they tap their feet to the beat of spiritual songs while riding to and from errands, and they hum the great melodies of God while putzing about the house or puttering in the shop. They "sing and make melody" with their hearts to the Lord.

But none of this just comes naturally. To be filled with the Spirit, the Christian is obliged to reprogram his mind, to get rid of destructive thoughts, negative images, and "downer" songs, and replace those with the true, pure, and praiseworthy. It takes disciplined effort to thus renew the mind, and those who follow the will of the Lord in filling their lives with spiritual songs do so with careful deliberation. That is why "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" comes under the exhortation to "be filled with the Spirit"; it is the result of a conscious decision and disciplined implementation. And the same holds true with the next heading under being filled with the Spirit: "always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father" (Ephesians 5:20).

- **Always giving thanks** - The opposite of being filled with the Spirit is being downcast, angry, and/or bitter. What the Father has prescribed to help solve this problem is for brethren to learn to always give thanks. When the saint of God is truly thankful, he cannot be downcast, angry, or bitter at the same time. Thankfulness drives those three destructive thought patterns out of the mind, and when the Christian learns to give thanks at all times, he automatically has a great attitude.
- **For all things** - There are circumstances which on the surface seem very difficult to be thankful for. The faithful brother of Christ never forgets the greatness and care of God, noting that "we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). Since the Christian knows that his current situation, while it may look like a lemon, is really a lemonade, he can thus give thanks for all things!
- **In the name of Jesus Christ** - Giving thanks is a form of prayer, and no one can pray to God and be heard except through the name of Jesus Christ. The scripture is emphatic that no one has access to the courts of heaven in anyway other than through the mediation of Jesus the High Priest; that is why no unimmersed sinner can pray to God and be granted a hearing. So the reminder comes to the Christian that when he offers thanks for all things, he is to mention that he comes to the throne of grace only by the authority of Jesus Christ.
- **Offering thanks to God the Father** - The faithful brethren are not praying into empty space or to some impersonal force. Their thanksgivings ascend to the great and awesome God Himself, seated on the great white throne, attended by myriads and myriads of angels. But, so that the saint will know that each of his expressions of gratitude is carefully received in so august a setting, the prayers are addressed not only to the one designated "God," but "even God the Father." Any dad, but especially the Father, will certainly pay close attention to statements of gratitude from his kids.

The wise and knowing Father knows that, in one sense, attitude is everything. Those who are depressed, angry, and bitter are a blot on God's name and fit only for the garbage heap of eternity. So through the exordium to "be filled with Spirit," the great Jehovah works to produce an upbeat family, children of light who exhibit the radiance of His goodness and glory. Brethren who learn to have a thankful heart, who always give thanks for all things through Jesus to the Father, are well on their way.

Excitement From Ephesians

Subject to One Another

There is no such thing as serving God apart from serving people. Even under the old covenant, the great commandment was to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength, and the second greatest commandment was like the first in that the believer in God was to love his neighbor as himself. The teachings of Jesus actually upgraded the emphasis on serving people; the follower of Christ is not only to love his neighbor as he loves himself, but he is to love others even as Jesus loved, exhibited ultimately in His death on behalf of the brethren. It is not unexpected, then, that the word of God would note that, in order to be filled with the Spirit, the brethren are to "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (Ephesians 5:21).

"Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" works on one aspect of overflowing with the fruit of the Spirit of God; those tunes continually whirl in the head of one so filled, and he is focused on praising God. When the individual learns to always give thanks for all things, he is also focused on thanking God. God is thus served through a mind that has been trained to praise and thank Him; man is served when the saint is subject to the brethren in the fear of Christ; and the package, now including serving both God and man, produces a disciple who is filled with the Spirit.

This concept of being subject to one another does not just deal with relationships in Christ. The Holy Spirit, through Paul, describes how a Christian is to serve man in husband-wife, parent-child, and slave-master relationships, and how to do that with a good attitude.

- **Be subject to one another** - "Subject" and "submit" are distasteful words in modern Western culture. With most people educated in government school systems throughout the West, the principles brought through values clarification techniques permeate society. In values clarification, values and morals "imposed from the outside" (that is, those from God and parents) are rejected, and each child determines what he thinks is right and wrong for himself. This produces full-blown humanists who essentially serve self, are not interested in serving others or submitting to authority. Those who serve Christ are governed by principles exactly the opposite of those who serve self, and are willing to submit to the conditions which make teamwork possible.
- **Greatness of serving** - When the apostles argued with one another over who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus called them to Himself and taught them a little lesson. "You know," He said, "that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great shall be your servant and whoever wishes to first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28). Our Lord set the tone, serving instead of being served. This unselfish attitude produces great fellowship and trust among those who share this life-style, and great joy in doing for others. There is, by contrast, no honor or trust among those who are self-serving, and selfishness produces anger, clamor, and malice.
- **In the fear of Christ** - Without the authority figure of Christ in the background, the selfishness of the flesh tends to override the desire of the Spirit to be a servant of others. But when the disciple is aware of His deep respect for Jesus, coupled with the right amount of dread for His wrath, then he makes a conscious decision to adjust his attitude over the hassle that often comes with being subject to others, and once again begins to serve in the joy of the Lord.

Brethren are to keep in mind that God's desire is for each to be filled with the Spirit, to be enthusiastic, upbeat, hopeful followers in the footsteps of Christ. While spiritual music and thankful prayers focus on serving God, being subject to one another wraps up the picture by focusing on serving men. The true adherent to the principles of Christianity implements all three phases in his life and really begins to bear the fruit of the Spirit in a productive and joyful life in Christ.

Excitement From Ephesians

Submissive Wives

The general heading of this section of Paul's letter to the Ephesians is "be filled with the Spirit." Under that heading are given three specific ways to do that; the first two - praising God in song, and being thankful for all things - have more to do with man serving God. The third one has to do with man serving man, and is stated in these words: "Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ." There is no such thing as serving God without serving man; and there is no such thing as being filled with the Spirit apart from being subject to one another. Christianity is the ultimate in virtual reality and interactive religion. In Christ one cannot separate himself from people and in monkish fashion serve God; in Christ each disciple carries out his holy activity through relationships with other people.

One of the most rewarding and challenging of those relationships is that between husband and wife. The closest thing on earth to heaven is a good marriage; the closest thing on earth to hell is a bad one. The Lord Jesus was well aware of the challenge and while He was discussing the importance of commitment in marriage, the apostles exclaimed, "If the relationship of the man and his wife is like this, it is better not to marry" (Matthew 19:10). Marriage has its challenges, but it has great rewards if the Christian man and Christian woman will follow the instructions on how to be filled with the Spirit by being subject to one another as directed.

- **Wives are subject to husbands** - "Wives," said the Holy Spirit, "be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). This often can be a great test of the Christian wife's faith in God. Sometimes the wife is smarter than the husband, or at least she thinks she is; and sometimes she has better judgment, or at least she thinks she does. Her role in the marriage, though, is subordinate to her husband, and he has the final say. Wives making a claim to godliness need to do their best to make those final decisions work and keep a great attitude in the Lord. When the marriage begins to work as God intended, it is a joy for the woman to be subject to her man.
- **The husband is the head of the wife** - The Holy Spirit further intones, "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" (Ephesians 5:23). From the beginning God made the woman the helper of man; God did not set marriage up where the woman is the head, and the man is supposed to be running and jumping to help his wife. That doesn't mean that the husband can't or shouldn't help his wife, but it does mean that the husband has a higher set of priorities, and that the wife has to operate inside the framework where her priorities are secondary. As Christ is the Savior of the body, so the husband is the provider and protector of the family. Therefore the husband has the greater responsibility and thus his projects the higher priority; if the wife wants what her husband brings to the relationship, she must submit to his head-ship.
- **As the church to Christ** - Before shifting the focus to husbands, the Spirit again emphasizes: "But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything" (Ephesians 5:24). Marriage itself is subject to a higher purpose, to teach brethren about the relationship of Christ and the church. If a woman goes into marriage thinking that the purpose of marriage is to make her happy, she is in for a quick and rude awakening. Marriage is enrollment in an institution of learning where husbands learn to love and wives learn to submit, as the church is to submit to Christ. While both parties to the contract of marriage are in the process of learning their roles, there are some rocky spots in the road. In the midst of all the trials, both the husband and wife need to be patient and understanding of each spouse's struggles.

The wife's role in the marriage is the subordinate one. She can fight that if she wants, but in so doing she runs counter to the order which God set up and over time she becomes a bitter and hardened woman. But if she wants her days to be filled with maximum joy available under her circumstances, then she needs willingly to submit to her husband and thus be filled with God's Spirit.

Excitement From Ephesians

Loving Husbands

Don't confuse love and romance. One of the dictionary definitions of romance brings out a subtle difference between the Biblical concept of love and the more earthly-centered concept of romance: "Romance: a strong, sometimes short-lived attachment, fascination, or enthusiasm for something." Romance is short-lived because it is based on feeling; Biblical love is deep, abiding, and strong because it is based on decision. So the imperative comes: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). Christian husbands ultimately must make the decision to love their wives.

- **Learning about love** - If love was as natural as the media portrays it to be, the human race would not be rocked with violence, divorce, greed, war, and plain old selfishness. But it is. For the most part, agape love has to be learned by the new creature in Christ. "We love," the apostle John addressed the brethren, "because He first loved us" (I John 4:19). Biblical love is learned from God, "for God is love" (I John 4:8).
- **Husbands learn love** - Men often get married without knowing a whole lot about love. Having been joined together with a female of the species in a union to last 'til death performs its separation, the Christian man is in for an education. While spiritually men and women have equal standing before God, as that plays out in the body of Christ, there are major differences in the way they are to conduct themselves, major differences in their focuses, and major differences in their emotional make-up. A husband has to learn to live with his wife "in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman" (I Peter 3:7). Wives, in the meantime, are to be patient and not play pouty games while the husband is in the 50-75 year long project of learning how to love his wife.
- **Christ gave Himself up for the church** - The greatest love story of all time is Christ's wooing and winning His bride. Before the world was, He caught a glimpse of the bride-to-be, noted that she was desirable, and with fervency set out to prepare the world for her birthing and development. At the appropriate point in history, Jesus demonstrated His love and His protective ability by the sacrifice of Himself to save her from eternal death. Normally the death of the bridegroom leaves a weeping and broken bride; but, in this case, the bridegroom, having been resurrected from the dead, can still step to the altar with His shiny-eyed and radiant betrothed.
- **As Christ loved the church** - Husbands, then, are to learn from Christ how to demonstrate their love for their wives and their protective abilities. The husband sets up the home as his castle, not only for the place where he is comfortable, but also to shield his wife and family from the invading forces of the world (which is why he has the authority to determine what friends will be allowed over, if a TV or video is allowed, etc.). He also sacrifices to be the provider; he lays down his life to provide food, shelter, clothing, and spiritual sustenance for his household; and as such he has to prepare for one, two, five, or twenty years down the road.
- **Wives must recognize love** - The world does not really recognize the love that God has for it; otherwise they would cease to be of the world and become Christians. Wives may have the same type of difficulty in recognizing the love a husband demonstrates. Many men have some challenges in verbally expressing themselves, and a woman may take this, in her own insecurity, as an indication that the husband does not really love her, while all around he has built those physical and spiritual edifices which substantiate his non-verbal expression of love for his wife and family.

God expects His children to learn love through the husband-wife relationship, and to thus be filled with the Holy Spirit. The husband, on his part, cannot be selfish; he must willingly sacrifice himself, laying down his life as a provider and protector of his glorious bride. Hunting, fishing, or the race track, if necessary, must be set aside in order for the Christian man to carry out his physical and spiritual responsibilities.

Excitement From Ephesians

The Sanctified Church

God is very interested in holiness in His people. "Pursue peace with all men," the inspired author of Hebrews noted, "and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). That sanctification, or holiness, is to be pursued, to be chased with vigor. The righteousness of God is not only imputed to the believer at his immersion into Christ; he is, through processes directed by the scripture and by what the Holy Spirit supplies, to be holy, and to exhibit that holiness to the world.

In the discussion on husbands and wives, the apostle Paul also taught the relationship of Christ and the church. "Husbands," he said, "love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:25-27).

- **Cleansing the church** - The general picture the word of God paints is that of a poor orphan girl, dirty, unkempt, and beaten, stranded along a deserted and lonely road. In the next scene a handsome Prince arrives, resplendent on His charger, attended by His royal retinue. The Prince loves the orphan girl, gets down off His horse, personally picks her up, and carries her to His palace. There the girl is cleaned up, clothed in new garments, and educated so that she might conduct herself as a queen, worthy to walk beside the King.
- **The washing of water** - The church, the bride of Christ, consists of millions of individuals who have been picked up from the gutters of this world one at a time. Each of them needs to be cleansed, and this is accomplished in the waters of immersion through the blood of Jesus; the heart is thus sprinkled clean from an evil conscience when the body is washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:22). The expurgation of the church is a continuing process as one by one the saints are purified and presented to the Lord.
- **With the word** - The washing of the believers is not an empty, formal immersion; the immersion is to result from the conviction produced in each pierced heart by the preached word. The word of God produces the belief in the message of Jesus to start with. The sword of the Spirit generates repentance without regret. Through the scripture the penitent believer learns that he is to publicly confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And from the conversion examples of the New Testament writings, the sinner finds that he needs to be immersed in the name of Jesus for the remission of his sins, and in that obedience to the gospel, he will receive the indwelling Holy Spirit. Thus the apostle Peter wrote that "you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls." The brethren, therefore, "have been born again, not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God" (1 Peter 1:22,23).
- **No spots or wrinkles** - When it comes time for the orphan girl to be presented to the Prince on the wedding day, the bride is to be perfect. All stains and blemishes are gone; she has been cleaned up. Thus Christ is purifying each believer, bringing each one to holiness and blamelessness.
- **The church in all her glory** - Step by step, person by person, the church is taking on the radiance and personality of Christ. As each Christian focuses on the glory of the Lord revealed in the written word, he is transformed into that same image of glory.

The orphan girl loves the Prince. She is grateful that the Prince saw the potential in her when she was lying ragged and ruined beside the desert road. She is appreciative of the opportunity she has to be cleansed and beautified. She knows the Prince sacrificed Himself for her, and her thoughts are continually fixed on Him. As a result she imitates His character, and, by an unseen power which the Prince possesses, she takes on His radiant glory. Finally, at the Prince's "right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir" (Psalm 45:9).

Excitement From Ephesians

Body Love

The body needs care. If it isn't fed, it dies. If it gets wounded, it needs patched up. The physical side of man requires shelter, clothing, daily rest, occasional cleaning, and some comfort. And the body lets its possessor know when it has needs or wants; gnawings of hunger, aches from bruises, eyes clamoring for sleep, and cravings for a place to sit down all make their way to the decision center of man. Sometimes - facing starvation or suffocation, for example - those exigencies override all other priorities. The body has needs and communicates its needs to the spirit and soul of man, and then the man acts to meet those needs, often moving with intensity and great speed to meet those bodily requirements. With those general principles in mind, the apostle Paul appeals to Christian husbands: "So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body" (Ephesians 5:28-30).

- **Wife-body love** - As the man is aware of the outcries of his body, so also he is to be sensitive to the needs and wants of his wife. While some of the woman's basic requirements are physical, involving food, shelter, and clothing, many of her real needs are emotional. When the scripture says that husbands are to love their own wives as their own bodies, it means that the man is going to have to learn to pick up the signals of his spouse's emotional needs and allow those signals to make their way to his decision center. And those needs and wants must take their proper place in his set of priorities, sometimes overriding the importance of anything else he has going on.
- **Loving himself** - The apostle Paul has in his mind the idea that man and wife are one flesh; that is, essentially one body. Under that concept, it is obvious that when a man meets his wife's needs, he meets his own needs. But there is a deeper point here for the man who claims to follow Christ; he also benefits. When a Christian wife knows that her needs and wants are actually getting a fair hearing at the decision center and being placed in their proper priorities, then she is much more able to fulfill her role as the helpmeet God intended her to be, and the husband ends up being blessed in the process also.
- **Nourishing and cherishing** - No man hates his own flesh; he shows up at meal time and makes sure he has a pillow for his head. The follower of Christ is to likewise cherish his wife, being concerned for her comfort and well-being. He, as the spiritual head, is to make sure that she is spiritually nourished as well.
- **Christ cares for His church** - Christ really cares for the church, providing for the material, emotional, and spiritual needs for each member of His body. In regard to food, clothing, and shelter, the Lord said, "For all these things the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:32,33). But Christ is also the bread that satisfies, and the water that slakes the thirst; He is able to meet all emotional and spiritual needs of His bride.
- **Members of His body** - In the physical body, each part's importance and contribution is recognized. The eyes work in conjunction with the hands and feet, and the ears and knees are doing their part to accomplish their common purpose. But the head of the body is aware of the needs of each part, knowing that if a finger is cut or a heel is bruised. In the same way Christ is aware of each Christian, and is conscious and active in each one's hurts and contributions.

Husbands are to learn from Christ what it means for his wife to be part of his own body. His body needs care; so does his wife. When his body is wounded, it needs patched up; when his wife is emotionally wounded, she must be mended also. As Christ tenderly cares for His bride, so the Christian man cares for his bride also. And that is a form of being subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Excitement From Ephesians

The Secret of Marriage

Before the foundation of the world God planned the union of Christ and the church. And, in God's scheme of things spiritual, Christ woos the church through demonstrating His love and tender affections, just as a man courts his prospective bride. In fact, a portion of Christ's reaching out to win His bride's understanding and affection is done through the male-female relationship God created at the beginning. "For this cause," stated Moses in Genesis, and quoted by Paul in Ephesians, "a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh." The apostle then appended, "This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his wife as himself; and let the wife see to it that she respect her husband" (Ephesians 5:31-33).

- **For this cause** - The apostle Paul, under inspiration of the Spirit, informed the brethren in Ephesus of what he called a great mystery, a big secret. He said that every marital union between a man and his wife throughout the entire human race was designed as a type or foreshadow of the ultimate union of Christ and the church. The fact that most marriage ceremonies throughout the world are clueless about the symbolism involved in that ceremony (in whatever culture that ceremony is conducted) does not change the verity of the typology of the marriage rite.
- **A man and his wife** - A man is to leave his father and mother and be glued to his wife (implicit in the passage is that the wife correspondingly leaves her father and mother and cleaves to her husband). They together begin a new family unit, to some degree independent and separate from all other family units. The picture is clear as it relates to Christ and each member of His body also; forsaking all other gods or idolatry in any form, the individual Christian cleaves to Christ.
- **One flesh, one body** - In marriage, by the word of the Lord, the two become one flesh. This is interesting in itself, because by design and practice, in a good marriage the man and wife really do become one, one in flesh, one in purpose, and one in values. This same oneness is produced in those who are members of Christ's body; they are united with Christ in immersion, they come to have the same purpose, the same values, and the same character as the Head of the church. And because they have this same oneness with Christ, they have it likewise with one another, and are at peace.
- **Let each man love his wife** - The scriptural major heading for this section, it will be recalled is to be filled with the Spirit. Beneath that heading, one of the major ingredients for that filling was entitled, "Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ." As part of that mutual subjection, the husband-wife relationship was brought forward, and here, the apostle, in his concluding comments on that relationship, reminds husbands to love their wives as they love themselves. A woman's security, paralleling the church's, is in knowing that she is loved. The husband's great obligation and privilege is to communicate his love to her in both repetitive and creative ways so that she blossoms in the security of that knowledge.
- **Let the wife respect her husband** - Most husbands come into even Christian marriages with insecurities themselves. Just as the woman's biggest need is to know that she is loved, the man's biggest need is to know that he is respected (that is not to say that he couldn't use a little TLC now and then). The wife must express confidence in his judgment (within reason) and give him the honor due the protector and provider of the family.

The secret of marriage is knowing that marriage is designed by God as a means of teaching a less tangible and less easily understood lesson. When the husband and wife both know that their mutual relationship is their daily homework assignment, and that through the relationship they are to learn to be subject to a higher purpose and thus be filled with the Spirit, then they can also learn how to help each other with their homework. And be joyful.

Excitement From Ephesians

Children and Parents

God wants His people to "be filled with the Spirit." The Father desires that each Christian be enthusiastic, overflowing with praises and thanksgivings to His name. And He expects that His holy ones will be filled with the Spirit in their interactions with other people, being "subject to one another in the fear of Christ." This is to be carried out in relationships where occasionally there is likely to be tension; the Father did not take His children out of the world, but their Christianity is to be exhibited in husband-wife, parent-child, and master-slave relationships. Each saint is to trust God and faithfully discharge His instructions recorded in the written word.

Thus Christian husbands and wives have a set of directives from on High which govern their conduct and which they are to carry out joyfully if they are to be filled with the Spirit. If wives refuse to be subject to their husbands, or husbands spurn the injunction to love their wives as Christ loved the church, then destruction and major heartaches lie ahead.

In the same fashion, then, the Holy Spirit brings the parent-child interconnection to the forefront. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:1-4).

- **Children are to obey** - Parents sometimes make mistakes. A parent, however, is less likely to make a mistake than his eight-year-old. So when the question arises as to whether the kids are going to run the household or whether the parents are, the answer had best be swift and certain, and it had better be "the parents." But in order for mom and dad to govern the house, then the children have to obey; if the children won't obey, then the parents don't run the household. Now if a parent is trying to use an older child to steal or engage in otherwise immoral or illegal activity, then the child should try to figure out some way to refuse to submit. Children are to obey their parents "in the Lord." However, most parents who make a claim to following Christ really desire the best for their progeny, and "it is right" for the kids to submit to their parents' will.
- **Honor your father and mother** - When the Ten Commandments were thundered from Sinai's mount, the fifth contained the words, "honor your father and mother." But it was, as the apostle put it, "the first commandment with a promise" in that it contained a blessing for keeping it as well as a curse for breaking it. He who cursed father or mother was to die by stoning; he who kept the commandment would have things go well for him, and in general the people would live long on the land.
- **Do not provoke your children to anger** - It takes a lot of wisdom to raise children in the ways of the Lord. God's wisdom is unwavering, or consistent. One of the quickest ways to provoke children to anger is to be inconsistent and unpredictable. Parents who change course often, or who make up new rules spontaneously just to have their kids carry out their whims, frustrate their offspring because a sense of fairness and reasonableness is lost. Children need to know that the interests of God and the real needs of the kids come before the selfish or petty desires of a parent.
- **Bring them up in the Lord** - Children need to be trained; they do not automatically just do what is right. Children must be instructed from the time they are little in everything from picking up their trash from the floor to the ways of God. And they must be disciplined, given both positive and negative corrective influences consistently from parents.

Parent-child relationships are designed by God for at least dual purposes: to give Christian parents hands-on experience in learning to be subject to a purpose larger than themselves and to learn to be filled with the Spirit through the challenges that come with parenting.

Excitement From Ephesians

Christian Slaves and Masters

"Be filled with the Spirit," is the directive from heaven. "Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" is a specific additional pointer instructing Christians how to be happy in interrelating to one another. Following inspired biddings on husband-wife and parent-child relationships come some real testings, some instructions for Christian masters and Christian slaves. "Slaves," writes Paul, "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; not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. And, masters, do the same thing to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him" (Ephesians 6:5-9).

- **Slaves are obedient to their masters** - The slave of the first century couldn't quit his job. He was stuck in a system from which there was no extrication until the winds of time blew the dust of the Roman Empire in the ash heap of history. Since that was several hundred years in coming, the slave in the flesh (but the Lord's freeman!) could not change his circumstances; all he could change was his attitude. Thus, being filled with the Spirit, he was enthusiastically obedient to his master in the flesh.
- **As slaves of Christ** - No doubt not every slavemaster of the first century treated his slaves with care and dignity. So how was a slave to act toward this master who generally behaved as some sort of fiendish jerk? Simple. He was to conduct himself as if Christ were his master, standing before his master in the same respectful manner of fear and trembling which he would give Jesus.
- **Rendering service in good will** - The submissive attitude of a slave toward his master had to be translated into his work ethic or it really wasn't a submissive attitude. The work had to be done correctly and completely; the work not readily seen was to be done properly as well as that which was easily visible. Thus the slave was with "good will" to render service to his master as if the master were Christ, and the work was to be done, not with "eyeservice," but done well enough to please the Lord.
- **Reward for doing right** - The Lord rewards a Christian for doing what is right, but not necessarily during his earthly sojourn. The Lord communicates to each faithful brother that even the smallest things that he does for the sake of Jesus' name will not escape His notice: "And whoever in the name of a disciple," said the Christ, bringing attention to the littlest detail done for the most insignificant person, "gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward" (Matthew 10:42). So when the lowliest of slaves according to the flesh did what was right with an attitude which pleased the Lord, even if there was no earthly recognition (or even undeserved punishment), then that follower of Christ had the security of knowing that the Lord would take note of his action and award him his prize at the appropriate time.
- **Masters have a Master** - The love of God upholds the dignity and worth of each person; Jesus, for example, is concerned about the one sheep that is lost. Thus the Christian slave holder, caught in a system in which he really could not release his slaves, knowing that he had a Master in heaven, treated his slaves with compassion, creating a sense of teamwork. He knew that he was accountable to Jesus, and gave up the threatening use of whips and beatings as motivational "tools" to deal with his slaves.

In the master-slave relationship, the concept of being filled with the Spirit - being joyful and enthusiastic - is put to the test. If the Christian master of the first century could face the pressure of his peers and govern his slaves in accordance with the dictum of being subject to one another in the fear of Christ, and if the first century slave could take abuse from his earthly master with rejoicing, then none of us today have any excuse for bad attitudes.

Excitement From Ephesians

Welcome to War

The Christian is to make the most of his time, because the days are evil. He is to maintain a good attitude, being filled with the Spirit; he is to be enthusiastic and cheerful in husband-wife relationships, in parent-child relationships, and in slave-master relationships. But above and beyond the problems arising in those personal interactions, the saint of the Most High is to be aware of the big picture, to be conscious that he is a soldier in a total war, and to be excited and upbeat in the midst of that global spiritual conflict. "Finally," says the apostle, "be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 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" (Ephesians 6:10-12). Christians are not monkish recluses, cloistered in remote hide-aways; followers of Christ are soldiers who have voluntarily enlisted in the army of Christ and are fervently fighting against the world forces of Satan's evil minions. Welcome, brother, to the war.

- **The schemes of the devil** - Satan, by men's standards, is very intelligent, devising multifarious schemes to deceive men in his age-long war against God. God, however, is much smarter than the devil, and is not only capable of defeating the deceiver, but is also able to strengthen and educate the church so that its members too may be triumphant. But the devil's schemes are sufficiently tricky that the saint has to be always on his guard, and God's word contains many warnings and much education for the brethren.
- **The warfare is in the spiritual realm** - Because the warfare takes place not against flesh and blood but against various layers of Satan's forces, the war must be fought and won on spiritual grounds by spiritual men and women. "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh," wrote Paul of himself and other spiritual men, "for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God" (II Corinthians 10:3-5). Guns and groceries, ammunition and armament are of no avail in this war; Peter's sword would assist against mere robbers in the future, but was of no value in assisting Jesus to carry out His spiritual onslaught against Satan's realm and death's prison.
- **Array of evil hosts** - The devil is not a lone ranger prowling in the spiritual wilderness. A whole host of spiritual malevolence works with Satan, described by the Holy Spirit as "rulers," "powers," "world forces of darkness," and "spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." This array is not to be dismissed with a mere shrug of the shoulders and a mumbled comment about how Jesus already won the war. The picture of the devil's dark legions is presented to the saint so that he will understand the size and nature of the forces marshaled before him, not be slack in his spirituality, and be aware of the evil and thus not be deceived.
- **Be strong in the Lord** - Once the saint is aware of Satan's hosts marching in their murky spiritual array, he can be overwhelmed by the sight, much as Israel's small forces felt overmatched by the Philistine hordes. But the soldier of the cross is to be encouraged; he can "be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might."

The church is to recognize that her warfare has not ended. She is not at peace during the years that earth exists, in which her members must carry out their responsibilities. Wartime measures are therefore in effect; there must be a sense of urgency connected with the use of time, and the fellow soldiers are to be team players, upbeat and filled with the Spirit. Welcome to the war.

Excitement From Ephesians

Schemes of the Devil

Satan certainly is an evil schemer. Going to be flung headlong into the pits of hell himself, he has decided that his misery needs company, and is trying to drag every member of the human race into destruction with him. But if people clearly understood what they were getting when they bought the devil's package, there would be no takers. So the great adversary of God and enemy of man has devised a series of schemes - some complex and some simple, some directed at single individuals and some pointed toward the whole race to confuse men and ensure that their souls are sent to a Christ-less hell. While it is impossible to list all of Satan's schemes in this short space, there are several which should be pondered as worthy of special consideration.

- **Immediate personal temptation** - Satan is called the tempter, and the point at which all of his schemes become operative is when the target yields to temptation. "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren," pleads James. "Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:14-16). The prince of the power of the air, working with his deceitful spirits, is constantly playing the keyboard of individual lusts, composing the Siren song which lures the human into the realm of temptation where he is slaughtered on sin's alter. The roster of individual lusts is virtually endless; remember, however, that all of Satan's schemes depend upon the yielding of the individual to the temptation proffered, and starting the chain reaction of sin in himself and in others.
- **Discouragement and a "can't do" attitude** - In the spiritual, psychological warfare in which the Christian is engaged, it is paramount that he and the other troops maintain a positive, winning attitude. Satan is sensitive to this, and assiduously sends out his hosts to cast the pall of discouragement over the ranks of God's army. The brethren are to overcome these mists of despair from the "rulers" and "powers" of darkness, remembering "whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4). That is why Paul was so careful in exhorting the Corinthian brethren when they were welcoming back a repentant individual; discouragement attendant to the brother's past sins was to be avoided (II Corinthians 2:5-11).
- **Weapons of mass instruction** - Spiritual warfare includes conflict over education. Education either pre-disposes an individual to be favorable to Christianity or to have a pre-disposition against the spiritual truths of Jesus. Hence the "world forces" of darkness have worked to take control of education throughout the globe, and have used this control to increasingly bias moldable young minds, making them have the general impression that Christianity is bad. The media are also slanted; so everything from music to movies assaults the principles of the word of God.
- **Violence in the stands** - Once the masses are sufficiently mis-educated, then steps of repression can be implemented. Only a moral, educated society can remain free; when the morality is destroyed and the educational level sufficiently reduced, then tyranny - marked with brutality and senseless killing - begins. The "spiritual forces of wickedness" hold sway, and Christians can only carry on underground in the battle for men's minds.

These are all schemes of the Adversary, who uses individual and massive deceit to carry out his warfare against Christ and His church. It is obvious that God does not want His children to be ignorant of Satan's secret plans, but that He wants the sons of light to expose, oppose, and overcome them.

Excitement From Ephesians

Armored Up

Spiritual warfare is fought and won on spiritual grounds. Any Christian who would try to carry on a skirmish against Satan's regulars by warring in the flesh is guaranteed to lose, and to lose quickly and decisively. "Be strong in the Lord," is the advice of Paul. "Put on the full armor of God," he says. "Take up the full armor of God," he again emphasizes, "that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm" (Ephesians 6:13). There are huge warnings built into this statement, emphasizing to the brethren the seriousness of this warfare; the Holy Spirit is majorly concerned that the saints be able to resist in the evil day, the Spirit exhorts them to have done everything, and the Helper pleads with them twice to put on the full armor of God. The battle, she's a fierce one ... and only those who heed these injunctions will survive by standing firm.

- **Loins girded with truth** - "Stand firm therefore," again states the apostle under inspiration. "having girded your loins with truth" (Ephesians 6:14). While it may seem evident that truth is important, truth is super-foundational. Christianity, in contrast to the schemes of the devil, moves forward only on the basis of truth and truthfulness. As the Roman soldier then folded up the bottom of his robe and wrapped it around himself (thus the expression "gird up your loins") to prepare for battle, so the soldier of Christ girds himself with truth - truth of the gospel, and truthfulness in dealing with men.
- **Breastplate of righteousness** - Having girded his loins with truth, then the spiritual warrior is reminded that he is to "put on the breastplate of righteousness." Without a breastplate, the whole front of a Roman soldier would be exposed, and he would have to spend most his time trying to cover himself rather than effectively engaging in forward combat against the enemy. Likewise, when a Christian is not living righteously, his own conscience condemns him, and he spends most of his time trying to cover for himself instead of being able to take the gospel of the glory of Christ and destroy the works of the devil.
- **Preparation of the gospel of peace** - The gospel is the good news connected with all that Christ has done; it is the gospel of glory, it is the gospel of grace, and it is the gospel of peace. The soldier of the cross is to have "shod" his "feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace" (Ephesians 6:15). A Roman soldier who would charge barefoot into the battle would certainly be unprepared: a man making a claim to godliness, if he is not skilled in handling the word of truth and explaining the gospel of peace, is likewise unprepared and ineffective in the battle against Satan's forces.
- **Shield of faith** - "In addition to all," expounds the apostle Paul, "take up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one" (Ephesians 6:16). The Roman soldier never had such a shield as this one; he could never extinguish all the tarred and burning arrows fired at him. But if a Christian presses on in full assurance of the faith as revealed in the word of God, all Satan's darts will hit that shield and be snuffed out. All!
- **Helmet of salvation** - Like the protective breastplate is to be put on, so the disciple is to "take the helmet of salvation" (Ephesians 6:17). As the soldier's head would be dangerously or fatally exposed without his helmet, so the Christian, if he has not made his salvation secure as dictated by the scripture, is dangerously or fatally exposed in the spiritual war.

When the Christian soldier also takes up the sword of the Spirit, then he is fully armed and ready to engage in the conflict. But if disciples of Christ fail to heed the serious and strenuous warning of Paul and the Holy Spirit to get themselves "armored up," they will be casualties in this spiritual war. A spiritual war is fought and won on spiritual grounds.

Excitement From Ephesians

The Sword of the Spirit

For the soldier of old, the sword was both an offensive and defensive weapon. With it he could defend himself, and with it he could press forward, slicing into the enemy. As the spiritual soldier puts on the full armor of God, most of his armament is defensive or preparatory; it is only when he takes up "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17), that he is able to carry on the offensive thrust against the phalanxes of the devil. And since the Lord Jesus came to plunder the house of Satan, He is quite interested in seeing that His body be able to execute that forward charge.

- **Take up the sword** - A sword sheathed is a sword worthless. The soldier is to "take up the sword of the Spirit" and use it. And the sword of the Spirit is the word of God; it is not the Reader's Digest or Guidepost or other human interest magazine or set of stories. When the Christian hears teaching or preaching and does not affirm its accuracy by comparing it to the word of God, he is unarmed and ripe for spiritual slaying because he has not taken up the word of God. If a brother making a claim to godliness were to try to "save" others through the use of his "personal testimony," his words would have been useless in the real spiritual war because he had not used the sword of the Spirit, the only true testimony. Actually the process is simple: take up the sword!
- **Sword handling** - The sword of the Lord is described as being "two-edged." Its double-edged blade cuts either way, and the soldier who is unskilled in sword play will find himself badly sliced and diced upon his own sword. "Be diligent," said the master swordsman Paul to Timothy, "to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (II Timothy 2:15). To be skillful in the use of God's word requires training and practice.
- **It is the Spirit's sword** - The word of God, while written through the stylus of men, is produced by the Holy Spirit. Since it is His word, it is not to be trifled with, altered, twisted, or presented with exclusions. The words "are Spirit, and are life" (John 6:63), and he who would in any way change the message of the Spirit to the world does so at the cost of his own soul. And the sword is sharper, really, than any two-edged sword; he who would blunt the point or dull the edges tries to destroy the thrusting and slashing power of the word, and sets the stage for the Lord to be ashamed of him at His coming.
- **It is a defensive weapon** - Jesus, it is to be remembered, used the sword of the Spirit to protect Himself when Satan came to do battle after Jesus' fasting in the wilderness for forty days. Quoting memorized scripture from Deuteronomy, the Lord parried the onslaughts of the tempter and sent him packing. No one can defend himself against Satan apart from skillful use of the scripture.
- **It is an offensive weapon** - The word of God's primary use is as an offensive weapon to carry the message of Christ throughout the earth. "Go into all the world," said Jesus, "and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). "Preach the word," Paul told Timothy, "in season and out of season" (II Timothy 4:2). This sword, which is living and active, not only is used to convert the world but is also effective in transforming the one who uses it; it "performs its work" in those who believe (I Thessalonians 2:13).

The soldier in the Lord's army has been handed a truly marvelous piece of weaponry, the sword of the Spirit. It is a blade for use defensively and offensively in the spirit realm, and the best steel of Toledo could not even begin to compare. So take up the sword of the Spirit, soldier, and carry on!

Excitement From Ephesians

Prayer and Petition

Does God really hear prayer? If everything is all decided by God beforehand, do the prayers of the saints really make any difference? These are questions often asked by the brethren as they mentally meander their way to a clearer understanding of the Father and His mighty deeds. While the child of God is not privy to the inner workings of the Almighty and the complex inter-arrangement of prayer and the predetermined purpose of God, the scripture is repeatedly emphatic that prayer changes things, that the Father hears and acts when the sons of God pray. "With all prayer and petition," implores the apostle Paul, "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" (Ephesians 6:18).

- **Pray at all times** - Jesus Himself, as always, led by example in praying at all times. He was always conscious of the Father and in constant communication with Him, stating the point in these terms: "The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner" (John 5:19). In the same way the Father desires that the rest of His spiritual kids follow the example of the elder Brother and pray at all times.
- **Prayer** - While there are many types of prayer, all fall under the category of speaking to God. The Pharisees were accused by Jesus of publicly praying to be seen by men. "Truly," He said, "they have their reward in full" (Matthew 6:5). Those who pray must first of all be conscious that their words are addressed to God. Does this exclude public prayer? No. Does this mean that public prayer can not or should not also be edifying to the saints? No (see I Corinthians 14:16,17). But unless the praying individual is conscious that his expression is directed to the throne of grace, his words are essentially worthless.
- **Petitions** - The idea of petitioning God carries the impression of imploring Him to act on behalf of certain persons or to intervene in certain situations. Petitions, in this sense, are requests made by weaker individuals to the stronger to accomplish what is beyond the capacity of the petitioners.
- **In the Spirit** - No one can have his prayers and petitions heard in the courts of heaven unless that individual comes by the authority of Jesus Christ. And no one can come by the authority of Jesus Christ unless he, in full repentance, has been immersed in the name of that same Jesus for the remission of sins and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then, as one indwelt by the Spirit, and with attitudes reflective of that Spirit, he can pray to and petition God.
- **Be on the alert** - Can a Christian ever relax and let his guard down for a moment? The answer is a resounding NO! The forces of evil are continually attacking and the roaring lion is seeking to devour any one of the lambs or sheep. So the Christian is to have perseverance in his alertness - no slacking off, no giving up or giving in. He is to keep praying, praying, praying for all the saints.

The natural tendency of people is to pretend that evil does not exist so they don't have to think about it or do anything about it. God breaks into this mystical reverie with the message to the Christian soldier that he is on alert. He is to be fully armed - protected, and with the sword of the Spirit in the position to strike. And where does this warfare begin? In prayer! Our Lord spent forty days in prayer and fasting before kicking off His ministry to the lost of sheep of Israel. The infantrymen of God need to take note, praying and petitioning at all times in the Spirit, alertly aware of all the situations and dangers the saints are in, and praying diligently for them.

Excitement From Ephesians

Prayer for Boldness

Fear shuts the mouths of Christians more often than it ought. Satan, the master user of fear, desires the paralysis which terror produces. If he can therefore generate the illusion in the mind of the Christian that the loss of something earthly is a catastrophe of major proportion, and can intimidate him with the possibility of that loss, then the terrified child of God clamps his jaw rather than jeopardize his fleshly stumbling block. Threats of a gruesome death, the ultimate in intimidation, could even make someone like the apostle Paul blanch at the thought. So he appealed to the brethren in Ephesus: "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, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly as I ought" (Ephesians 6:19,20).

- **Prayers for Paul** - "Pray on my behalf," pleaded the imprisoned apostle. The former Saul of Tarsus, persecutor of the church, knew that the prayers of the saints, in God's economy, impacted the Almighty and made a difference in the outcome of his time in jail and his ability to carry out the desire of God.
- **Utterance given to Paul** - In the days when Paul lived, the New Testament was just being written. What a modern teacher of the word would get by study, the apostle Paul would have to receive by revelation. As an apostle, he could prove through the signs and wonders which accompanied his preaching that the doctrines he taught were given to him by God, as he noted in his comments to the Corinthians: "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles" (II Corinthians 12:12).
- **Speaking the mystery** - The great desire of the great God from the beginning was to enjoy deep spiritual friendship with all men. To do that (because of what He knows about man) He would first dwell in their hearts by faith. In the Old Testament it was clear that God would, in "the last days," send His Spirit to dwell in the sons of Judah. What was a mystery, hidden from past ages and generations, was that He would also send His Spirit to abide in the Gentiles also by this same faith. Thus, all who would be willing to come to Him from every nation, tribe, and tongue would be prepared for the deep spiritual fellowship with the great God in the age yet to come. And it was when Paul went to the Gentiles with this message that the Jews persecuted him, as he explained to King Agrippa: "I kept declaring ... even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death" (Acts 26:20,21). So the apostle was in earnest when he asked the brethren to pray that he might proclaim the mystery with boldness.
- **Ambassador in chains** - Paul was commissioned by Jesus to carry the message from the land of heaven to the courts of the sons of men. Instead of granting him diplomatic immunity, they persecuted and incarcerated him as a prisoner of war, angry that the message from heaven should make it clear that God was their superior. Thus he was "an ambassador in chains," still boldly delivering the proclamation as he had been set aside to do.

The nature of man has not changed since Paul was delivering the message from heaven. Those today who proclaim the mystery of the gospel - the Holy Spirit dwelling in the Gentiles who are obedient to the faith - really need the brethren to pray earnestly on their behalf, that they may speak boldly as they ought to speak.

Excitement From Ephesians

A Faithful Minister

Mankind has always found ways to share with one another. Whether it is by telephone, telegraph, or the secret codes of men confined in the "Hanoi Hilton," people have devised means to communicate with others of similar interests. And thus it was among the churches in the first century, AD. "But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing," wrote Paul to the Ephesian brethren, "Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. And I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you also may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts"(Ephesians 6:21,22).

- **Communication among first century congregations** - It is clear that each of the churches of New Testament record were autonomous; the elders of the congregation at Ephesus, for example, were subject to the Holy Spirit and not to some diocese or consistory. But the autonomy did not preclude communication or cooperation. Evangelists freely traveled throughout the congregations, as evidenced by Paul's words to the Corinthians about Apollos: "But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity" (I Corinthians 16:12). The preachers often worked in an area, laboring amidst more than one congregation at a time, as indicated by Titus' work on Crete (Titus 1:5). And the congregations would often send representatives to work as a part of a team laboring with someone such as Paul (the congregation at Ephesus had sent Tychicus to Paul, and now Paul was sending him back). In these and other ways the congregations kept abreast of what was happening in the church at large. Thus Paul could say to the brethren in Rome, "All the churches of Christ greet you" (Romans 16:16).
- **Concern for those who preached the word** - Paul strove hard and underwent much suffering in establishing the congregations throughout the Roman province of Asia. "For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren," the apostle stated to the saints of God in Christ Jesus at Achaia, "of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life" (II Corinthians 1:8). The Christians in Ephesus were appropriately grateful, and were desirous of finding out the welfare of Paul through the returning Tychicus.
- **Beloved brother** - In the first century, Christians actually loved their brethren and regarded those who labored among them with high esteem. Tychicus was rightly called a "beloved brother"; may this high regard be reflected in our terminology today.
- **A faithful minister** - Tychicus was a giver, not a taker. He was a hard-working servant not a resource draining drone. Any Biblical concept or description of any ministry emphasizes the servitude of the one who so ministers rather than establishing the position of "the minister" as one with the chief seat in the synagogue.
- **Comfort your hearts** - Everyone could use some encouragement. And in the throes of great struggle, intense persecution, and heavy burdens, a little comfort - which includes care, concern, and encouragement all rolled into one - would greatly assist the brethren in their spiritual warfare. Tychicus would thus "comfort" their hearts.

The apostle Paul was greatly blessed to have a man like Tychicus working alongside him. As a faithful minister, Tychicus could be trusted to tell the brethren about Paul's work, to carry out his teaching and ministry to the saints in truthfulness and sound doctrine, and to bring edification and encouragement to the brethren.

Excitement From Ephesians

Grace, Faith, Love and Peace

The difference between solitude and loneliness is what has been going on the rest of the time. Fifteen minutes of silence on a shaded porch can be excruciating loneliness to an old man who feels like he is over the hill and left out of the conversation; it can be fifteen minutes of restful solace to a man who has been harried all day with people, phone calls, and problems. So when Paul wrote his closing words to the brethren in Ephesus, to the modern "at ease in Zion" Christian, the thoughts expressed seem to be a ho-hum, this-is-how-we-finish-the-letter ending. But to the brethren who suffered such as they did in the Roman province of Asia in the first century, AD, the signing off of Paul was laden with meaning and encouragement.

- **Peace** - Peace is a common theme throughout the letter to the Ephesians. Paul began the letter with a greeting of peace. In the body of the epistle a main section was devoted to the peace - the peace which an individual is to have in being reconciled to God, and the peace which was therefore to exist between those of Jewish and Gentile background. Jesus "Himself is our peace" is one statement; how important then is this peace. Paul's closing of "peace to the brethren" was meaningful and encouraging to the saints in those troubled times, and focused their hope on God and their efforts on peaceful relationships with the brethren.
- **Faith** - All these good things with God occur in the realm of the unseen; they are perceived only by the eye of faith. If a person bases his faith on wrong understanding, he may believe that he is at peace with God when he is not. But when the good soldier of Christ walks in accordance with the written word of God, then he is operating by Biblical faith, and he has the calm assurance that God has kept His covenant of peace through Jesus Christ.
- **Love** - The word of God communicates the love of God for each person on earth, especially for those who have become children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. The love of God is unseen and unfelt; the only way it can be known is through the love letter from God to man. Moreover, as the saint learns more of God's love toward him, expressed through the gospel, he learns to love lost men and his brethren of like precious faith. Through application of scripture to life's circumstances, faithful saints increase in love toward one another, and learn to love God with a love "incorruptible."
- **Grace** - Intermingled with the peace and love emanating from the throne of God is the grace of God. Grace is His willingness to overlook transgression and to forgive iniquity, and to shower His gifts for service on the brethren. The grace of our Lord Jesus is learned by the saints, who in turn learn to overlook the transgressions of other Christians against themselves, who are kind and helpful, and who are gracious in their interrelationships in the church.

"Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus with a love incorruptible" (Ephesians 6:23,24). Amen!

Excitement From Ephesians

Final Summary of Ephesians

The words of Paul to the congregation at Ephesus will stand forever. When all the writings of man, be he a Plato or a Shakespeare, have moldered or burnt, what constitutes the six chapters of the apostle to the saints in the province of Asia will echo perpetually through the halls of heaven. And what a message it brings!

The apostle is conscious of the great spiritual war, which is taking place in the heavenlies, wherein the hosts of Satan collide with the forces of God. Christians are caught right in the middle of the warfare, and the brethren are informed that "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" (Ephesians 6:12). Because of the seriousness and severity of the battle. the brethren's attention is focused on some great - spiritual truths:

- The apostles and other Jewish Christians were chosen before the foundation of the world to be the core of the spiritual kingdom. The grace of God was lavished upon them, and they were forgiven their transgressions through the riches of God's grace. Those of Gentile heritage also, having heard the message of truth and having obeyed the gospel, were sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit. Both Jews and Gentiles, having now been justified by His grace, were to have their spiritual eyes opened, that they might comprehend the majesty and magnificence of Christ in glory, and His power exerted in behalf of the church, "the fulness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:23).
- All who become Christians need to be cognizant that at one time they were dead - separated from God - by their trespasses and sin. But God, "being rich in mercy," through the gospel of Christ, saved through His grace those who believe in Christ, and raised and seated them with Him on the heavenly throne. Through the workmanship of God, Jew and Gentile alike are brought together in the body of Christ, are peaceful, and are being built into the true and spiritual temple of God.
- The apostle Paul was pleased to make known the mystery of Christ, "which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men." God had clearly promised the indwelling Spirit to the Jews, but it was hidden - although clear to anyone looking back into the Old Testament through the eyes of the New Testament apostles and prophets - that the indwelling Spirit was also promised to the Gentiles. Thus all in Christ can be strengthened with power through the Spirit in the inner man, and God is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all anyone asks or thinks through that power. Truly, there is to be glory in the church to Christ throughout all generations.
- The brethren were to preserve the unity of that Spirit, knowing that there was only one body, only one Spirit, only one hope of their calling, only one Lord, only one faith, only one common immersion, and only one God and Father of all. They were to be renewed in the Spirit of their minds and put on the new self, which was being shaped in the image of Christ in Glory.
- The saints of God were to be imitators of God, walking as children of light and being filled with the Spirit. Filling their lives with songs of praise to God and their mouths overflowing with thanksgivings, they could successfully take on the challenge of husband-wife, parent-child, and slave-master relationships.
- The soldiers of the gospel could put on all six pieces of spiritual armor and, prepared both defensively and offensively, successfully do battle with the forces of evil.

The gospel is the same today as it was when Paul wrote what is now called the book of Ephesians. The purpose of God is the same. The power of the Spirit in the inner man is the same. And the spiritual warfare is the same. The Christians were conquerors in the first century, AD; are "modern" Christians the same as they?