

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE MYSTERY

A VERSE BY VERSE STUDY
OF THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

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Published by:



1450 Oak Hill Road
Fort Worth, Texas 76112

Speaking the Truth in Love

January 2003

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INTRODUCTORY LESSON

In the Book of Ephesians we find a wealth of doctrinal instruction which is directed by the Holy Spirit to the believers of the present day. We remember that “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (II Timothy 3:16-17). However, this does not mean that “all scripture” is written to us, and for our doctrinal instruction. It is all “written for our learning” (Romans 15:4) and it is all “profitable for our doctrine,” but it is not all directed to us, or to our particular dispensation. Therefore, we must study to show ourselves approved unto God, workmen that needeth not to be ashamed, “rightly dividing the Word of Truth” (II Timothy 2:15).

As we apply II Timothy 2:15 to our Bible study, we find that the Bible falls into seven general dispensations. There are also shorter and more specific dispensations within each of these seven.

A dispensation, as the term is used in the Bible, is a period of time during which a man or men are tested as to their obedience to some specific revelation from God.

The present dispensation, in which we find ourselves and during which God is calling out the church which is the body of His dear Son, was given to Paul, and is spoken of as “the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints” (Colossians 1:24-27). Revelation concerning this mystery dispensation is not to be found in the Word except in the writings of Paul.

Paul is the one and only apostle spoken of as the apostle, preacher, or teacher of the Gentiles. His ministry is definitely set forth as a minister to the Gentiles. This truth is made plain in II Timothy 1:11—“Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles,” in Romans 11:13—“For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify mine office,” and again in Galatians 2:7-9—“But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter: (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision,

the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:;) And when James, Cephas, and John who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the heathen and they unto the circumcision.”

In order to understand clearly the message which God has given to us through the apostle Paul, we must distinguish between the three definite periods in the general dispensation of grace, which begins at Calvary and ends with the return of Christ in glory. The three periods are set forth in the Scriptures as follows:

1. From the crucifixion of Christ to the setting aside of National Israel—Acts 28:28.
2. From the setting aside of National Israel to the catching up of the church which is the body of Christ—Phillippians 3:20-21.
3. From the catching up of the church which is Christ’s body to the return of Christ in glory—Revelation 19:11-16.

A careful study of these three periods, within the dispensation of grace, will bring to our attention:

1. God’s dealings with National Israel during the book of Acts period, or the first period mentioned above.
2. God’s dealings with the church, which is the body of Christ, or the period in which we are now living, the second period mentioned above.
3. God’s dealings with Israel and the nations during the Great Tribulation period, which will follow immediately after the catching up of the Body, or the third period mentioned above.

Even though three distinct periods of ministry are recognized during this present age of grace, we must understand that only two different companies of saints are dealt with. The first and the last of these three different periods of the Holy Spirit’s ministry is directed toward National Israel, while the middle period of His ministry is

given to the church, which is the body of Christ. In other words, the present mystery dispensation is a parenthetical period which fits in between God's dealings with National Israel during the Acts period and His dealings with National Israel during the tribulation period.

The Book of Ephesians is directed to the saints of this parenthetical period fitting in between God's dealings with National Israel during the Acts period and His dealings with National Israel during the tribulation. In other words, the message which God gave to National Israel from Calvary to Acts 28:28 will be given again to the same people during the tribulation period which falls between the catching up of the body of Christ and the return of Christ with His body, to set up the Kingdom. The message given during these two periods has to do with the kingdom of heaven which is to be set up on earth when Christ returns. This kingdom dispensation is commonly referred to as the millennium. It is separate and distinct from the church which is the body of Christ. The hope and calling of the kingdom saints is the heavenly reign of Christ on earth. The hope and calling of the body saints is the rapture of the church into glory with Christ. This is clear to the Bible student who has observed that Israel is God's earthly people and the body of Christ is God's heavenly people.

The hope of Israel and the setting up of the kingdom are the subjects of Old Testament prophecy, the gospel accounts, the epistles of Peter, James and John, and the book of Revelation, but the hope of the body of Christ and the catching up of the church into glory is revealed through Paul's epistles only.

It is also helpful to note that Paul's epistles written during the Acts Period—Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, and I and II Thessalonians—revealed his double ministry, "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Gentile)"—Romans 1:16. During this period his marching orders are found in I Corinthians 9:19-22 where he was "made all things to all men," that he might "by all means save some." All of these epistles were written while God was still dealing with National Israel in the closing part of the Acts period.

Acts 28:25-28 marks the time of the setting aside of National Israel, and from that time forth the Holy Spirit uses Paul to magnify the truth concerning the body of Christ and the mystery dispensation. His epistles written after Acts 28:28 are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Timothy, Titus and Philemon. In these epistles "the

middle wall of partition” between the Jew and the Gentile is no longer standing (Ephesians 2:14-18). It was broken down at the cross, but was permitted to separate between the saved Jews and the saved Gentiles as long as God dealt with Israel as a nation, or up to Acts 28:28.

It is evident that the last appeal which the Holy Spirit made to National Israel was made through the apostle Paul, and is recorded in Acts 28:17-28. This message was given to “the chief of the Jews” (verse 17). At that time, Paul was bound with a chain for the “hope of Israel” (verse 20). As Paul unburdened his heart before the Jewish brethren, he “testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening” (verse 23).

There was nothing in this last message to Israel concerning the body of Christ, or the mystery dispensation. He could not have given them truth concerning the “mystery” out of the law of Moses and the prophets because the mystery had been hid “from ages and from generations” previous to its revelation to Paul (Colossians 1:25-28). It was the “kingdom of God” that Paul preached to these dispersed Jews of Rome. Therefore, he used the Scriptures given through the Law of Moses and the prophets.

When the Jews “agreed not among themselves” concerning Paul’s message, he closed his message with a quotation from Isaiah, chapter 6, saying, “Well spake the Holy Ghost by Isaiah the prophet unto our fathers, saying, go unto this people, and say, hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles and that they will hear it” (verses 25-28).

These verses mark the setting aside of National Israel until after the church, which is the body of Christ, is completed and glorified. With the nation of Israel set aside and the middle wall of partition between the Jew and the Gentile broken down, there was no more place for “the law of commandments contained in ordinances.” For full proof of this statement carefully and prayerfully study the fol-

lowing Scriptures:

Ephesians 2:14-15—“For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace.”

Colossians 2:13-14—“And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross.”

Colossians 2:20-22—“Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men.”

With the nation of Israel set aside and the middle wall of partition broken down, there is no more place for “the law of commandments contained in ordinances” (Ephesians 2:15, Colossians 2:14 and 2:20-23).

As we go into a verse by verse study of the Book of Ephesians, we must remember that we are not in the “shadow” days of the Old Testament, nor in the “Jew only” and the “Jew first” days of the book of Acts, but we are studying a book which has to do with the revelation of the very capstone of God’s entire building program, namely the building of the church which is Christ’s body—Ephesians 1:22-23.

CHAPTER 1

In Verses 1 and 2

Paul salutes the saints at Ephesus and the “faithful in Christ Jesus” with the familiar epistolary salutation—“grace be to you and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

These two words, “grace” and “peace,” are found in the opening verses of every one of Paul’s epistles. The order is always the same, grace, then peace; never peace and grace. There is no peace for the depraved human heart until first the grace of God is manifested through His Son Jesus Christ.

“We have peace with God” because we have been “justified by faith” through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). And having been justified by faith, “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding” keeps our “hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). When the Lord returns to the earth “in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory,” He shall set up His kingdom over the whole earth and then there shall be peace on earth and “good will toward men” (Luke 2:14). But let us ever remember that our present “peace with God,” the “peace of God,” and the future world wide “peace on earth” are resting upon the grace of God which is made known through our Lord Jesus Christ. This is why the Holy Spirit always says, grace and peace and never, peace and grace.

We also call attention to the fact that this “grace” and “peace” flows out “from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” The Son had glory with the Father “before the world was” (John 17:5). He left the glory world and “took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:7-8). It was here that God “made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (II Corinthians 5:21). It was God’s eternal love and grace that brought the Son from heaven’s glory to the cross of Calvary where He bore “our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed” (I Peter 2:24).

This love and grace of God is set forth in the gospel hymn by

William R. Newell—

O, the love that drew salvation's plan,
O, the grace that brought it down to man,
O, the mighty gulf that God did span,
At Calvary.

Mercy there was great and grace was free,
Pardon there was multiplied to me,
There my burdened soul found liberty,
At Calvary.

In Verses 3 to 14

we get a glimpse of the eternal purpose and plan of God which is now being worked out through the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. At the time Paul penned these verses he was suffering untold cruelties of earth, but he was enjoying unlimited visions of heaven. Though he was lodged in a Roman prison, he launches forth into the message of this epistle with the triumphant word “blessed” (verse 3).

The clause, “blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” in verse 3, reminds us of this testimony in II Corinthians 1:3-5—“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.” Paul seems to never forget the blessing and praise that belongs to our God and Father and to our Lord and Savior. Perhaps our prayers would be more far-reaching if they were filled with more praise and gratitude to God for what He has already done, and less begging for things we think He ought to do.

We call your attention to four things about the blessings of verse 3. He “hath blessed us with all ... blessings.” They are “spiritual blessings.” They are blessings which belong to the “heavenly places.” And they are blessings which are secured “in Christ.”

Seven of these blessings are dealt with in detail in these verses. They are as follows:

We were “chosen” in Christ “before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love” (verse 4).

God “predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself , according to the good pleasure of His will” (verse 5).

“He hath made us accepted in the beloved” (verse 6). That is, He hath made us acceptable to Himself by robing us in the righteousness of His own Son.

He has redeemed us through the blood of His Son by which we have “forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (verse 7).

He has instructed us “having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself” (verse 9).

“He has sealed us with the Holy Spirit of promise” until the day of the redemption of our bodies when the church is caught into glory (verse 13).

Finally, He has enriched us with a specified “inheritance” which will be given unto us when we, “the body, the church” meet our Lord and Head in glory.

As members of the “church, which is the body of Christ,” we are God’s children, or sons (verse 5). This is true because we are in His Son. Our redemption and the forgiveness of our sins is “according to the riches of His grace” and the riches of His grace are “unsearchable” (Ephesians 3:8). Therefore the measure of forgiveness which we enjoy in Christ is the measure of the “unsearchable riches of Christ.” In Christ, we stand “holy and without blame” before God. God cannot see us as we were in Adam, fallen and condemned; but He sees us as we are in Christ, risen and accounted righteous. This reminds us of Colossians 1:21-22—“And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight:”

It is true that “we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isaiah 64:6). Yet, it is

also true that we who are saved have been made clean through the blood of Christ and we are now robed in His infinite righteousness. Therefore, we are a new creation and we no longer belong to the fallen race of Adam. Our citizenship is in heaven and our standing before the Heavenly Father is just as perfect as that of His dear Son, because we stand in Him and in His righteousness.

In Verses 15-23

we find the recorded prayer of the apostle Paul to “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory” (verse 17) and for the “saints” of Ephesus and the “faithful in Christ Jesus” (verses 15 to 16 with verse 1). This prayer was prompted in the heart of the apostle by their “faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints” (verses 15 to 16). Therefore, we may expect it to be a prayer of thanksgiving and praise; and one that petitions the favor of God upon the saints.

The burden of all the prayers recorded in the Bible is for the saints and not for the unsaved. The Saviour came into the world “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10); but when “one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray,” He taught them to pray for that little Jewish remnant, which the Father had elected to obtain kingdom glory, and not for the blinded multitudes (Luke 11:1-4 and Matthew 6:9-15). When Christ, Himself prayed to the Father, He said, “I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine” (John 17:9).

If we present-day believers would study Paul’s prayers recorded in the text of this lesson, in Ephesians 3:13-21, Philippians 1:8-11, Colossians 1:9-17, I Thessalonians 3:9-13, and II Thessalonians 2:16-17, we would learn how to bring each other before the throne of grace scripturally and without so much form and repetition.

The burden of the apostle’s prayer, in the verses of our text, is that the saints might know four things. These four things are set forth as follows:

First, he prays that the “Father of glory” might give unto the saints “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” (verse 17). All saved people know Jesus Christ as their Saviour, but his petition for the saints is that they may gain precise, or further knowledge of Him. This further knowledge comes through

acquaintance, fellowship and Bible study. It means growth “in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (II Peter 3:18).

Second, he prays that the saints might “know what is the hope of his calling” (verse 18). He wants us to know that we are called to sonship “in the beloved” and that we are not servants as under the Mosaic law (verses 4 to 6 with Galatians 3:4-7). Ours is a heavenly calling. Positionally, we are now seated “in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6). Although for the present we are living in vile bodies of flesh, and laboring under the constant pressure of Satan, we are “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ,” and we “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Titus 2:13 and Philippians 3:14).

Third, he prays that we as believers might know “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (verse 18). We not only have an inheritance in Christ Jesus (verse 11), but He also has an inheritance in us. He “hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6-7). We are told again in Titus 2:14 that He “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” In these verses the Holy Spirit gives us to understand that we are the inheritance of the Son and that our relationship to Him throughout eternity will bring forth glory to His name because of His grace, mercy, and love which were manifested at the cross of Calvary in our behalf.

As we compare Exodus 19:5 with Titus 2:14, we see that God has an inheritance (“peculiar treasure”) in His earthly people, Israel, and He has also an inheritance (“peculiar people”) in the members of the church which is His body, His heavenly people. We must be careful not to confuse the hope and calling of His earthly inheritance, “Israel,” with the hope and calling of His heavenly inheritance, the present-day believers, the body of Christ. We must also be careful not to confuse the earthly glory that awaits Israel with the heavenly glory that awaits the church which is Christ’s body. The “hope of Israel” is the coming of Christ in glory to set up His earthly king-

dom, but our “hope of glory” is the coming of Christ to catch us up into heaven and change us from our “vile body” into the likeness of His “glorious body.” Such Scriptures as Isaiah 2:1-4, 11:1-9, 35:1-10, Ezekiel 36:22-38, Joel 3:15-20, Matthew 5:5, Matthew 24:27-31, Revelation 1:7, 11:15-18, 19:11-21, and many others have to do with His second coming to the earth to set up His kingdom and fulfill the promises made to Israel and the nations that are to be blessed with Israel (Romans 15:8-10 with Genesis 12:1-3). On the other hand, the following Scriptures will enlighten us concerning our position in Christ and Christ in us our “hope of glory”—Colossians 3:1-4, Philippians 3:20-21, I Thessalonians 4:16-18, I Corinthians 15:51-53, and II Timothy 4:8.

Fourth, he prays that we who have been raised from the mire of sin in Christ Jesus might know “what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come” (verses 19 to 21). He is praying that we might realize that the same power which raised Christ from the tomb and placed Him at the right hand of majesty on high has worked in our own hearts and raised us from the power of sin and from death in sin and hath made us to be citizens in glory in our risen Saviour. Notice the expression “exceeding greatness of His power” in verse, 19. This means surpassing power or power that is beyond all other powers. Therefore Satan is powerless to hold the one who wills to trust in Christ. He cannot keep the unsaved from being saved if they will to receive the Lord Jesus Christ. He cannot keep the saved from victory over sin if they will to yield themselves to Christ who is powerful to hold them. And best of all, he cannot keep the church on the earth one second after the risen and exalted Head calls us to be with Him in glory.

This chapter closes with the truth of “all truth” concerning Christ as the Head of His church, which is His body (verses 22-23). In this position Christ occupies a seven-fold headship. He is above (1) All principality, (2) power, (3) might, (4) dominion, (5) every name, (6) all things, and (7) the church.

The wonderful thing for us, as members of Christ's body, is that we are given the position of power with Him. When we subject ourselves to Him as members of His church, and allow Him to work in and through us, according to His own good pleasure and will, there is no principality, power, might, dominion, name or thing that can triumph over us in our stand for the truth. This helps us to understand the meaning of I John 4:4—"Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world."

CHAPTER 2

In Verses 1-3

we see our past condition by nature. “And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins:” (verse 1). The Holy Spirit is here addressing all who have been quickened or made alive “with Christ” on a basis of unconditioned grace (verse 5).

Before we were quickened, we were “dead in trespasses and sins” (verse 1); we “walked according to the course of this world” (verse 2); we were busy fulfilling “the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (verse 3). This was our condition by nature. The marvel of all marvels is that the God of glory, who knew all about us from the beginning, could have love and grace enough to choose us in Christ, to predestinate us to the adoption of children by Christ, to make us accepted in the Beloved, to redeem us through the blood of His Son, to instruct us in the mystery of His will, to seal us with the Holy Spirit of promise, and to enrich us with a specified inheritance according to Ephesians 1:4-11.

Even though we were dead in trespasses and sins, we could walk. However, our walk was according to the course of this world, and according to Satan, the prince of the power of the air. As dead sinners, we could move about in the world and enjoy the lusts of the flesh, but we were absolutely powerless to make one moral move toward God. We were not disobedient children, but “children of disobedience” in whom Satan works (verses 2 and 3) and upon whom the wrath of God comes (Ephesians 5:6). We were not merely sons of Adam, but sons of fallen Adam. Our nature was not merely human nature, such as Adam had before he fell into sin; but fallen human nature such as Adam had after sin entered.

Satan, “the prince of the power of the air” (verse 2) injected the poison of sin into the blood stream of the human race through the first man Adam. The unborn race was in his loins when he sinned. Through this one man, Adam, “sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned” (Romans 5:12). This is why we were dead in sin before we were quickened in Christ. Adam yielded himself to Satan and his

fallen nature cried out for the things of the world. We, the sons of Adam, inherited his fallen nature; therefore, we came into the world with an inborn desire for the things of the world which satisfy the lusts of the flesh. There is nothing in our fallen human nature to help us resist the evil one; therefore, before we received our new nature in Christ we walked according to the course of the world, according to the prince of the power of the air, and had our conversation in the lust of our flesh.

God does not see the children of Adam as graded sinners; some not so bad, others worse, and still others vile and terrible. He declares, "There is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:22-23). In God's sight natural men are all alike, dead in sin, corrupt by nature, sons of disobedience, led by the spirit of Satan and under the wrath of God. These are cold facts from God's infallible Word, but they are facts that the proud heart of man both dislikes and denies.

In Verses 4-10

the divine picture changes from our past condition by nature to our present condition by grace. The expression "but God" (verse 4) brings to our attention the one and only possibility for so great a change. Here is where God undertook for us and did for us what we could not begin to do for ourselves.

We stand in amazement at the grace of God to usward. Read again the record of what we were by nature (verses 1-3), and then read of the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus, as pictured so clearly in verses 4-10. Such miserable beings as we were, yet He showed mercy toward us, loved us, quickened us, and even raised us up and made us sit together with His Son in the heavenlies. In all this, God was the sole worker. Our hands were tied by sin.

Before we could take our present position in the heavenlies as companions of God's dear Son and one with Him in all of His glory, we had to be cleansed. This, God did through the application of the precious blood of Christ to our sinful souls. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God buried us with His Son "by baptism

into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4). This burial and resurrection has been experienced by every child of God, and it was accomplished “through the faith of the operation of God,” who hath raised His Son, the Lord Jesus, from the dead. Such a baptism cannot be performed by the hands of man.

Our salvation is by grace through faith; and that faith is not of ourselves; “it is the gift of God” (verse 8). The gift of faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). God has a definite plan and He is working out that plan for His own glory. This is why He has undertaken for us according to verses 4-10. We were included among His “vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory,” and it is necessary that He cleanse us and prepare us for our place in His plan and program.

We who are saved are of the same “lump” as those who are lost. It is only by His grace and mercy that we are “vessels unto honour” instead of “vessels unto dishonour.” Such sovereign grace is beyond our human understanding, but it is clearly taught in the Word. For instance: “Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also the Gentiles?” (Romans 9:21-24). Throughout “the ages to come” God will be showing “the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness to us through Christ Jesus” to the principalities and powers of the heavenlies (verse 7).

God is “not willing that any should perish” (II Peter 3:9). He has not predestined anyone to hell. The “whosoever” of John 3:16 are “the chosen” of Ephesians 1:4. Of the same “lump” some believe and are saved, others believe not and are damned. The glory which comes to God through the salvation of lost souls is not measured by the number of sinners that believe and are saved, but by the “exceeding riches” of God’s grace in the offering up of His Son for the salvation of sinners. It will not be the number of saved people in

heaven that will bring glory to God, but the display of the “exceeding riches of His grace” that made it possible for even one person to be there.

Man was created in the image and after the likeness of God. God permitted sin to corrupt him and kill him, and render him utterly helpless. All the while God’s plan of redemption was completely worked out in His own mind whereby He was to lift the fallen man through His Son, Christ Jesus, into an infinitely higher position with God than that which Adam had before he fell. Adam was only innocent, we are righteous. God allowed sin to do its complete work in order that He might glorify Himself through the complete eradication of sin before the eyes of Satan and all of his forces. This, He did when Christ came forth from the grave “having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:15).

God’s plan for the walk of the believer is just as perfect as His plan for the salvation of the sinner. As believers, “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (verse 10). We must be God’s workmanship before we can be God’s workmen. It is equally true that God’s workmen must work according to the blue print laid down in His Word. His entire plan is revealed through His Word. The Holy Spirit leads the believer, but He never leads contrary to the Word.

As “workers together with God” in the building of His church (not ours), we should study His plan, revealed in His Word, just as carefully as the builder of a house would study the blueprint of an architect. The one reason for all the different churches of organized Christendom is the fact that men have built contrary to God’s revealed plan. They have built and are still building for themselves and for their religious corporation instead of for God and His glory. “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (I Corinthians 14:33); therefore, He could not be the originator of all the different denominational churches. If the organized church did not come from God, from what source did it come? See Colossians 2:8 and 20-23.

In these closing days of the church age we need to emphasize the fact that we are saved by grace through faith (verse 8), and having been saved, we are complete in Christ (Colossians 2:10).

In Verses 11-12

the Holy Spirit is addressing saved people, who have “in time past” been “Gentiles in the flesh” (verse 11). He tells them of their past condition by birth.

The past condition of these who have been redeemed from among the Gentiles is indeed a dark picture. “At that time,” that is, “in time past,” they were “without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (verse 12).

God has a good reason for excluding the Gentiles, of “time past,” from the commonwealth of Israel and from the covenants of promise. The wrath of God was revealed from heaven against them “because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image like to corruptible man, and birds, fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore, God gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up into vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men: leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lusts one to another; men with men, working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them” (Romans 1:21-32).

Three things stand out in the above quotation, namely,
“God gave them up to uncleanness” (Romans 1:24).
“God gave them up to vile affections” (Romans 1:26).
“God gave them over to a reprobate mind” (Romans 1:28).

All of this God did because “they did not like to retain God in their knowledge” (Romans 1:28). This explains why God had to call Abram out from among his Gentile kindred in order to establish with him the covenant of promise. “Now the Lord had said to Abram, get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; And thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:1-3).

Later God gave to Abraham and his seed circumcision in the flesh as a sign of this covenant. “And God said unto Abraham, thou shalt keep My covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is My covenant, which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee; every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your fore-skin; and it shall be a token of a covenant betwixt Me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in thy house, or bought with money of any stranger which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his fore-skin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken My covenant” (Genesis 17:9-14).

These truths clearly bring to our attention the good reason for those of the “circumcision in the flesh made by hands” calling the Gentiles the “uncircumcision” according to Ephesians 2:11. This “time past” condition of the Gentile could be changed in only one way and that one way was Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

We are told by the Lord that circumcision was included in the Mosaic covenant also. In John 7:22 we find this statement, “Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses,

but of the fathers;).” This sign in the flesh was to remind God’s called out people of what He expected them to be at heart. This is made clear in Deuteronomy 10:16 where God said to Israel, “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked.” The Lord wanted His people to be separate and apart and distinctly different from the corrupted Gentiles.

Beginning with verse 13, we no longer see the Gentile as he was “in time past.” The Holy Spirit says: “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” The time element in these verses means everything to us believers who came from the corrupted Gentiles pictured in the first chapter of Romans. “In time past” we were given up to uncleanness, to vile affections and given over to a reprobate mind; we were without Christ, having no hope and without God in the world; but now in Christ Jesus we are made nigh by His precious blood.

The One who has brought us nigh by the blood of His cross is also the Saviour for as many of the “circumcision” as will believe. They too need the cleansing blood applied to their hearts. Just as the Gentile failed God before the Mosaic Covenant was given, so the Jew failed God under the Mosaic Covenant. Therefore, the Scripture concludes that “we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God” (Romans 3:9-11).

Christ has not only become our Saviour, but “He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (verses 14-18).

The enmity which stood between the Jew and the Gentile “in time past,” that is, during the Mosaic dispensation, was “the law of commandments contained in ordinances” (verse 15). These ordinances were blotted out and taken out of the way through the sacrificial work of Christ on the cross. “The handwriting of ordinances that

was against us, which was contrary to us,” He took out of the way, “nailing it to His cross” (Colossians 2:14). This explains why the Holy Spirit tells us as members of the body of Christ that we are complete in our Saviour without the observance of ordinances. He says, “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?” (Colossians 2:20-22).

The fellowship which we have in “the church, which is His body,” is not based upon carnal things, but spiritual. We are a company of heavenly citizens, waiting for the soon coming of the Lord Jesus, the Head of the church (Philippians 3:20-21). Having been raised and seated with Him in the heavenlies (Ephesians 2:6), we are admonished to forget “those things which are behind,” and “reaching forth unto those things which are before,” we should “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling (or calling on high) of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14). Since we are “risen with Christ,” we should “seek those things which are above,” and set our affections on “things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1-2). The religious ordinances belong to Israel and the earthly kingdom and not to the body of Christ and the heavenlies.

The body of Christ is built upon “the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone” (verses 19-20). Indeed, the foundation work of all the building that God has ever done is the same. It is all resting upon that foundation which Paul speaks of in I Corinthians 3:11, “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

The body, the church, is the dwelling place of “God through the Spirit” in this dispensation. He lives in the heart of each and every individual member (I Corinthians 3:16). This truth is borne out in verses 21 to 22 where we are told that we are a building “fitly framed together,” and that this building “groweth into an holy temple in the Lord”

We quote the closing paragraph of *Williams’ Commentary* on the 2nd chapter of Ephesians. “So the chapter opens with men as an habitation of Satan (vs. 2) and closes with these same now become an habitation of God (vs. 22), and verses 4 and 10 in the middle of

the chapter reveal how this amazing miracle was effected.”

CHAPTER 3

In Verses 1-13

the Holy Spirit deals with Paul's "knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (verse 4). These thirteen verses make up a division of this chapter which opens and closes with a suggestion that Paul was suffering for the cause he represented. In verse 1, he refers to his imprisonment and in verse 13, he speaks of his tribulations.

During his Acts period ministry, Paul was bound with a chain for "the hope of Israel" (Acts 28:20), but immediately following his proclamation to the Jews in Acts 28:28, he was in bonds for "the mystery of the gospel" (Ephesians 6:18-20). This means that from the beginning of Paul's ministry (Acts 9:20) to the setting aside of national Israel (Acts 28:28), a period of about twenty-one years, he suffered for Israelites; but after he had delivered God's final appeal to Israel, as a nation, he became a prisoner for the "Gentiles" (verse 1).

Even though Paul was in prison, he was always "the Lord's prisoner" (Ephesians 4:1). He was just as active and useful in the Lord's service while in prison as when out of prison (Acts 16:25-34 and 28:30-31 with II Timothy 4:6-8).

In the second verse of this chapter, Paul calls attention to the fact that the "dispensation of the grace of God" was given unto him. The word *dispensation* means stewardship, or period of ministry. He also emphasizes the fact that this particular dispensation leads him in service toward the Gentiles.

A short time before Paul wrote the book of Ephesians, he declared himself to be an able minister of the "new testament," (II Corinthians 3:6). The new testament is certainly a covenant which was promised to the house of Israel and the house of Judah in the days of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34 with Hebrews 8:7-13). As a minister of the new covenant, Paul was not preaching a message "which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men," but he was confirming "the promise which was made unto the fathers" (Acts 13:26-43). However he clearly sets forth in this third chapter of Ephesians that by a special revelation God made known unto him the truth concerning "the mystery" (verses 2-7).

Men of other ages were privileged to see that God would “justify the heathen through faith” (Galatians 3:6-9) and that they would be made to rejoice “with his people” (Romans 15:10), but no prophet of God, prior to the apostle Paul, was permitted to see “that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel” (verses 3-7).

The word *mystery*, as used in this chapter, means “a sacred secret.” The same word is used in connection with the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13:10-11). Paul uses it again in Romans 11:25 in connection with the duration of Israel’s blindness. The same word is used again and again in the Scriptures. However, this mystery which was revealed unto Paul was different from all other sacred secrets in that it was “unsearchable” or untraceable in the writings of all the inspired men prior to the apostle Paul. He was the first man whom God called upon “to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (verses 9-11).

“The churches of Asia” seemed to be standing with Paul when he wrote I Corinthians 16:19, but about seven years later he reminded Timothy that “all they which are in Asia” were turned away from him (II Timothy 1:15). It seems that the churches of Asia accepted Paul’s message when he was an able minister of the new covenant, but turned away from him when he began to preach “the mystery.”

Paul’s experience along this line was no different to that which the present day preacher meets when he dares to preach the truth concerning the mystery without a mixture of works which were associated with the old and new covenants.

In Verses 14-21

we have the second prayer of the Holy Spirit, through the Apostle Paul, which is related in this Epistle. The first prayer we have already dealt with in chapter 1, verses 15-23. Both prayers have to do with the “spiritual blessings” mentioned in the third verse of the

opening chapter.

The deep underlying cause that brought Paul to his knees before the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” is clearly set forth in the following verses: “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (verses 16-19).

The “inner man” alone can be strengthened with might by God’s Spirit. The some Spirit that strengthens the inner man slays the outer man. The “outward man” must perish, but the “inward man is renewed day by day” (II Corinthians 4:16). As we “reckon” ourselves “to be dead indeed unto sin” the inner man grows stronger in the life of God, which is imparted through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:11). It is the inner man whom God admonishes in Colossians 2:6-7, saying, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.” The outward man can never walk in Christ Jesus, neither can he be rooted and built up in Him. He can never be established in the faith, neither can he abound in Christ with thanksgiving. Indeed he must be crucified before the inward man can do these things.

The strengthening of the inner man is to be accomplished by the Holy Spirit (verse 16). He alone can guide the believer into “all truth” (John 16:13), thus nourishing and strengthening the inner man. As believers, we must meet a personal enemy, who is too strong for the outward man. “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” Wherefore, we must take unto ourselves “the whole armour of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:12-13).

Even “Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil” dared not to bring a railing accusation against him, but said, “The Lord rebuke thee” (Jude 9). If the archangel could not meet the enemy in his own strength, surely we cannot successfully contend with

him without the strengthening power of the Holy Spirit in the inner man. However, through the power of the Holy Spirit the present day believer can confidently say with the Apostle Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). Just as the Lord spoke unto Zerubbabel, saying, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts;" so God speaks through His Word to His present day church urging them to lean upon the Holy Spirit and not upon the arm of flesh. And just as God caused the great mountain to become a plain before His servant, Zerubbabel, so will He remove mountain high opposition from before the onward march of any individual believer or group of believers in the church which is the body of His dear Son.

The apostle is burdened for the believers at Ephesus, and elsewhere, that we may be "able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge," that we "might be filled with all the fullness of God" (verses 17-19).

The breadth of God's love in Christ is boundless, the length of His love is endless, the depth of His love is fathomless, and the height of His love is measureless, says the author of the *Companion Bible*. Such love "passeth knowledge."

The love of God makes it possible for every believer to be "filled with all the fulness of God" (verse 19). This does not mean that our capacity is equal to that of God. A thimble can be filled with all the fulness of the ocean. A believer can be filled with the fulness of God. Some believers are able to contain more of His fulness than others, yet all may be full. As we empty ourselves of self and the things pertaining to self, we make increasing room for His fulness. This is why the outward man must be gotten out of the way in order that the inner man may be filled with the Spirit, who alone is able to strengthen us and make us able to comprehend the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of God's love.

The closing words of this prayer are heart strengthening. "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

We can neither ask for nor think of anything that our God is not

able to do for us. We often think of things and ask for things that He does not see fit to grant unto us. This is because we so often think and ask outside of His divine will and purpose for us. We ask, and receive not, because we “ask amiss,” that we may consume it on our lusts (James 4:3). However, “If we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him” (I John 5:14-15). So it is not a question of God’s ability and power to work in us and “do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,” it is a question of yieldedness on our part to His perfect plan which He hath ordained for us, even before the foundation of the world.

As we yield ourselves and allow Him to accomplish through us far more than that which we ever thought of asking for, we say with Paul, “Unto Him be glory in the church by Jesus Christ throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

CHAPTER 4

In Verses 1-3

the Holy Spirit refers to Paul as “the prisoner of the Lord,” and not the prisoner of the Roman Emperor. In the opening verse of the third chapter, Paul declared himself to be the prisoner of Jesus Christ for the “Gentiles,” and in the sixth chapter, verses 19 and 20, he speaks of himself as an ambassador in bonds, because he was making known “the mystery of the gospel.” It pleased the Lord to let Paul remain in prison after the revelation of the mystery.

These first three verses of this chapter make up the introduction to a deep and heart-searching message on the walk of the believer. The same Holy Spirit that opened our eyes when we were “dead in trespasses and sins,” and let us behold the Lamb of God, who bore our sins in His own body on the tree, and then baptized us into the body of the risen Christ, thereby making us members of His church, has also told us to walk in the risen Lord. He has said: “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” This is more than we can do in our own strength. Therefore, He has said unto us: “As ye therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: Rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving” (Colossians 2:6-7). We received Him by giving up completely and admitting our inability to save ourselves. We can only walk worthily in the Lord by giving up our own ways and committing them unto Him that He may direct our paths. We have no more strength within ourselves to make us walk in Christ than we had to make ourselves new creatures in Christ when we were saved.

There is nothing in our human nature to make us lowly, meek, longsuffering, or forbearing. There is nothing within the natural man that prompts him to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. However, when the old man is crucified, the Holy Spirit furnishes the believer with ample grace to do all of these things. Our business is to “die daily” and let the Holy Spirit have full sway to work through us “according to the good pleasure of His will,

to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved.”

While it may be impossible for us to keep the unity of the Spirit with all of God’s children, it is always possible to endeavor to keep it. It requires two or more saints to keep the unity of the Spirit in the “bond of peace,” but every individual may endeavor to keep it. The word “endeavoring” of verse 3 has exactly the same meaning as the word “study” of II Timothy 2:15. We must “study” to show ourselves approved unto God, workmen that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth. In like manner, we must study, or endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit among the brethren. If God’s church would study the Bible and study each other there would be more honest endeavor toward the keeping of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Verses 4-6

set forth the sevenfold unity which believers must keep in order to have “the bond of peace” in the assembly and among the assemblies. “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” Unless there is unity on the part of the believers concerning every one of these seven points there can be no bond of peace.

The vast majority of fundamental believers are in agreement concerning the “one body,” the “one Spirit,” the “one hope,” the “one Lord,” and the “one God and Father.” It is the more than one faith and the more than one baptism that is causing so much strife and division among sincere believers in our present day and generation.

Christians are divided according to Catholic faith and Protestant faiths because of the “tradition of men.” The Bible doesn’t speak of a Presbyterian faith, a Methodist faith, a Baptist faith, a Church of Christ faith, a Pentecostal faith, an undenominational faith, a Bible church faith, an independent faith, a 615 College Avenue faith, or any other kind of a faith that divides the brethren. There is only one faith and that is “the faith of the Son of God” (Galatians 2:20).

Sincere believers are divided and set at variance one with another because of the contention that there is more than one baptism for the

members of God's church. We read in I Corinthians 12:13 that "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." In verse 27 of the same chapter, we are told that this one body into which every believer is baptized is "the body of Christ." In Ephesians 1:22-23 we are told that Christ is the "Head over all things to the church, which is His body." Therefore, it is clear that the Holy Spirit baptism puts the believer into the one church which is the body of Christ. It is also clear that Ephesians 4:5 teaches that there is only "one baptism." Surely this one baptism is the Holy Spirit baptism that puts the believer into the body of Christ, the church. To contend for more than one baptism for the church of this mystery dispensation is to invite division, strife and confusion among believers.

God's order is just as strong for "one faith" and "one baptism" as it is for one Spirit, or one Lord, or one God and Father of all. Remember, it is impossible for any company of saints to keep the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" as long as there is division among the believers on any one of these seven points of unity given by the Holy Spirit to the church which is the body of Christ.

In Verses 7-11

the Holy Spirit sets forth the gift of "grace" to every individual member of the body of Christ (verse 7) and the gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to the body as a whole (verse 11).

Our gift of grace is "according to the measure of the gift of Christ," and Christ is God's "unspeakable gift" (II Corinthians 9:15). The "gift of Christ" cannot be measured in the words of mortal men. Such a gift can only be described in the language of paradise, "the third heaven," where Paul "heard unspeakable words, which is not lawful for a man to utter" (II Corinthians 12:2-4).

The gift of grace is "according to the measure of the gift of Christ," therefore, it is also unspeakable, hence, impossible to describe. No mortal tongue can explain the grace of our God which is greater than all of our sins. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:20).

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

Thro' many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath bro't me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.

We were "dead in trespasses and sin," and were "by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Ephesians 2:1-3); but now "unto every one of us is given grace according the measure of the gift of Christ."

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt.
Yonder on Calvary's mount out-poured,
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.

Sin and despair like the sea waves cold,
Threaten the soul with infinite loss;
Grace that is greater, yes, grace untold,
Points to the Refuge, the Mighty Cross.

Dark is the stain that we can not hide,
What can avail to wash it away?
Look! there is flowing a crimson tide;

Whiter than snow you may be today.

Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe;
You that are longing to see His face,
Will you this moment His grace receive?

Chorus—

Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that is greater than all our sin.

No man has ever appreciated “the gift of Christ” who has not first seen that the gift included the darkness of Calvary and the glory of the resurrection. We must understand that the Father “spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all” (Romans 8:32). He was “delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25).

He was delivered into the hands of wicked men to be “crucified and slain,” but God “hath raised Him up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it” (Acts 2:23-24). He was bruised by man unto physical death, and “it pleased the Lord to bruise Him,” and “put Him to grief” when He made “His soul an offering for sin” in the second death. The Son had fellowship with the Father, while hanging on the cross before the three hours of darkness. During the time He prayed to the Father, addressing Him as Father, saying, “Father forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). But when the darkness fell over all the land from the sixth to the ninth hour, the Son was separated from the Father, and was tasting hell for every man. “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:45-46). Here He was bruised by the Father and His soul was made an offering for our sin. Here the Father made the Son “to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (II Corinthians 5:21).

During these three hours Satan tortured the spotless, sinless Son

of God with all the agonies of hell; but at the close of the three hours, Jesus “cried again with a loud voice,” saying, “It is finished” (Matthew 27:50 with John 19:30). His voice was not faint as one that was being killed and struggling to the end that He might live; but it was with a loud voice that Jesus proclaimed the triumphant words, “It is finished.” Here He was laying down His life that He might take it up again on the morning of the resurrection, just three days hence.

“Wherefore He saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things).” (Verses 8-10). This passage reminds us of the words of our Lord to the Emmaus disciples, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?” The cross always comes before the crown.

Our Saviour descended into “the lower parts of the earth” and remained there for three days and three nights. This is in keeping with the words of Jesus to the scribes and Pharisees, “for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40).

On the morning of the resurrection, our Saviour came forth from the heart of the earth in a body of flesh and bone. In that body He “ascended up on high,” carrying with Him “the keys of hell and death” (Revelation 1:18). Here He triumphed over His enemies and “made a shew of them openly” (Colossians 2:15).

His triumph meant the triumph of all Old Testament believers. All the saved people from Adam to the cross were saved through faith in the coming Son of God, who was to bear their sins on the cross of Calvary. When they died they went in spirit to the place of comfort, in the heart of the earth, described in Luke 16, verses 22-26. This is the place where Christ promised to meet the thief, who said, “Lord remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:42-43). The spirits of the saved from Adam to this thief were taken on high with our Lord when He “led

captivity captive” according to verse 8. In other words, Christ moved paradise from the heart of the earth to the third heaven on the day of His resurrection. This explains why Christ met the thief in paradise, in the heart of the earth (Luke 23:43 with Matthew 12:40); and Paul was caught up into paradise, in the third heaven (II Corinthians 12:2-4). The thief went down to paradise. Paul was caught up into paradise. The thief’s experience was before the resurrection. Paul’s experience was after the resurrection.

The Old Testament believer left the body to go into paradise in the heart of the earth, but the New Testament believer leaves the tabernacle of flesh to enter paradise in glory. Paul says, “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (II Corinthians 5:8). Our saved loved ones who have departed this life are not dead, neither are they asleep, they are alive in the presence of the Lord in glory. One day soon the Lord will come for His church to catch it up to meet Him in the air. On that day the sleeping bodies of the members of the church will be raised and joined with their spirits which have gone on to glory; and the living bodies of the members of the church will be changed and caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air. Thus the entire church, which is the body of Christ, will be glorified with Christ our Head (I Thessalonians 4:13-18 with Philippians 3:20-21).

This is the blessed hope of every member of the body of Christ: because “unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.”

In Verses 12-16

the Holy Spirit sums up in a few words the working out of God’s purpose through the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers of verse 11. These men are not only gifted servants of the Lord, but they are themselves gifts to the church.

It is God’s order that through the combined efforts of these gifts the plan of salvation should be given to the unsaved, and that the saints should be perfected unto “the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ” (verse 12).

It is also God’s unchangeable plan and purpose to continue this edifying work “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the

knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (verses 13-16).

The apostles of verse 11 are not the twelve apostles, chosen by our Lord before His death and resurrection. They are Paul and the eight men who were called by the risen Christ after His ascension into glory.

The names of the twelve are listed in Matthew 10:2-4. This includes Judas, whose place was later filled by Matthias (Acts 1:26). The ministry of these apostles was to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” and concerned the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 10:1-8). The names of the apostles mentioned in verses 11 are Paul and Barnabas, who were first called Apostles in Acts 14:4 and 14, Andronicus and Junia, who are referred to in Romans 15:7 as Paul’s “kinsmen” and “fellow-prisoners,” who were of “note among the apostles.” In I Thessalonians 1:1 Paul associates Silvanus and Timothy with himself and tells us in the 2nd chapter, verses 1 and 2, that they were bold to speak “the gospel of God with much contention.” Epaphroditus is mentioned by Paul in Philippians 2:25 as his “brother, and companion in labor, and fellow-soldier.” Sosthenes and Apollos are certainly included with Paul in I Corinthians 4:9, where he said, “I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it was appointed unto death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.” Compare I Corinthians 1:1 and 4:6. The ministry of these men was to “the Jew first and also the Greek (Gentile),” (Romans 1:16) and chiefly concerned the body of Christ.

“A Perfect Man”

When the church, which is the body of Christ, has reached its

fulness it will be “a perfect man” and not “a bride.” Christ is our Head and we, as members of His body are moving forward “unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (verse 13).

In God’s own time the church will be completed and presented to Christ “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” It will be “holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27). This presentation will take place when our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, shall come from heaven and catch us up to meet Him in the air, changing “our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself” (Philippians 3:30-31).

On this side of the rapture, every member of the body of Christ lives in a body of flesh that is vile. We must all say with the apostle Paul, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Romans 7:18). As many as lean upon the arm of flesh are sure to be “tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” This is why God has given to His church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers “for the perfecting of the saints” unto the work of the ministry. It is His desire that we grow up in Christ and become established in the truth “that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro” by every wind of doctrine and the sleight of men (verse 14).

Constant growth on the part of the members of the body of Christ is assured to every believer who desires and is willing to be fitted into God’s purpose and plan. We draw our strength to grow from Christ, our Head; “from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (verse 16).

Spiritual Nourishment

flows from Christ, the Head, to every individual member of the body by way of “joints and bands” whereby the body is linked with the Head. The different members of the physical body are linked together by joints and bands and every member is directed by the head

to function in harmony with the rest of the body. Paralyze the joint, or break the band between any member of the body and the head, and that particular member can no longer carry out the orders of the brain to move in harmony with the rest of the body. The body of Christ “is not one member, but many” and “whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (I Corinthians 12:14 and 26). This is why we are admonished to hold fast “the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (Colossians 2:19).

God Himself furnishes the joints and bands whereby the members of His church are held together in conscious fellowship one with another and with Christ, the Head. Men may join themselves together and band themselves together in organized churches with earthly headquarters, but only God, through the Holy Spirit, can join believers together in the church, which is the body of Christ with headquarters in glory.

Let us take our stand outside the camp of organized Christendom with our Lord and the faithful few, who own no name but His. While the organized churches are working under the name of more than four hundred different denominational divisions, let us remember the admonition of the Holy Spirit—“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him” (Colossians 3:17).

In Verses 17-32

we find continued instructions to the believers. Having reminded us of our responsibility in connection with the vocation wherewith we are “called” (verses 1-3), and having informed us of the seven-fold unity we are to endeavor to keep “in the bond of peace” (verses 4-6), and having called our attention to the gift of “grace” for the individual members of the body of Christ, and the gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to the body as a whole (verses 7-11), and having shown us clearly the purpose of the ministry of these gifts (verses 12-16), the Holy Spirit closes the chapter by setting forth a few things that we should not do and a few things we should do.

Let us examine His own words: “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness” (verses 17-19).

In these verses, the Holy Spirit tells us that the walk of these “other Gentiles” led them down, down, down. First, they walked according to “the vanity of their mind.” This caused them to have their “understanding darkened” and to be “alienated from the life of God” through “the blindness of their heart,” and finally they were “past feeling” and gave themselves over unto “lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.”

God expects better things than these of His children. We are not to walk as these other Gentiles walk because we “have not so learned Christ;” if so be that we “have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus” (verses 20-21). They walked according to the vanity of their mind, but we are told to “walk in the Spirit” and “not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16); to “walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us” (Ephesians 5:2); to “walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16); to “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10), and to “walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time” (Colossians 4:5).

God has provided the one way whereby it is possible for His children to walk according to the Scriptures set forth in the above paragraph. Christ is this one way. We, who are saved, have been “baptized into Jesus Christ.” This means that we have been “buried with Him by baptism unto death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4). We have the Scriptural right to know “that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin” (Romans 6:6-7).

Our walk “in newness of life” depends entirely on our willing-

ness to “die daily.” We are privileged to say with Paul—“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Such an experience should bring the believer to the place of saying with Paul again—“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14). We begin to realize and enjoy these rich, deep truths when we begin to reckon ourselves “to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” This is what God tells us to do in Romans 6 and verse 11.

Now let us go back to our original text in the 4th chapter of Ephesians. Beginning with verse 22, the Holy Spirit tells us to “put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts.” He goes on to tell us in verses 23 and 24 that we should “be renewed” in the spirit of our mind; and that we should “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” In other words, we are privileged as new creatures in Christ Jesus to “put off” the old man, or the natural man that we received through the natural birth, and to “put on” the new man that we receive through the spiritual birth. God no more expects the new man to continue in the ways of the old man after conversion than He would expect the old man to begin walking in the ways of the new man before his conversion.

Since we are new creatures in Christ and supposed to be walking in newness of life, God is entirely justified in saying to us—“Be angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (verses 26-29).

As we come to the closing verses of this chapter, we are reminded of the fact that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of God “unto the day of redemption.” He came into our hearts to seal us as God’s “purchased possession” after that we “heard the Word of truth,” and after that we “believed” (Ephesians 1:13-14). We are told in John 14:16 that He will abide with us “for ever.” It is not God’s

plan that the Holy Spirit should come into the heart of the believer and then depart from him before His work is accomplished and the believer is delivered safely into the presence and into the likeness of Jesus Christ. He will not leave us until we are presented to Christ “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27).

Even though the Holy Spirit will not leave us, it is possible for us to grieve Him and hinder His freedom in working out the plan and purpose of God through us. God says—“Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God” and then follows up His statement with the clear cut admonition, “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (verses 30-32). It is evident that bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, malice, lack of kindness, and lack of forgiveness on the part of God’s children will grieve the Holy Spirit.

It takes grace from above to enable the believer to live in a body of flesh and not grieve the Holy Spirit who lives with him. However, we need to remember that this grace has been given to us “according the measure of the gift of Christ” (verse 7), and that such a measure of grace is entirely sufficient for all of our need. God has not asked us to do more than His grace will enable us to do. He has made it possible for us to draw on Him for wisdom and strength and power to do all things through His Son, Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:13).

We have Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord. He is also the Head over all things to the church to which we belong. We have the Holy Spirit living within our very bodies and He is ready to guide us into all truth (John 16:13), and the truth will set us free from the bondage of sin and enable us to deny “ungodliness and worldly lusts,” and to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11-13).

CHAPTER 5

In Verses 1-17

the Holy Spirit shows us that, as “dear children,” we should follow, or imitate God in our daily walk. The heavenly Father knows that if we can imitate His love all the rest of our walk and behavior will take care of itself. Therefore, He says, “walk in love.” What kind of love is the believer to walk in? Notice, “walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour” (verse 2).

How can poor fallen sinners love as Christ has loved? They cannot unless they are saved by grace and made to be new creatures in Christ, but even though we have been saved and are made new in our Lord and Saviour, aren't we still weak through the flesh as a result of the fall of the entire race through Adam? Isn't it a Scriptural fact that even the “dear children” of God have to say, “the Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41)? Didn't Paul say, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” and at the same time he said, “when I would do good, evil is present with me” (Romans 7:21-22)?

If Christ Himself has told us that our bodies of flesh in which we live are “weak” and Paul, who had been saved by grace and had been taught of the Holy Spirit to “delight in the law of God after the inward man,” had to admit that when he would do good evil was present with him, how are we to ever gain such spiritual heights as to enable us to “walk in love as Christ also hath loved us?”

We must admit the weakness of our flesh. We know from the Word that in us (that is in our flesh) “dwelleth no good thing” (Romans 7:18). We also know that there are weights to be laid aside, and we are mindful of the “sin which doth so easily beset us” as we try to “run with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:2). Yet, along beside all this truth concerning our human weakness, God has said, “Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ” (Ephesians 4:7). This measure of grace is amply sufficient to enable every one of us to “walk in love, as Christ hath loved us.”

How much love would we be walking in if we manifested the same love that God had manifested toward us? The Father “so loved

the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have ever lasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:16-17). He “spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all” (Romans 8:32). “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (I John 4:9-10). The Son “loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Revelation 1:5). He “suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (I Peter 3:18).

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us and His love is perfected in us. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (I John 4:11-12 and 3:16). This doesn’t necessarily mean that we ought to lay down our physical lives for our Christian brethren. It means that we should be crucified with Him and continue to live in the flesh “by the faith of the Son of God” who loved us and gave Himself for us (Galatians 2:20). This is the only way to let the same mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus: “Who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8).

As dear children walking in love, fornication, uncleanness and covetousness are not to be so much as even “named” among us; “neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whore-monger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God” (verses 3-5).

The God of glory, whom we follow, also warns us saying, “Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be ye not therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness,

but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord” (verses 6-10).

It is interesting to note with what clearness God has warned His dear children against the works of men. He has said:

“Let no man deceive you with vain words” (Ephesians 5:6).

“Let no man beguile you of your reward” (Colossians 2:18).

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days” (Colossians 2:16).

“Beware lest any man spoil You through philosophy and vain deceit” (Colossians 2:8).

It was the doctrines of men that caused Paul to fear for the spiritual welfare of the church at Ephesus when he was about to leave them for Jerusalem. He said, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:28-30).

It is impossible for God’s people to “walk in love as Christ hath also loved us” and to “walk as children of light,” and at the same time be the disciples of men. Men never draw away disciples after themselves through teaching the Word of God rightly divided. They get their followers by “speaking perverse things,” and by “handling the Word of God deceitfully” (II Corinthians 4:2). These are things that the faithful servant of God will not do.

In these days of highly organized churches and hireling preachers who serve them, it is of the utmost importance to call the “dear children” of God back to the first love, and to the walk in light, and to the proving of all things by the Word. God tells us to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reprovèd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Wherefore He saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not

as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (verses 11-17).

IN CHAPTER 5:18-6:9

we see the highest demonstration of the Spirit’s power. Namely, the elevation of the everyday duties of the Christian life into the spiritual realm.

In these verses we see the possibility of wives and husbands, children and parents, and servants and masters submitting themselves one to another in the fear of God. The realization of such Christian fellowship and such natural and social relationships is a greater exhibition of power than that of healing the sick, working of miracles, discerning of spirits, speaking in tongues, or any other of the extraordinary gifts in connection with the kingdom message of I Corinthians, chapters 12-14.

To the wives (5:22) and to the husbands (5:25), to the children (6:1), and to the fathers (6:4), to the servants (6:5), and to the masters (6:9); God has said: “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:18-21).

Wives,

“submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the church: and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” (Ephesians 5:22-24).

Husbands,

“love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it: that He might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing

of water by the Word that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh. But nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church; For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let everyone of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.” (Ephesians 5:25-33).

Children,

“obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (Ephesians 6:1-3).

And, Ye Fathers,

“provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

Servants,

“be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free” (Ephesians 6:5-8).

And, Ye Masters,

“do the same thing unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that

your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with Him” (Ephesians 6:9).

These orders are given to the saved people of our particular church age and we can only carry them out when we are “filled with the Spirit” (5:18). However, when we are all filled with the Spirit, there is no room within us for the evil one who would keep us from speaking to ourselves according to 5:19, or giving thanks according to 5:20, or submitting ourselves one to the other according to 5:21 to 6:9.

Any Spirit filled wife will enjoy submitting herself to a Spirit filled husband who manifests his love toward her “even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.” And the Spirit filled husband cannot but love and give himself for a wife who is so filled with the Spirit as to submit herself to him as unto the Lord. But let both wife and husband remember that just a little bit of the old devil in either of them makes this divinely intended relationship impossible.

Spirit filled children find it easy to obey and honour their parents who are also filled with the Spirit and careful not to provoke the children to wrath, but to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And, of course, it isn’t difficult for fathers and mothers, who are filled with the Spirit, to bring up children who are willing to obey them in the Lord. But, if either children or parents give place to the devil, the result will be strife and confusion in the home.

The servant whose heart is filled with the Holy Spirit can joyfully work with his hands for a Spirit filled, forbearing master. And the master who knows his heavenly Master and is filled with the Holy Spirit can always get along with his servants who render their service in the will of God, from the heart, as unto the Lord, and not to men. But without the filling of the Spirit, the devil will get in with his weapons of greed and selfishness causing untold ill will and strife between the employer and his employees.

After reading these verses and prayerfully meditating upon them, we are brought to the conclusion that to put them into practice in our everyday life, we must be “filled with the Spirit.”

The Bible speaks of the baptism of the Spirit, Acts 1:5; the indwelling of the Spirit, I Corinthians 3:16; the gift of the Spirit, Acts

2:38; the sealing of the Spirit, Ephesians 4:30; the earnest of the Spirit, Ephesians 1:14; the anointing of the Spirit, II Corinthians 1:21; and the fullness of the Spirit, Ephesians 5:18. It is the fullness of the Spirit that makes possible the behaviour and walk set forth in this lesson text.

God has made it possible for us to do what He has told us to do in these verses. His grace is sufficient and He is ready and well able to work in us a work of grace that will enable us to live up to His instructions.

Our part is to “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” and not “give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:24-27).

In Verses 10-24

our attention is first attracted by the word “finally” in verse 10. The final words of this epistle remind us of those spoken at the beginning. As we are enlightened concerning our “spiritual blessings in heavenly places” in verses 3 to 14 of the opening chapter, so are we warned concerning our spiritual enemies “in high places” in these verses of the closing chapter.

The members of the church, which is Christ’s body, are seated “in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6); therefore, both our blessings and our warfare are in the heavenlies. This position we have in our risen Lord gives us a clear title to all spiritual blessings in the realm of glory, and it also gives us free access to all the strength, power, and might of our Lord, who has triumphed over our enemies, “made a shew of them openly” (Colossians 2:15), and is now seated “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion” (Ephesians 1:21). Such divine provision makes its entirely possible for every saved person of this age to fight a good fight, finish his course, and keep the faith.

Let us meditate upon verses 10-13, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore, take

unto you the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

These words of instruction are given to every member of the body of Christ. We are warriors and God expects us to fight. He wants us to be daring in battle for His glory. Like David of old, we should discard the armour of Saul and “put on the whole armour of God.” Above all things, we are to remember that our enemies are not “flesh and blood;” but principalities, and powers, and rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places. Such enemies are too much for the arm of flesh and for carnal weapons. It takes the “whole armour of God” to enable us to “stand against the wiles of the devil” in this “evil day.”

The whole armour of God is defined in verses 14-17, “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God:”

Each piece of the armour, referred to in the above quotation, is defined elsewhere in the Word of God as being Jesus Christ Himself—

The girdle of TRUTH about our loins (verse 14) is the One who said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me” (John 14:6).

Our breastplate of RIGHTEOUSNESS (verse 14) is none other than “Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that according as it is written, He that glorifieth, let him glory in the Lord” (I Corinthians 1:30-31). We can say with Jeremiah of old, He is “The Lord our righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:6).

Our “feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of PEACE” (verse 15) is suggestive of our walk in Christ, who is spoken of in Ephesians 2:14 as being “our peace.”

That shield of FAITH, wherewith we are able to stop anything thrown at us by Satan (verse 16), is “the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8), none other than “Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2).

Our helmet of SALVATION (verse 17) is clearly defined in the

words of the Psalmist, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalms 27:1).

Our sword, the WORD OF GOD (verse 17), is the Word who was “made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Thus we see, that to “put on the whole armour of God” is to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the full meaning of Paul’s admonition to the Romans in chapter 13, verse 14, “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.”

It is one thing to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is entirely another thing to put Him on and wear Him in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation, using Him as the whole armour of God to give you victory in the day of battle. How foolish to try to live without Him when we are privileged to put Him on. The reason so many do not put on Christ is because it is impossible to put Him on until you have put off self. This truth is clearly set forth in Ephesians 4:22-24 where we are told to, “put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” God requires us to put off the old man as we put on the new man, and He stands ready to furnish the sufficient grace for the full accomplishment of the change.

Those who have put on Christ, the whole armour of God, are admonished to engage themselves in constant “prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (verse 18). Paul coveted the prayers of this group for himself and his ministry, “that utterance” would be given unto him that he might open his mouth boldly, “to make known the mystery of the gospel,” for which he was an ambassador in bonds (verses 19-20).

Paul loved Israel, his kinsmen according to the flesh, so dearly that he could wish himself “accursed from Christ” for his brethren (Romans 9:3). “The hope of Israel” was so precious to him that he was willing to be bound with a chain in order to make it known to

his people (Acts 28:20). He was, indeed, one of the “able ministers of the new testament” (II Corinthians 3-6), which God made “with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Hebrews 8:8), but never with the Gentiles nor the body of Christ. As a minister of the new covenant, he “expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets” (Acts 28:23). At that time, he was preaching “the hope of Israel” which was to be realized under the new testament, or covenant.

Upon Israel’s final rejection of the new testament kingdom and after Paul passed judgment upon them (Acts 28:23-27), he said, “Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it” (Acts 28:28). This verse marks the setting aside of National Israel and the beginning of Paul’s heavy burden concerning the church, which is the body of Christ. Up to Acts 28:28, he was bound with a chain “for the hope of Israel.” After Acts 28:28, he was “an ambassador in bonds” for the “mystery of the gospel.”

This explains why Paul urged the believers at Ephesus to pray for him, that utterance might be given unto him “to make known the mystery of the gospel.”

Only those who have on the whole armour of God, and who are constantly praying, and who “love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity” will be numbered among the warriors who preach “the mystery of the gospel” and Scripturally practice “the fellowship of the mystery.”

The benediction, recorded in verses 23 and 24, is indeed comforting—“Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.”

