

F. Wayne MacLeod

Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians

Light To My Path Bible Notes



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Bible Notes

*Galatians, Ephesians,
Philippians and
Colossians*

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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians

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Preface

Having completed the Light To My Path Devotional Commentary series, I felt there were a couple of limitations I wanted to address. The first limitation had to do with being able to easily access specific verses. Because the devotional commentary series was written on a section-by-section basis, it was not easy to find a verse the reader may have wanted to clarify. The Light To My Path Bible Notes seeks to deal with this limitation by commenting on a verse-by-verse basis.

The second limitation had to do with the nature of Scripture itself. No one commentary can ever hope to grasp the fullness and application of the truth of Scripture. After completing the first commentary series, I found myself writing whole books on sections of Scripture that needed to be examined in more detail. The Light To My Path Bible Notes is another attempt to dig just a little deeper into the truth revealed in these biblical books.

The series is written from scratch without reference to the Devotional Commentary series. It is more of a reference work, designed for those who want to clarify a particular verse or passage of Scripture. I trust that it will be a blessing.

F. Wayne MacLeod

Introduction to Galatians

This epistle was written to the churches in the region of Galatia in present day Turkey. Galatia included cities such as Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. The apostle visited each of these cities in Galatia. Over time, however, false teachers also visited these cities preaching that the true Christian needed to be circumcised and follow the Jewish laws and traditions. These false teachers were influencing many to turn from the message Paul preached of freedom from the law and salvation by faith in Jesus and His work.

Paul writes the letter to clarify the message the Lord had given him to preach. He reminded the Galatians that the true believer was free from the law and that the work of Jesus alone was sufficient for salvation. To support his argument, the apostle shares the testimony of his personal conversion from Judaism to Christ. He supports his message also by showing the Galatians that salvation by grace through faith was not a new concept, but one that was older than the law itself.

The apostle reminds that Galatians that freedom from the law was not lawlessness. In fact, the believer, who accepted the work of Christ was indwelt by His Spirit and enabled by that Spirit to live the life God required. For Paul, the only way to experience salvation was through the work of Christ Jesus on the cross. The only way to live the life God required, was by means of the Spirit of Christ given to all who experienced a new birth.

Galatians 1

Verse 1

Paul identifies himself as the author of the epistle in this opening verse. He refers to himself as an apostle. Notice, however, that this calling was “not from men nor through man.” In other words, he was not given this position by another human being who recognized his qualifications and decided he would be good for the job. This reference to men here included himself. Paul did not choose this ministry himself. He knew that he was on a very different path before he met the Lord. He persecuted the church and wanted nothing to do with the Lord Jesus and His message.

Paul’s calling to be an apostle was *“through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.”* Notice the reference to the Father who raised Christ from the dead. Paul makes a connection between his calling as an apostle and the death of Jesus Christ.

It was the death of the Lord Jesus that made his calling possible and gave it purpose. The death of Jesus Christ was Paul’s forgiveness. It was this death and resurrection that formed the basis of his message. All Paul’s hope lay in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.

Verse 2

Paul sends his greetings from *“all the brothers who are with me.”* He does not mention any names in particular. The greeting, however, shows the connection between brothers and sisters in Christ. They saw themselves as being part of the same family and demonstrate their concern for each other through this greeting.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

The letter is addressed to the churches of Galatia. Galatia was a Roman province with many cities. Paul had travelled through this region and planted different churches in it. Obviously, it was the wish of Paul that the letter be circulated among the various churches of Galatia.

Verse 3

Paul's prayer for the Galatians was that they experience grace and peace.

Grace is the unmerited favour of God. By praying for grace, Paul is reminding the Galatians that they did not deserve what God had to offer. It is also, however, a reminder that the Lord God was merciful and compassionate and willing to pardon.

Peace relates to their relationship with God which was the result of grace. Through the work of the Lord Jesus, they could have peace with the Father.

Notice that this grace and peace is from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. No mention is made here of the Holy Spirit. While the Holy Spirit clearly has a role in the work of salvation and holiness, the focus of Paul at this time is on the work of the person of Jesus Christ.

Verse 4

Paul has three things to tell the Galatians about the work of the Lord Jesus here.

First, He *"gave himself for our sins."* The grace of the Lord Jesus toward undeserving sinners is found in the fact that He was willing to lay His life down for us. The words, *"he gave himself,"* indicate that His life was not taken from Him. He came to die and willingly surrendered His life as a payment for our sin.

Second, Paul goes on to tell us that Jesus died *"to deliver us from the present evil age."* The apostle John had this to say about this world in which we live:

Galatians 1

19 We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. – 1Jn 5:19

This present evil age is under the control of the evil one. Satan and sin have ravaged this earth. The curse of sin has stripped us of a relationship with God, broken our relationships with each other, and plunged us into sickness and death. All of this is rushing toward an eternal separation from God. According to Paul, Jesus came to rescue us from this destiny and give us hope and new life.

Third, Paul tells the Galatians that the death of Jesus was “according to the will of our God and Father.” God the Father was willing to let His Son die so that we could have hope and know the forgiveness of sin. Why should God the Father demonstrate such love? This is purely an act of compassionate love and grace on His part.

Verse 5

For His wonderful love and mercy, Paul’s heart was that the name of the Lord be glorified forever and ever.

To glorify the name of the Lord Jesus implies a recognition of worth. We glorify His name in what we say and speak about Him. We do this in worship and praise, but also in our daily conversations.

Glorifying the name of the Lord Jesus is much more than words. We glorify His name also by how we live our lives. Consider the words of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians:

31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. – 1Co 10:31

We are called to live our lives in such a way that Christ is elevated in whatever we do. The apostles glorified the Lord in their willingness not only to live for Christ but also to die for Him.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 6

Paul begins his letter on a somewhat abrupt note – “*I am astonished.*” The use of this word leaves us to understand that something was out of the ordinary and left Paul baffled and perplexed.

The matter that perplexed Paul was that the Galatians were quickly deserting “*him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.*”

Notice first that the Galatians were deserting “*him who called you in the grace of Christ.*” The question we must ask here is who is the one who called them in the grace of Christ?

Commentators are divided over this matter.

Some suggest that the “him” referred to here is Paul who had preached the gospel to the Galatians and called them to come to Christ. Those who interpret the verse to refer to Paul, refer to his words in Galatians 4:

13 You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, 14 and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. 15 What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. 16 Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? –

Ga 4:13-16

The apostle makes it quite clear that he preached the gospel to them first, but they were deserting his teaching and treating him as an enemy.

Other commentators believe that the one the Galatians were deserting was God the Father who called them to Christ and His salvation. Those who interpret the verse to refer to God, point to

Galatians 1

Galatians 1:15-16 where Paul tells the Galatians that It was the Father God who was pleased to call him to his Son:

14. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; – Ga 1:15-16

Ultimately, it was God who called the Galatians into the grace of Jesus Christ through the ministry of the apostle Paul.

Paul accuses the Galatians of “*turning to a different gospel.*” He explains this more fully in verse 7.

Verse 7

Paul accused the Galatians of turning to another gospel in verse 6. He qualifies this by telling them, however, that there was only one gospel. The problem was that there were teachers among them that distorted the message of the gospel of Christ. This was causing trouble in the churches of Galatia.

Paul teaches a very valuable truth here. To change anything in the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to preach another gospel. The gospel must be preached in its purity and there is no room for compromise. It is all too easy for us to water down the message so that it does not offend. This, however, falls under the category of another gospel.

Verse 8

Notice how strongly the apostle Paul felt about preaching the message of the gospel without compromise or distortion. He tells the Galatians that if an apostle or even an angel from heaven preached anything contrary to the message they had given them, they were to be cursed as enemies of the cross of Jesus Christ.

The message of the gospel was non-negotiable. Neither apostle nor angel of heaven could change this message. There was only one

Light To My Path Bible Notes

means of salvation and apart from that means there was no salvation at all. Everyone had to pass through the same door, and the path to that door was very narrow.

The severest of punishment awaited those who would declare another means of salvation.

Those who did so denied the work of Jesus Christ and would be forever cursed.

Verse 9

Paul repeats his words in verse 8 to emphasize them. Anyone who preached a gospel contrary to the one he preached was cursed.

This shows us just how serious a matter the preaching of the gospel in all its purity is. We must examine this message clearly and be sure that all who preach it do so in accordance with the truth the apostles and Jesus Himself delivered to us. We must not compromise this truth in any way lest we too fall under the curse Paul proclaims here.

Verse 10

One of the great temptations in the preaching of the gospel is to seek the *“approval of man.”* There are times when what God calls us to preach is not popular. The prophets of the Old Testament often suffered for what they preached. The apostles were beaten and put in prison for their message of the gospel they proclaimed. This message cannot be changed to please people. It must be preached as it is without compromise. Paul determined that he would preach to please the Lord God. This of course would result in much rejection, stoning and beatings. He would ultimately be thrown into prison for this decision, but this was the price he was willing to pay.

Paul knew he had one of two choices to make in the preaching of the gospel – either he would choose to please man by compromising the truth and distorting it to suit his desires for human approval, or he would preach the unadulterated truth and suffer the consequences. He chose to preach the truth.

Galatians 1

This decision brought him into conflict with the Galatians in this letter. He risks the anger of these believers and their rejection, but he would fight for the purity of the gospel message.

Verse 11

Paul reminds the Galatians that the gospel that he preached was not of human origin. The plan of salvation was not of human design but God's purpose from eternity past. Because it was not of earthly origin, it could not be changed to suit the wishes of the preacher or the desires of the listener. It was to be accepted as presented to them. They had no right to compromise or distort this message lest they be guilty of mishandling the truth of God.

Verse 12

Paul assured the Galatians that he did not receive the message of the gospel from any human source. No one taught it to him. It came to him by means of a direct revelation of Jesus Christ.

While Paul was not one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, he did encounter the Lord on the road to Damascus. In those days, the Lord spoke to Him and revealed the truth of the gospel to him. Remember that Paul was radically opposed to this message when he set out for Damascus to persecute believers in Jesus Christ. His heart was transformed, however, when he met Jesus and learned the truth of the gospel from Him directly.

Paul was a direct witness to this truth, having heard it from Jesus, Himself. He felt compelled to maintain the purity of what Jesus had delivered to Him.

Verse 13

The apostle reminds the Galatians of his former lifestyle as a Jew who persecuted the church of Jesus Christ. Notice what Paul tells them about this past lifestyle.

First, Paul admits that he persecuted the church of God. He believed that he was doing the right thing by removing heresy. He felt he was serving God by removing those who would say that

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Jesus was His Son. Paul travelled from place to place rooting out Christian and bringing them to Jerusalem to be tried and sentenced for such blasphemy.

Second, how Paul describes his persecution of Christians – “*I persecuted the church of God violently.*” Paul’s hostility toward the church of Jesus Christ was such that he acted violently toward all who professed the name of the Lord Jesus. Believers were dragged from their homes and beaten for their faith.

Third, Paul tells us here that his great ambition in those days was to destroy the church of Jesus Christ. He saw Christians and the church as a plague on his nation that needed to be uprooted and destroyed.

Verse 14

Paul knew what it was like to seek approval and advancement in his faith. He tells the Galatians that as a young Jewish man, he was advancing in Judaism beyond many of his age. This advancement was in knowledge, position and influence. He described himself as “*extremely zealous*” for the traditions of his fathers.

It is clear from this that Paul had devoted his life to being a Jewish leader and advancing in Judaism. He certainly had no questions about the legitimacy of his faith. The fact that Paul would become a Christian and accept the message of the gospel was a miracle. He had no intention of doing so, and in fact, did all he could to persecute and stop anyone who preached this message.

The apostle seems to be showing the Galatians how unlikely he was to accept this message and how powerful that gospel must have been to transform Him into its greatest ambassador.

Verse 15

As zealous as Paul was to advance in Judaism and follow the traditions of his fathers, he could not resist the power of the gospel message. Notice what Paul tells us about this message that broke this religious zeal.

Galatians 1

First, he came to understand that he had been set apart before he was born. This is reflected in the words – “*when he who had set me apart before I was born.*” Clearly, Paul had a hunger for the things of God. That hunger drove him to do all he could for the cause of Judaism. That was not the heart of God for Paul, however. Even before Paul was born, God had set him apart for a cause. That cause was to preach the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In time, the Lord Jesus revealed that message to Paul, transformed his heart and broke all resistance. It was in this gospel that Paul found his purpose in life.

Notice second that Paul was called by the grace of God to this gospel. He did not deserve to be forgiven for all he was doing to the followers of Jesus. He was not even seeking to be a follower of Christ when he met the Lord. Christ, appeared to Him, however, and offered him forgiveness and pardon. More than this, He called him to be His ambassador to preach the very message he despised.

Paul shows the Galatians that he could not fight the truth of the gospel. He had been chosen before he was born to be a servant of that gospel. Even his strong opposition to its message was not a barrier to God’s call on his life. The gospel found Paul when he was not looking for it or expecting it. It overpowered him and transformed him from a zealous Pharisee to a humble believer in Jesus Christ.

Verse 16

Paul knew about Jesus Christ prior to his conversion but opposed everything he heard about Him. He could not accept the claims of Jesus about Himself.

The apostle tells us, however, that God revealed his Son to him. The word Paul uses here is ἀποκαλύπτω (apokalýptō) which means to remove a veil or to reveal something that to that point was hidden. In other words, God opened Paul’s eyes to see His Son Jesus Christ in a new way. That day, Paul saw Jesus as He had never seen Him before. This was not an intellectual exercise but a spiritual revelation. In that moment, Paul was convinced of

Light To My Path Bible Notes

the claims of Jesus Christ to be the Son of God and promised Messiah. God blinded Paul's physical eyes for a time but gave him new spiritual eyes to see what he had never seen before. He saw Christ as God, the Saviour of His people.

Along with this new vision, God commissioned Paul that day to preach what he had seen and heard to the Gentiles. All the passion he had for Judaism was now transferred to the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The persecutor of the gospel now becomes its greatest ambassador.

Notice that Paul tells the Galatians that when God revealed His Son to him and called him to preach the gospel, he “*did not immediately consult with anyone.*” There are various ways to understand what Paul is saying here.

First, Paul did not consult with anyone else to confirm this call on his life. There was no need to have this confirmation for there was no question in his heart about what God had asked him to do. He did not need human approval to do what God had told him to do.

Second, Paul did not immediately seek the approval of the church of the day to preach the message of the gospel. Remember here that he had been the church's greatest persecutor. We can only imagine how they would have received him with suspicion. Instead, Paul was forced to prove himself over time. He did not work under the authority of the church in those initial years. He knew the call of God on his life and stepped out in obedience despite not having the approval of the church.

Third, Paul did not consult other believers about training in how to preach the gospel. He had heard from the Lord God and shared what God had revealed to him in those days.

Paul stepped out into ministry without human confirmation of his calling, without the approval of the church to preach and without any formal training or diplomas to preach. He was dependant on God alone.

Galatians 1

Verse 17

After his conversion to Christ, Paul did not return to Jerusalem or meet with the apostles. Instead, he went to Damascus. Acts 9:19-25 tells us what took place when Paul was in Damascus. He connected with the disciples in that city and began to preach in the Jewish synagogues (Acts 9:19-20). Those who heard him preaching Jesus were amazed that the one who persecuted believers would now preach so powerfully of Christ (Acts 9:21-22). His impact in Damascus for the cause of Christ became so powerful that the Jews eventually plotted to kill him (Acts 9:23). Christians in the city, discovered the plot and helped him escape (Acts 9:23-25).

Verse 18

Only after three years of absence, did Paul return to Jerusalem. At that time Paul visited with Cephas (Peter) for fifteen days. The wording, "*I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas,*" leads us to believe that Paul's intended purpose in going to the city was to spend time with Peter.

It is unclear what took place in those days with Peter but after three years of proving himself in Damascus, it was time for Paul to consult with the leaders of the church and for them to get to know him. Acts 9:27 tells us that Barnabas took Paul to meet the apostles in Jerusalem and told them how he had proven himself in the city of Damascus:

27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. Acts 9:27

It appears that Paul was accepted by the apostles and began to preach boldly in Jerusalem until the Hellenistic Jews sought to kill him there as well (Acts 9:28-30).

Becoming a believer was not easy for Paul. Already to this point in his life he has death threats in Damascus and in Jerusalem.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 19

During this initial time that Paul went to Jerusalem to see Peter, he tells the Galatians that he saw no other apostle except James, the Lord's brother.

In Acts 9:27 Barnabas brought Paul to Jerusalem where he met with the apostles. It would be easy to assume that all the apostles were together in Jerusalem at the time. This does not seem to be the case. Galatians 1:18 tells us that Paul spent fifteen days with Peter. Here we discover that he also saw James the brother of Jesus there as well. Obviously, these were the only apostles that Paul saw in those days in Jerusalem. We are not told where the other apostles were at this time.

Verse 20

Paul has been sharing his testimony of conversion with the Galatians. He shared with them that his conversion had nothing to do with anyone in the church. No one shared the message of the gospel with him. In fact, even after three years the only apostles he had met were Peter and James. His calling was not confirmed by the church, nor had he any formal training from her leaders. It was God alone who broke his stubborn resistance to the gospel. It was God who revealed the truth to him by revelation. God also called him into full time ministry to the Gentiles.

This testimony seemed quite incredible, but the apostle assured the Galatians that what he was writing to them was the absolute truth.

Verse 21

Acts 9 tells us that after Paul spent fifteen days with Peter, he preached boldly in Jerusalem.

This boldness brought about the wrath of the Hellenistic Jews, and they determined to kill Paul. When the church discovered the plot, they brought him to the seaport of Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus in Cilicia.

28 So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the

Galatians 1

Lord. 29 And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. 30 And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. – Ac 9:28-30

Paul also mentions going into the region of Syria with its cities of Damascus and Antioch.

The plot to kill him in Damascus and Jerusalem, did not discourage Paul. He simply went into Syria and Cilicia and continued to preach the gospel.

Verse 22

While Paul spent some time in the Jerusalem in Judea, he had been converted to Christ and ministered in Damascus, Syria. He had not ministered in Judea and for the most part he was unknown in that region.

Verse 23

While believers in Judea had not met Paul personally, they had heard of his reputation. Paul was known as the one who had persecuted the church but was now preaching the faith, he had at one point tried to destroy. To this point, however, God had not called him to minister in Judea.

Verse 24

Note that though the believers in Judea, they had never met Paul, they glorified God that the one who had persecuted the church had been converted to the faith and was now preaching the gospel faithfully. Paul's reputation ministered to those who had never met him. They saw the change in his life and the boldness with which he preached and praised the Lord. They were grateful for their deliverance from the persecution generated by Paul, but also for the incredible change God has brought to his life. To this day, the story of Paul's conversion to Christianity has been a blessing to many.

Galatians 2

Verse 1

In Galatians 1:8 Paul told the Galatians that three years after his conversion he went to

Jerusalem and spent time with Peter. After the Hellenistic Jews wanted to kill him, he left for Syria and Cilicia where he continued to preach the gospel. Here in verse 1, Paul tells us that fourteen years later he went again to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus. The only clear reference to Paul going to Jerusalem in the book of Acts around this time is found in Acts 15 when he attended a church council meeting with the apostles. At this meeting they debated the matter of whether circumcision was required for Gentile converts.

Verse 2

Paul told the Galatians that he went to Jerusalem because of a revelation. He does not tell us what that revelation was but there may be a connection here to what he told the Galatians in chapter 1:

11 For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. 12 For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. – Ga 1:11-12

Notice how Paul told the Galatians that the gospel was given to him as a revelation from God. Here in verse 2, Paul connects this revelation with the gospel he proclaimed to the Gentiles – “*I went up because of a revelation and set before them ... the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles.*” It is possible that the revelation of

Light To My Path Bible Notes

the gospel to Paul for the Gentiles was what brought him to Jerusalem to see the apostles.

When Paul was in Jerusalem, he spoke with the church about the gospel he preached to the Gentiles. He did this in both public and private sessions, speaking privately with those who “*seemed influential.*”

The reference to those who “*seemed influential,*” may indicate that Paul was not familiar with the church in Jerusalem and its leaders. He had no reason to know them as his ministry took him to other regions.

While Paul was convinced personally of the message God gave him for the Gentiles, he does take the time to explain it to the leadership in Jerusalem. He tells the Galatians that did so because he wanted to make sure that he “*was not running or had not run in vain.*”

It is likely that God brought Paul to Jerusalem to help the church sort through their understanding of the role of circumcision and other Jewish traditions in the Christian faith. This was an important decision made by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. If this was when Paul was in Jerusalem, his input at this critical time would have been very important.

Verse 3

When Paul went to Jerusalem, he brought Titus with him. According to the apostle, Titus was an uncircumcised Greek convert. The church in Jerusalem received him and made no requirement of circumcision for fellowship. Obviously, this was a blessing to Paul and corresponded with the revelation God had given him about the salvation of the Gentiles apart from the Jewish law.

Verse 4

While the Jerusalem church made no requirement of circumcision for fellowship and good standing, the matter of circumcision was still an issue for some in the community. Among them were Jewish converts to Christianity who wanted to maintain the Jewish

Galatians 2

traditions and saw them as a requirement for every believer in Christ.

This matter threatened to divide the church. In fact, Paul tells us that “*false brothers*” were secretly brought in to “*spy out our freedom*.” That is to say, to get information from them about who was circumcised and whether they believed circumcision was a requirement for the believer in Jesus Christ.

Notice how Paul speaks of these individuals who had slipped in among them as “*false brothers*.” There may be a couple of reasons why Paul sees these individuals as false brothers.

First, these individuals preached a gospel that was different from what Paul had learned from Christ. That is to say, a gospel that required circumcision and the observation of Jewish traditions and laws for salvation. Paul taught that salvation was apart from the practice of the law.

Second, Paul called these individuals “*false brothers*” because of the attitude they held. These brothers were secretive and deceptive in their dealings. They had no interest in truly seeking the will of the Lord in this matter but wanted to harm those who held a view that was different from theirs. They were not motivated by love but by deception, and deceit. This was not from the Lord. Their intention, according to Paul was to bring the church “*into slavery*.” That is to say, under the yoke of Jewish law and a faith that was not based on the grace of God but on human efforts which only led to bondage and slavery.

Verse 5

Paul tells the Galatians that he refused to yield, “*even for a moment*,” to “*false brothers*” who wanted to impose the Jewish law on Christians.

The question we are forced to ask here is this: What is the harm in circumcision and the practice of Jewish traditions in the Christian life? Can't a person who is circumcised be saved? Is circumcision and the practice of Jewish traditions really a hindrance to salvation?

Light To My Path Bible Notes

To answer this, we need to see things from Paul's perspective. Paul came to Christ as a circumcised Jew and was powerfully used by God in the preaching of the gospel. He came to understand, however, that circumcision and the Jewish traditions had nothing to do with salvation at all. The Lord Jesus accepted the circumcised and the uncircumcised. The false brothers of his day, however, believed that circumcision was a requirement for salvation and in order to be right with God, the believer had to follow the Jewish traditions. This is where Paul held his ground in opposition.

Paul believed that salvation was by faith in what the Lord Jesus did alone. He taught that salvation had nothing to do with circumcision and the Jewish law. It had everything to do with Jesus and His work on the cross. Christ's work alone would save. His work alone paid our debt in full. The uncircumcised was as saved as the circumcised. The one who practiced Jewish law was no more saved than the one who had never done so. The only requirement for salvation was faith in the work of Jesus Christ to pay for our sin.

It was vital that the purity of the gospel message be preserved. Paul would not compromise that message by adding anything to it or taking anything away from it.

Verse 6

Paul's time in Jerusalem was important. Admittedly, there were "*false brothers*" whose desire was to add the requirement of circumcision and the law to salvation, but their teaching was ultimately rejected. The overall decision of those in authority was to accept the revelation of Jesus to Paul. That is to say, salvation was apart from the law. In the end, Paul tells the Galatians that the influential leaders in the church "*added nothing*" to him.

The phrase "*added nothing to me*," can be somewhat confusing. Understand, however, that Paul came to seek the church's advice on the matter of salvation apart from the law and its obligations. He was opposed by those who taught that salvation had to be accompanied by circumcision and the observation of the Jewish law. As the influential leaders of that day heard what Paul had to say, prayed about it and debated the matter, they concluded that

Galatians 2

the work of Jesus alone was sufficient for salvation, and they added no further qualifications or obligations.

Notice one final detail here in this verse. Paul speaks once again about *“those who seemed to be influential.”* He qualifies this by saying, *“what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality.”* Let me say two things here.

First, these words seem to indicate that Paul was somewhat uncertain about the leadership of the church in Jerusalem and surrounding regions. He had not worked in this region for very long and did not really know the leadership.

Second, this matter of who was influential and who was not really did not matter to Paul. Admittedly, before coming to know the Lord, he was concerned about advancing in Judaism, but the Lord had taken that desire from him as a believer. He did not see people in this way anymore. The message of the gospel showed Paul that every single person is a sinner and without the work of Christ would be eternally lost. Because salvation was based on the work of Christ, and not on what anyone did in their human effort, all glory went to God. No one was any better than the other. God saved the Jew as well as the Gentile. He revealed Himself to the persecutor of the church as well as that influential. God showed no partiality. No one was better than another. The rich, the poor, or the influential and the common person all needed the grace of God and were eternally lost without it. This, in the mind of Paul, put everyone on the same level.

Verse 7

Paul has been speaking to the Galatians about a meeting he had in Jerusalem where the church heard his proclamation of the gospel as it had been revealed to him. Having heard his presentation, the church determined that they could add nothing. They endorsed his message and call to preach to the *“uncircumcised”* just as Peter had been called to preach to the Jews.

Notice that the church confirmed that he had been *“entrusted”* with the gospel to the uncircumcised. The idea here is that having heard

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Paul's testimony, they came to the conviction that God had called him and placed this message in his hands for the Gentiles. They understood that Paul had an obligation to share this message with the uncircumcised just as Peter did with the circumcised.

Verse 8

It took a while for the Jewish Christians to accept that the message of the gospel was for the Gentile world. Throughout the New Testament there are hints of false teachers promoting a mix of Christianity and Judaism, claiming that the true believer needed to be circumcised and practice the law of Moses.

The church in Jerusalem, however, came to the conviction that the gospel was for both Jews and Gentiles and that God placed no obligation on either to follow the practice of circumcision or the Jewish traditions. Having heard Paul's testimony, the believers were convinced that God had called Paul to preach that message of salvation apart from the law to the Gentiles.

While Peter had been called to preach to the Jews, Paul had received a call from God to go to the Gentiles. The church fully endorsed this call in Paul's life. We can only imagine how encouraging this must have been to Paul in those days.

Paul shared this testimony with the Galatians to show them that not only had he received the message of the gospel as a revelation from God, but the leaders and apostles of the church stood firmly behind what he preached.

Verse 9

Notice how the church of Jerusalem sealed their endorsement of Paul's ministry. The apostles, James, Peter and John were present at these meetings and sensed that God's hand was on Paul for this ministry to the Gentiles.

Sensing that God was with Paul and had entrusted this message to him for the Gentiles, they *"gave the right hand of fellowship"* to

Galatians 2

both Barnabas and Paul, commissioning them to go to the Gentiles and preach the gospel.

Note the reference here to the “*right hand of fellowship*.” *The right hand was a symbol of favour or blessing. When the right hand was extended to another it was a symbol of agreement, confidence and partnership.* By extending their right hand to Paul and Barnabas, Peter, James and John were expressing their blessing and agreement. It was a symbol of their fellowship with them in the ministry of the gospel.

Verse 10

As part of this partnership agreement, Peter, James and John encouraged Paul and Barnabas not only to share the message of the Gospel but also to minister to the needs of the poor.

When Jesus was on this earth, he preached the gospel and healed the sick. His ministry was wholistic in nature. It reached the whole person, body, soul and spirit. The apostles in Jerusalem encouraged Paul to adopt this type of ministry. Paul told the Galatians that he was very eager to do this.

The ministry of the church must be to the whole person. Listen to the words of James in his epistle:

*27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before
God the Father is this: to visit orphans and
widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself
unstained from the world. - Jas 1:27*

James believed that the ministry of the church was to care for the needy and afflicted. We have an example of the apostle Paul bringing offering the believers in Jerusalem:

*1 Now concerning the collection for the saints:
as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you
also are to do. 2 On the first day of every week,
each of you is to put something aside and store
it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no*

Light To My Path Bible Notes

collecting when I come. 3 And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. – 1Co 16:1-3

He also counselled Timothy in how to set up a ministry for poor widows in 1 Timothy 5.

Verse 11

Paul's stand on the equality of Gentiles to the Jews was so strongly held that he did not hesitate to oppose even Peter when he came to Antioch. Notice how he expresses this:

"I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. – Ga 2:11

It appears that this interaction took place after the council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. The verse tells us that Paul opposed Peter to his face. Remember here that for centuries, Jews considered Gentiles to be pagans, unworthy of salvation. They did not associate easily with the Gentiles and would certainly never worship with them or even enter their homes. Obviously, these traditions were not easily broken in Peter.

Verse 12

Paul explains more fully the nature of his conflict with Peter here. When Peter came to Antioch, he had no problem eating with the Gentiles, something a Jews would not traditionally do. It was important to Paul that the Jews be willing to eat with Gentiles to demonstrate that they were equal partners before God. The Jew was as much a sinner in need of a Saviour as the Gentile. Paul did not see two classes of believers.

While Peter ate with the Gentiles initially, it appears that after some men connected with James came to Antioch, he stopped eating with the Gentiles, and separated himself from them to eat only with these Jews. Paul makes it clear that the reason Peter did this was because he feared the "*circumcision party*." The circumcision party was a group who taught that Christians needed to be circumcised

Galatians 2

and follow the Jewish traditions to be in a right relationship with God.

For Paul, Peter should have stood his ground in this matter. As a leader, it was his obligation to demonstrate that there was no division between Gentiles and Jews. Peter, however, feared offending the Jewish brothers who came from James and refused to eat with Gentile believers. In doing so, Peter sided with those who believed circumcision gave them a special standing with God. This was contrary to everything Paul believed and only created division among true believers.

This conflict between Peter and Paul shows us that even the apostles clashed at times. They were not perfect and even these great men of God needed correction.

Verse 13

When Peter chose not to eat with the Gentiles, other Jews followed his example. Having observed this practice all their lives, it would have been very easy for them to slip into old ways. Notice Paul's response toward this decision here.

First, Paul calls the decision not to eat with the Gentiles, hypocritical. According to Paul, these Jews were saying that the Gentiles were equal partners in salvation, but they were acting as if they were second class Christians by refusing to eat with them.

Second, Paul was angry with this hypocrisy because it led even Barnabas astray. Barnabas was the one who introduced Paul to the apostles. Here now, because of Peter's decision, he stood in opposition to Paul. According to Paul, Peter was leading believers astray into hypocrisy and error. He was not creating division in the body of Christ and not walking in the truth of the gospel.

Paul believed that the gospel taught that Jew and Gentiles were equal partners in Christ. He believed that salvation was wholly because of the work of Jesus on the cross, apart from the practice of the Jewish law. Those who taught the requirement of circumcision for Christians were false teachers.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Paul's words in verse 13 are strong. Peter was being a hypocrite by siding with false teachers. He was leading believers astray by encouraging them to walk in a way that was contrary to the gospel.

Verse 14

When Paul saw how Peter and the Jews refused to eat with the Gentiles, he declared that their *“conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel.”* It is easy to say we believe, but quite another to see the implication of that truth to our daily life. In this case, these Jews declared their allegiance to the gospel but still practised their old ways. The truth of the gospel demanded a change of lifestyle, according to Paul. It required that all Jewish believers examine their traditions and customs, to see if they were in line with the gospel they now declared. In this case, these Jewish Christians said they accepted Gentiles as equal partners in Christ but refused to eat with them. What they declared by their actions, was contrary to the truth of the gospel they proclaimed.

Notice that Paul challenged Peter *“before them all.”* In this case, he does not take Peter aside but rebukes him publicly saying:

“If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” – Ga 2:14

Let's break down what Paul is saying to Peter here.

Paul accused Peter of living like a Gentile. At first glance, it appears that Peter was living more like a Jew by refusing to eat with Gentiles. This reference to Peter living like a Gentile can be taken two ways.

First, in the Jewish mind, a Gentile was a law breaker who did not walk in fellowship with God. It was clear in the mind of Paul, that the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 declared Gentiles to be equal partners with Jews in the gospel. Peter's actions here were opposed to the truth he declared. Like a Gentile, he turned his back on the truth of the gospel and lived like a pagan Gentile.

Galatians 2

Second, remember that Peter initially had eaten with Gentiles (see verse 12). In fact, we have a record of how Peter in Acts 10 went to the home of a Gentile by the name of Cornelius because of a vision from God. Peter shared the gospel with this man and his family, and they became Christians. Word of this got back to Jerusalem and when Peter returned, he was questioned by the circumcision party.

*2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, 3 “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.”
– Ac 11:2-3*

That day, Peter defended his actions by explaining the vision he had of a sheet filled with unclean animals and the words of God about not declaring unclean what He now declared clean. Peter went on to say that the Spirit of God told him to no longer make a distinction between the Jew and the Gentile:

11 And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. 12 And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. – Ac 11:11-12

In obedience to the leading of the Spirit, Peter ate with and associated with Gentiles, contrary to the custom of the Jews. In those days, Peter, denied the customs of the Jews and acted like a Gentile.

Notice Paul’s second point to Peter here: “how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” Paul is telling Peter here, that by refusing to eat with Gentiles, he was declaring that the traditions and the law of the Jews were still in effect for the Gentile Christians. In other words, they could not be truly accepted unless they were circumcised and obeyed the law of Moses.

What Paul is saying is something like this: Peter, you ate with Gentiles and broke the law of the Jews but now you are requiring

Light To My Path Bible Notes

that the Gentiles obey the very law you broke. How can you expect these Gentiles to obey the Jewish law if you break it yourself?

Of course, Paul does not expect that Peter force these Gentile Christians to follow the law of Moses. His purpose here is to simply remind him of how God had spoken to him on this matter and how he had defended his decision to eat with Gentiles before the church in Jerusalem.

Verse 15

Having spoken about his controversy with Peter in the previous verses, Paul moves now to a theological explanation of his position. He begins with a perplexing statement:

*We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile
sinners – Ga 2:15*

Paul speaks as a Jew here. Remember that God had chosen the Jewish nation above all other nations to reveal Himself to the world. They were His people. The Gentiles, for the most part, were left in the darkness of their sin and pagan practices. The general understanding was that salvation was for the Jew. They alone had a relationship with the one true God and creator of the world.

Verse 16

Though he knew that he had been born a Jew, Paul understood that his salvation was not by virtue of his race, but by faith in Christ and his work – *“yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.”*

The word Paul uses for “justified” is δικαιόω (dikaiōō). It refers to someone who is just and righteous. In this case it is the process by which a person is declared right with God.

What Paul is telling the Galatians here is that a person is never made right with God by *“works of the law.”* In other words, obeying the law of God will never make you right with God. Imagine a murderer declaring before the judge that he should be excused of his crime because, after he murdered, he was very careful to obey

Galatians 2

the law. His obedience of the law does not excuse his crime in the past. We are all sinners and while we may obey God's law, it doesn't change the reality of our guilt.

Paul goes on to tell the Galatians that while the law cannot make them right before God, *"faith in Jesus Christ"* would indeed change their status – *"so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law."*

Notice that Paul tells the Galatians that they believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified. In other words, their right standing with God came through their faith in Christ and His work.

What was it about the work of Jesus Christ that gave them a right standing with God? The Lord Jesus took on human flesh and died in my place. He took my penalty and paid the price for my sin. I can be pardoned from my sin because He died on my behalf.

Jesus did more than pardon my sin. As a result of His work on the cross the Spirit of Christ has taken up residence in me, giving me new life. Writing to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul put it this way:

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. – 2Co 5:17

Those in whom the Spirit of God comes to live, are a *"new creation."* Their lives have been transformed by Christ and the presence of His Spirit in them. This new life in us is in the person of Jesus Christ. It is His presence in us that chases away the guilt. It is His presence in us that enables us to live the Christian life. As the apostle will say later in this chapter:

20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. – Ga 2:20

Light To My Path Bible Notes

The apostle saw himself crucified with Jesus Christ. He no longer lived in the flesh but by faith in the Son of God who lived in Him.

Paul concludes the verse with the clear statement that no one will ever be justified or declared right with God by means of the law. Our right standing with God depends entirely on the work of Jesus Christ who not only pardons us, but also come to live the Christian life in us and through us.

Verse 17

The apostle brings up the issue here of why believers still sin – “*But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners.*”

Is it possible for a believer, in whom the Lord Jesus dwells, and for whom He has died, to sin? Speaking from personal experience, I can assure you that as one who loves the Lord Jesus, I fall short of His standard. There is no such thing as a perfect Christian who never sins in attitude, thought or deed.

Having established that even believers in whom Christ dwells, sin, the apostle then brings up an important question: “*Is Christ then a servant of sin?*” If I have given my life to Jesus, and He lives in me, enabling me to live the Christian life, how do I explain my failures and sinful shortcomings? If He can overcome those sins, why then doesn’t He keep me from falling? Why do I still sin? Is He the author of my sin? Paul answers this question by a resounding: “Certainly not!”

Verse 18

Paul responds to the question of whether Christ, who lives in the believer, is the author of his or her sin. Notice two points here:

The first response of Paul to this question is found in the words: “*For if I rebuild what I tore down.*” What has the believer torn down? The context indicates that we tore down our dependence on the law and our efforts for salvation and right standing with God.

Galatians 2

Paul speaks here about a believer, rebuilding or renewing that dependence on his or her flesh in order to be right with God. This is, according to Paul, what Peter was doing when he chose not to eat with Gentiles. It is also what we do when we begin to think that we can change our lives in the flesh. Instead of relying on the work of Christ we turn to our flesh. As a man after God's own heart, David fell into adultery. As one of Christ's closest disciples, Peter denied the Lord three times. They fell not because Christ was insufficient to keep them, but rather because they leaned on their own flesh and did not lean on Christ. They renewed their trust in the flesh and fell into sin as a result.

Paul makes it clear here that it was not because Christ authored their sin, nor was it because He was unable to give them victory, but because they proved themselves to be transgressors by wandering from Him and not trusting His enabling.

Verse 19

To understand what Paul is saying here let's break it down into three words: "through," "to," and "that."

First, notice the words, "*through the law.*" Paul was a student of the law of the Old Testament. He was born a Jew and carefully followed the Jewish law. That law showed him how God expected him to live. It taught him the penalty for disobedience. More than anything else, however, it showed him that perfect obedience was impossible, and he stood condemned before a perfect God in whom there was no shadow of sin.

Second, Paul tells the Galatians that *through* the law he died *to* the law. We have seen that the Law of God pointed out Paul's sin and condemnation. No matter how hard he tried, he could not perfectly obey this law. No matter how hard he tried, he always fell short of God's standard and was guilty of being a law breaker. There was no hope of ever being right with God in this law. Ultimately, the apostle saw that he was trapped in a system of human effort that would ultimately lead to his death and separation from God. This brings us to the word, "*that.*"

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Third, Paul tells us that he died to the law “so *that*” he might live to God. I like to picture this as a marriage. Paul was bound to the law as it’s marriage partner. The only way he could break that commitment was through death. This is exactly what took place. The apostle died to the law and its ways and took on a new partner. He chose to “live to God.” If he was bound to the law, he could not have the relationship he wanted with God. It was only by dying to the law and its obligations that Paul could experience the freedom to fully live for God.

The idea here is that to live for God, he needed to die to the law. The law showed him his guilt and drove him to death. That death opened the door for a relationship with Christ

Verse 20

Paul explains here how he died to the law – *“I have been crucified with Christ.”*

The law condemned him as a law breaker. The penalty for this crime was death. The Lord Jesus died in his place. It was as if Paul died on that cross with Jesus. The apostle took this very seriously and committed himself to live as one whose fleshly nature had died with Jesus on the cross. Consider this in the context of divorce. When a person divorces his or her partner and marries another, they no longer have the right to go back to their former partner. That partner may be alive and living near them, but they no longer have any commitment to each other. Their commitment is exclusively now to their new partners. They have died to their former relationship in order to live in another. This how Paul saw what took place on the cross. He died to the law in order to commit himself to Christ alone.

Paul goes on to tell the Galatians: *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”* Notice that Christ lived in Paul. This is the reality for every believer. He is the spiritual life in us. Jesus declared Himself to be life (John 14:6) and without His presence, we have no spiritual life.

Galatians 2

Paul tells the Galatians here that he no longer lived. Paul identifies himself with the old fleshly nature of sin. Consider what he told the Romans in Romans 7:

*18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me,
that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do
what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.
19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I
do not want is what I keep on doing. – Ro 7:18-
19*

It was this fleshly nature that Paul chose to die to. He would treat it like a divorced partner who was still alive. He accepted that he no longer had any right to her and devoted himself instead to Christ in Him.

*And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in
the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself
for me.*

The apostle's commitment now was to Christ in Him. He would no longer listen to the flesh and its ways. He would walk away from it and ignore its call. Instead, his total devotion and allegiance was to Jesus Christ.

Notice finally that this commitment to Jesus Christ in him was a commitment of faith. We can see the flesh and hear its cry. The voice of the Lord Jesus, however, is a voice heard by faith. We trust Him we do not see. We hear him whose words are not audible to our physical ears. The reality of Christ in us, however, is as real as our flesh.

By preaching the necessity of the law to be saved, we “*nullify the grace of God.*” In other words, if we could have a right standing with God by means of the law, then Jesus Christ died in vain.

Paul refused to do this. He chose to rely completely on the work of Jesus Christ for his salvation. He placed no confidence in his flesh and its ability to be good enough to merit salvation. According to Paul, to claim that you could do anything for your own salvation was

Light To My Path Bible Notes

to diminish the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. For Paul, salvation was from beginning to end, a work of God.

Galatians 3

Verse 1

Paul speaks directly to the Galatians here about the practical application of salvation by faith in Christ alone.

Notice first, that Paul calls the Galatians foolish. The word for foolish here is ἀνόητος (anóētos). It is derived from the word, “a” meaning, without, and “noéō” meaning, to comprehend. In other words, Paul is accusing the Galatians of being without understanding.

Secondly, notice how Paul asks them who had “bewitched” them. The picture Paul paints here is of a magician deceiving his spectators by slight of hand and trickery. In other words, they were being deceived by the clever words and arguments by false teachers.

The context of this verse shows us that the apostle is speaking about those who taught circumcision and the practice of Jewish law for all Christians. The Galatians were listening to these false teachers and falling prey to their teaching. He felt it was important to correct their misunderstanding and point out the error of these teachers.

Notice how Paul addresses this matter of placing Christians under the law:

*It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was
publicly portrayed as crucified.*

The apostle points the Galatians to the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. This was the most powerful argument against this falsehood. If

Light To My Path Bible Notes

salvation could be obtained by means of the law, then why did Christ have to die? If salvation could be obtained by our perfect obedience, then the cross has no value. Jesus, as the perfect Son of God took on flesh and died on the cross of Calvary because there was no other way for us to be saved. The law was insufficient.

Verse 2

Paul moves on now to the application of the truth of the cross. To do this, he asks a very simple question: “*Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?*” Consider first what Paul means by receiving the Spirit. To understand what Paul means here listen to what he told the Romans:

9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. – Ro 8:9

The apostle tells the Romans that they were no longer in the flesh but in the Spirit. In other words, their lives had been changed by the presence of God’s Holy Spirit in them. He went on to say that if the Holy Spirit was not in them, they did not belong to the Lord Jesus. In other words, the sign that they belonged to Christ was the presence of the Spirit of Christ in their lives. He equates receiving the Spirit with receiving the new life of salvation. They became new creatures in Christ by means of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling in their lives.

Paul asks the Galatians here how they received salvation and new life through the Holy Spirit. He offers them two possibilities. Either by “*works of the law or by hearing with faith.*”

What Paul is asking is this: Did the Holy Spirit come to live in you because you were good enough to meet His high standard, or did He come to live in you because, apart from Him, you could never meet God’s requirements. If the Holy Spirit is a reward for good works, then why does He even need to dwell in the believer. If we can meet God’s standards by ourselves, then He is not necessary.

Galatians 3

Clearly, the Holy Spirit is given to those who do not deserve His presence. He comes to give us faith and confidence in the work of Christ. He comes to give us spiritual life. He is a gift of God giving life to those who were dead in sin.

Verse 3

Notice how Paul applies the message of salvation to the Christian life. He tells the Galatians that if their Christian life began by a powerful work of God's Spirit, then it would be foolish to think that it could be perfected in the flesh. In other words, if they could not be saved by human effort, it is equally as impossible to live the Christian life in human effort. What is begun in the Spirit, must also be completed in the Spirit.

We received the Spirit of Christ by faith. We must also live by faith. We heard the voice of the Spirit calling us to Christ. That same voice continues to call us to Christ now that we belong to Him. The Spirit of Christ did a powerful work in our lives, making us new creatures in Christ. He does not stop that work when we come to the Lord. He continues to lead us and change us. The implication is that we need God's Spirit to work in us. We are not saved by faith and matured by the flesh. We must be matured also as a work of God's Spirit. Just as we depended on Him for salvation, so we must depend on Him to live the Christian life and develop the character of Christ in us. We cannot perfect ourselves; this requires the work of God's Spirit.

Verse 4

We have here the first hint in the epistle of what it cost the Galatians to accept Christ. Paul understood that these Galatian Christians had suffered "*many things*." He does not go into detail about the things they suffered but the insinuation here seems to be that this suffering was because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Remember the context here. Paul has been rebuking false teachers in their midst. These teachers wanted to bring them back to Judaism and its laws. If these Galatians had suffered for believing in the salvation of Jesus Christ apart from the law, why would they

Light To My Path Bible Notes

return to the law again. If they did so, their suffering would be in vain.

Paul ends the verse with the words *“if indeed it was in vain?”* In this statement He places a question mark on the vanity of their suffering.

Is it ever truly vain to live in the truth? Yes, the walk may be strenuous and there are obstacles on the path, but if we open our eyes to the blessings, those obstacles seem to fade into the background. The struggles will draw us closer to Christ and reveal His real presence in a deeper way.

There was certainly a sense in which, if the Galatians returned to the Jewish law, what they suffered would have been for nothing. At the same time, however, their suffering for Christ was a blessed experience. In their pain they saw Him work. They experienced His comfort and peace. Their faith was very real to them in their persecution.

Verse 5

Paul goes back now to the main subject of grace versus law. Notice, however, here how he applies this not just to salvation but to their ongoing walk with Christ.

Paul draws the attention of the Galatians to the work of God’s Spirit among them. *“Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you...”* Paul says two things here.

First, Paul tells the Galatians that God supplied them with the Holy Spirit. We know that all who come to the Lord Jesus are sealed by the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. As these believers met, the presence of the Holy Spirit was among them.

Second, the Spirit of God was working miracles among them. We are not told what those miracles were. We should not limit this to impressive signs and wonders. Some of the most powerful miracles are very simple answers to prayer. The miracle of unity in the body

Galatians 3

of Christ is one we often fail to recognize. God's Spirit works in many ways in our midst and every work He does is a miracle.

Paul moves now to an important question. Can we attribute this miraculous work of God's Spirit to the fact that we were good enough to deserve it or does he move among us despite our unworthiness? If I am honest with you, I want to believe that somehow the work of God's Spirit in me is because I did something right. I want to take some of the credit for myself when God answers my prayers or uses me in some way. I want to believe that God was able to use me because I was good enough or strong enough in myself. The fact that I believe this demonstrates how unworthy I am. In my pride, I am seeking to take the glory from God and place it on myself. I want people to think I am strong and spiritual. I want them to look at me and not at Christ. This sin of pride is a great sin. That God would determine to use me with this horrible sin in my life demonstrates that it is not because I am good that God uses me but because He is gracious.

Every miraculous work of God's Spirit is an act of grace originating from a heart of grace that responds to sinners who simply recognize their need and seek His intervention.

Verse 6

To prove from Scripture that righteousness is by faith and not by works, Paul brings up a story in the life of Abraham.

At this point in Abraham's life, he and his wife were old. In fact, Sarah was well beyond the years of bearing children. God had promised Abraham that he would make him into a great nation, but this perplexed Abraham, as he could not have any children. Confused about this, Abraham spoke to God, questioning His promise. Notice here that Abraham comes to God, not strong in faith and confidence but with a questioning heart and uncertainty about how God would fulfil His promise.

That day, God brought Abraham outside, asked him to look up into the sky and told him that if he could count the stars then he would know how numerous his descendants would be (Genesis 15:5).

Light To My Path Bible Notes

When Abraham heard what God said, he believed. Genesis 15:6 tells us that this belief was counted to him as righteousness.

What was it that God accepted in Abraham? It was his belief. Abraham trusted what God said, even when it made no sense to Him. He believed, that even through he could not understand God's ways, he could still trust Him to be faithful to His word. Just as God made the multitude of stars, so He was able to bring about what He promised. He accepted God to be true and trustworthy.

According to Paul, this is what God is looking for in us — a heart that believes in Him and trusts His purpose. Abraham was incapable of producing a great nation, but God could do what He could not do. Abraham trusted God, and not His own efforts.

Verse 7

Paul tells the Galatians that those who come to God like Abraham are his sons. Paul refers here to Genesis 15 when Abraham came to God as an old man, with a wife who was biologically incapable of bearing children. He questioned God's promise of making him into a great nation. God spoke to Abraham that day and reassured him that He would be faithful to His promise. Abraham believed the words of God, even when they made no sense to Him.

Paul tells the Galatians that this is how we need to come to God. We come with our questions and weakness, but we come believing by faith that He is everything He tells us He is. We come recognizing that we are incapable in ourselves, but God is fully able to accomplish through us what we cannot on our own. We come in complete dependence on Him for everything.

Verse 8

Continuing with the example of Abraham, Paul attempts to prove that salvation and the Christian life is by faith. To do this Paul quotes Genesis 12:3: *"In you shall all the nations be blessed."*

These were the words of God to Abraham in his old age. Paul shows the Galatians here that this prophetic word of God revealed

Galatians 3

that God would open the door for the Gentiles to hear and receive the gospel. Let's consider what Paul is saying here.

First, Paul has been showing us in this context that Abraham was right with God not because he was an observer of the law but because he trusted God's word. According to Paul, Abraham is the father of those who believe (Galatians 3:7).

Second, God told Abraham that through him, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. How would that blessing come? It would come through his seed. He would become the father of the Jewish nation. That nation would give birth to the Messiah Jesus who would bring salvation and forgiveness to people of all nations. Notice here that this blessing was not just for the Jews but for "all nation," which included the Gentiles as well.

This blessing for all nations, however, was not just through Abraham's physical descendant but also through his faith. In other words, Abraham would become the father of all who believed by faith. His children would live by faith, just as he did. They would trust when they were incapable in themselves. They would believe even what it made no sense to their fleshly minds. They would trust by faith as Abraham did, and the blessing of God would flow through that faith into every nation of the world.

There is one final point we need to make here. These Gentile nations did not know the law of the Jews. They did not practise this law or observe these traditions. According to Paul, God was telling Abraham that the day was coming when those who did not practice the law and lived in paganism and the bondage of sin would be delivered and become his children through faith alone. They would experience a salvation apart from Judaism and the law.

Verse 9

The promise of God was that all nations of the world would be blessed along with Abraham. That blessing of salvation and fellowship with God, would come to them, not through their nationality or through the law but by the same faith that Abraham demonstrated in God.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Notice, Paul's emphasis here on "*Abraham, the man of faith.*" Abraham was an example of what God expected. God was looking for men and women who would look to Him by faith and trust His word. Men and women who would not trust in their own skills and abilities but rather in what God could do through those who would simply have faith in Him.

Paul shows us that the Christian life is not so much a life of human effort and ability as it is of trust in God and His ability to do what we cannot. It is not so much about our planning and goals for God as it is a life of simple obedience and faith in His purpose for us.

Verse 10

Paul taught that anyone who relied on the works of the law was under a curse. Paul tells the Galatians that the law itself placed everyone who did not observe it under this curse.

In Deuteronomy 27:26 we have a case where God required His people to agree to be cursed if they did not follow all the words of His law:

26 "Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' – Dt 27:26

The apostle makes it clear to the Galatians that if they relied on the Law they would be placed under this curse of God if they did not keep it perfectly.

Verse 11

Paul points out an obvious fact here. If anyone who did not perfectly obey the law of God was under a curse, it was evident that no one would be made right with God by means of the law. Only Jesus who could perfectly keep the law of God.

This led Paul to the only other solution — "*The righteous shall live by faith.*" Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 here. The faith that Paul speaks about is in the person of Jesus Christ and His work on the cross to pardon us from our sin. The only solution to our sin is forgiveness. That forgiveness comes from the Lord Jesus.

Galatians 3

Verse 12

Notice how Paul makes a clear distinction between the law and faith here. He tells the Galatians that the “*law is not of faith.*” He backs this up with a quote from Leviticus 18:5:

5 You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD. – Lev 18:5

Leviticus 18:5 tells us that, under the law, if a person chose to follow God, they were to keep His statutes and rules and they would be judged on this basis. Adam Clarke in his comments on this verse puts it this way:

“It is not, what do you believe? but, what have you done?”

*(Commentary on the Bible by Adam Clarke,
notes on Galatians 3:12)*

The law was about “What have you done?” It was not about faith but about human effort to achieve favour with God.

Faith, on the other hand relates to “What do you believe?” To be more specific, in whom do you believe?” Of course, the subject of faith is the person of the Lord Jesus and His work on the cross.

According to Paul, to live by the law is to trust yourself and your own efforts. To live by faith is to trust the work of Christ for everything.

Verse 13

Paul has been speaking about the curse under which those who rely on the law have found themselves. He reassures the Galatians that they do not have to remain under this curse. Notice the means by which they could be freed: “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.*”

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Freedom from the curse is available through the Lord Jesus. The curse brought both physical and spiritual death. Ultimately it brought separation from God, for none of us could keep the law of God perfectly.

Paul tells us that Jesus “*redeemed us from the curse.*” The word, redeemed, in the Greek language is ἐξαγοράζω (exagorázō). It is derived from two words. The first is, ek, meaning out or from. The second word is agorázō, which simply means to buy. ἐξαγοράζω means to buy something out of or from. In this case Jesus bought us out of the curse. What is important for us to understand here is that redeeming us from the curse was not a simple matter of overruling the law. The Lord Jesus respected the law and paid the penalty on our behalf. Everything was done legally and there could be no questioning the result. Our penalty is recorded as being paid in full and we are released from the curse.

Notice here that Paul tells the Galatians that Jesus was cursed for them. To prove this point, Paul points them to the law of God in Deuteronomy 21 which says:

22 “*And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, 23 his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.*
– Dt 21:22-23

When Jesus was hung on the cross taking our sins, He was cursed. Not only did He take our sin, but He also took our curse with Him to that tree. Overcoming sin and death, however, he rose triumphant over both.

Verse 14

The Lord Jesus died on the cross, taking our sin and the curse upon Himself so that “*the blessing of Abraham might come to*

Galatians 3

the Gentiles.” Paul refers back here to what he said in Galatians 3:6:

6 just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? - Ga 3:6

What is the blessing of Abraham? According to Galatians 3:6 it is a right standing with God through faith apart from the works of the law. The death of the Lord Jesus opened the door for all who believe, regardless of race and nationality, to be forgiven and placed in a right standing before God. Gentiles who were once strangers to salvation, now were equal partners by faith in Jesus Christ and His work.

Notice how Paul concludes the verse here: *“so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”* Because Jesus died, the door is now open for all who believe, to receive the promised Spirit. The new life we receive at conversion is the life of the Spirit of Christ in us. This is not some abstract life but the very person of the Holy Spirit who has come to live in every believer. He is our spiritual life. He it is that transforms us and draws us to the Saviour.

Notice something else in the phrase, *“so that we might receive the promised Spirit.”* By using the word *“we”* here, Paul groups himself with the Gentiles. The blessing of Abraham was salvation and new life through the promised Spirit. That salvation came to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Together, as one people, they received this new life of the Spirit.

Verse 15

It would be easy to believe that Paul was against the law of God. This was not the case, however. Paul takes a moment here in the remainder of the chapter to explain his position on the law of God.

He begins by reminding that Galatians that even a *“man-made covenant”* was legally binding and could not be annulled or added to once it was agreed upon by both parties. There were serious consequences to breaking or changing a legal agreement.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

How much more would this be the case when it came to the Law of God and His covenant agreement with His people. Paul did not take this matter lightly. If this is the case, why does Paul tell the Galatians that they were free from the Law? He goes on to explain this in the proceeding verses.

Verse 16

Paul begins here by reminding the Galatians about the promises of God to Abraham and his offspring — *“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring.”*

What were the promises made to Abraham? Paul has already shown us the answer in this chapter.

First, God promised a right standing with Him:

6 just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? – Ga 3:6

Second, God promised that all nations would be blessed through Abraham:

8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” – Ga 3:8

Third, God promised a blessing that came by faith apart from the law to all who believed:

9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. – Ga 3:9

The promise given to Abraham was that through his descendants, a salvation apart from the law would come to all nations.

Paul goes on in this verse to show the Galatians that the promise God made was to both Abraham and his offspring. It would be easy for the Jewish scholars of the day to interpret this word *“offspring”*

Galatians 3

to refer to the Jewish people who claimed Abraham as their father. Paul interpreted this word, “*offspring*” to refer not to the Jewish people but to the person who would fulfil the promises made to Abraham. That offspring was the person of Jesus Christ. The promise of blessing and salvation to the nations was accomplished in Jesus Christ. It is revealed in our day in His church, comprised of people from every tribe and nation who bow a grateful knee to their Saviour and Lord.

The covenant agreement God made with Abraham is being accomplished. God is fulfilling His side of this legal agreement and promise through His Son and the gathering unto Him of peoples from all nations.

Verse 17

When Abraham believed God, God counted this as righteousness (Galatians 3:6). According to Paul, Abraham is the father of all who believe by faith, whether they be law-abiding Jews or Gentiles who never heard of the law (Galatians 3:7). He reminds the Galatians here that God promised Abraham that he would be a blessing to all nations (both Jewish and Gentile), and the father of those who experienced a righteousness apart from the law. This promise was given many years prior to the giving of the law through Moses. In other words, before the law was even given, God promised a salvation of people from all nations by faith apart from the law.

It is in this context that Paul says: “*the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God.*” Most commentators agree that the mention of 430 years here relates to the time between when God spoke to Abraham and sent him to Canaan until the time that God called Moses and gave him the Law.

Paul tells the Galatians that the covenant God made with Abraham was not annulled by the law that came 430 years later. God had promised to make Abraham the father of nation who would enter a relationship with Him by faith. God would still be true to His promise to Abraham. Salvation by grace through faith was the intention of

Light To My Path Bible Notes

God 430 year before the Law of Moses was given. Paul makes this clear in Galatians 3:8-9 where he says:

8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." 9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. – Ga 3:8-9

Hundreds of years before Moses the lawgiver, was the promise of God to bring a salvation by faith apart from the law. Paul assures that Galatians that this was still the intent of God.

Verse 18

God promised a salvation apart from the law for all nations. He gave this promise to Abraham 430 years prior to the law of Moses.

Consider the implication of this promise. If we can only receive our spiritual inheritance by means of the law, then what does this say about God and His promise to Abraham? Doesn't it render it void? Did God promise Abraham one thing and then change His mind in the days of Moses? Obviously not. As Paul said in verse 17, the law did not annul God's promise to Abraham. Salvation has always been by faith and not by works of the Law.

Verse 19

If the promise of salvation by grace through faith apart from the law was the promise given to Abraham, "why then the law?" The question is certainly an important one and one which Paul answers here in this verse.

Paul tells the Galatians that the law was given "*because of transgressions.*" Let's consider this a moment.

The law was a means defining sin. Paul put it this way when writing to the Romans:

Galatians 3

*7 What then shall we say? That the law is sin?
By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I
would not have known sin. For I would not have
known what it is to covet if the law had not said,
“You shall not covet.” – Ro 7:7*

The law defined God's standard and showed us what sin was. In this case, Paul tells the Romans that he would not have even known what coveting was if it were not for the law. He certainly would not have known that it was sinful before God apart from the law. The law defined sin.

Secondly, the law also restrained sin. Punishments were assigned by the law on sin. Knowing that we are accountable for our action keeps us from doing things for which we will be punished.

Finally, the law prepared us for the coming of the Saviour. It revealed just how far we were from the standard God required. It showed us our inability to be right with God by our own efforts. It showed us that we needed a Saviour. The law was given as a preparation for the Messiah who would bring salvation by faith. It was put in place *“until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made.”*

Notice that Paul told the Galatians that this law was put into place *“through angels by an intermediary.”* While it is not clearly revealed in the Old Testament, it was understood that the angels of God played a role in the giving of the Law of Moses.

Before being stoned to death, Stephen declared to the Jewish leaders:

*53 you who received the law as delivered by
angels and did not keep it.” – Ac 7:53*

The writer to the Hebrews writes:

*2 For since the message declared by angels
proved to be reliable, and every transgression or*

Light To My Path Bible Notes

*disobedience received a just retribution – Heb
2:2*

Both writers declare that angels delivered the Law. Paul tells the Galatians that while angels delivered this law they did so through an “intermediary.” That intermediary was Moses.

Verse 20

In Galatians 3:19, Paul told the Galatians that the law was “*put in place through angels by an intermediary.*” In other words, God gave the law to Israel by Moses through angels. This was done in a legally binding way.

In Galatians 3:14, Paul also declared that “*the blessing of Abraham*” would come to the Gentiles, “*through faith.*”

This immediately presents a problem. Are there two ways to God? Do the Jews need to observe the law to be saved, while the Gentiles are saved by faith in Jesus Christ? Does God present one way of salvation through His promise to Abraham and another by means of the law given to Moses?

To answer this Paul tells the Galatians that “*God is one.*” In other words, God is not divided. He is not one God to the Jews and another to the Gentiles. He says something very similar in Romans 3:28-30:

*28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart
from works of the law. 29 Or is God the God of
Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also?
Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since God is one—who
will justify the circumcised by faith and the
uncircumcised through faith. – Ro 3:28-30*

Paul tells the Romans that since God is one, He will justify both the circumcised and the uncircumcised by faith.

Galatians 3

Verse 21

Paul wants to reassure the Galatians that the promise God made to Abraham of salvation by faith was not contrary to the law He gave Moses. God was not offering two ways to be saved.

The apostle goes on to tell them that if there was a law that could offer salvation, then salvation could indeed be by the law. The reality of the matter, however, is that not one of us can perfectly keep the law. Every one of us falls short of His standard and so a salvation apart from the law was required. This is why the promise of God to Abraham was so important. It offers us hope that despite our inability to keep the law, God would not abandon us in our sin.

Verse 22

If there was one thing that Law did, it “*imprisoned everything under sin.*” It set a standard that we are to live by. When we could not live by that standard it condemned us.

This is where the promise of God to Abraham came into play. The promise of salvation by faith, given to Abraham, was offered to all who would believe. If there is one thing the Law of Moses did, it elevated the promise of God to Abraham. It revealed our need and pushed us to the promise.

Verse 23

Paul begins this verse with the words, “*Now before faith came.*” These words can be confusing if they are not taken in their context. We read, for example in Hebrews 11:

*7 By faith Noah, being warned by God
concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent
fear constructed an ark for the saving of his
household. By this he condemned the world and
became an heir of the righteousness that comes
by faith. – Heb 11:7*

It is clear from Hebrews 11 that many men and women exercised faith in God by their actions. Notice here in Hebrews 11:7, that by

Light To My Path Bible Notes

exercising this faith, Noah “*became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.*” Once again, we see that even before the law of Moses was given, there was a righteousness that came by faith.

When Paul speaks about the coming of faith, he speaks here about the object of that faith – the Lord Jesus Himself and the accomplishment of our salvation on the cross.

The apostle told the Galatians that they were held captive under the law until the coming of the Lord Jesus who would set them free. The word used here for captive is φρουρέω (phroureō) which refers to a guard. The idea is that the law watched over them like a military guard. It kept track of their every movement to keep them in line. When they fell short, they were punished and corrected.

The picture that Paul paints here is one of guilty criminals in prison. They have disobeyed the law and were being held in their prison cell awaiting their sentencing. The penalty for sin was death. This would continue until salvation by faith in Jesus Christ would be revealed.

Verse 24

According to Paul, the law was a guardian until Jesus came. The Greek word used here is παιδαγωγός (paidagōgós) which is an instructor of children. Like a schoolmaster, the law kept God’s children in line and instructed them in the way He expected them to walk.

Notice, however, the intention of this law — “*in order that we might be justified by faith.*” In saying this, Paul reminds the Galatians that the law was not an end. Its purpose was to point these children to faith in Jesus Christ and His work. The law would reveal God’s purpose, their inability to keep that purpose in themselves, and the solution that was found in the death of Christ on their behalf.

Galatians 3

Verse 25

Everything changed with the coming of the Lord Jesus and the way of faith. According to Paul, we are no longer under a guardian. We are no longer under the law.

The law required animal sacrifices for our sins. It showed us that the wages of our disobedience was death. One animal after another was offered to God as a payment for sin. All of this pointed to the death of the Lamb of God who would pay for all sin. When He died, no more sacrifice was required. Forgiveness was extended to all who would, by faith, accept His death on their behalf. This death was sufficient for all their sin. Pardon was extended to all who would believe.

Verse 26

Paul tells the Galatians here that in Christ Jesus we are sons of God through faith.

Notice first, the words, “*in Christ*.” These words indicate a confidence and trust in Him. They speak of a personal relationship and reliance on His work for salvation and forgiveness. Those who are in Christ, hide themselves in Him. They believe in what He has done and place their full weight on Him as their Saviour and Lord.

Those who trust in the Lord Jesus and are in Him are sons of God. Paul places no other restriction on this. Gentiles who trusted by faith in the work of Christ, were children of God – “*you are all sons of God, through faith.*”

Verse 27

Paul describes what it means to be “sons of God” (verse 26). Note the two qualities of a son of God here.

First, the son of God is “*baptized into Christ*.” Gentiles who converted to Judaism were baptised. Jesus also instituted baptism as a symbol of cleansing and new life. What is important for us to understand here is that there are many who have undergone a Christian baptism who do not belong to the Lord Jesus. In speaking

Light To My Path Bible Notes

about a baptism into Christ here, Paul is not merely speaking about a physical baptism. He is speaking about something very real and powerful. Listen to what John the Baptist said when he baptised people coming to him:

“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose— Mt 3:11

The physical baptism we practise as believers is merely a symbol of a greater baptism. It speaks of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit and His life in us because of the work of Jesus Christ.

Speaking to the Colossians, the apostle tells them that they were buried with him in baptism and raised to new life through faith in the “powerful working of God.”

having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. – Col 2:11-12

The baptism to which Paul refers here is not just a physical baptism but a dying to oneself and an infilling of the Spirit of Christ giving new life.

Second the son of God has put on Christ. The Greek word translated “put on” is ἐνδύω (endúō). The first part of this word “en” means, in. The second part, dúō means to sink or go under. It is also used to speak of putting on a garment. The idea of sinking into Christ is quite powerful. The idea is that we clothe ourselves with Him so that we are hidden, and He is visible. We die to ourselves and let Him live in and through us.

Verse 28

One of the wonderful truths of the gospel is that it reaches out to the world and to every status in society. There is no distinction made between the law-abiding Jew or the Gentile Greek. There is no difference between the slave or the free. Males and females are

Galatians 3

equally included in this salvation. All who receive Jesus by faith can know His forgiveness and pardon.

Verse 29

Paul brings all this back to the promise God made to Abraham. Paul tells us what that promise is in Galatians 3:8 when he says:

8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." – Ga 3:8

God promised that even Gentile nations that did not observe the law, would be blessed through Abraham. *"Just as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"* (Ga 3:5-6), so it would be for these nations. They too would believe God and it would be counted for them as righteousness. Abraham would be the father of those who by faith believed in the Lord Jesus and became God's children

7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. – Ga 3:7

Believers today are inheritors of the promised salvation by faith. The promise was made to Abraham and made real in our lives by the person of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 4

Verse 1

As the apostle begins chapter 4, he uses the illustration of a child heir to a great fortune. This child will not inherit this fortune, however, until he reaches a certain age. While it is set apart for him, he has not yet received it, nor does he have any say in how it is used. Paul compares this child to a slave who is governed by other people and has no authority over his possessions.

Verse 2

The child heir to a fortune, because he is not mature, is under guardians and managers until he reaches a certain age. These guardians teach him to be wise and responsible. The managers care for his inheritance until he is mature enough to make decisions himself. He has no authority over how it is used until the date set by the father arrives when everything will be signed over to him and under his care.

Verse 3

Paul now shows the Galatians the purpose of his illustration in verses one and two – *“when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.”*

Consider the phrase, *“when we were children.”* The apostle includes himself in this statement. He speaks about a time of immaturity and lack of understanding. This describes a time when they too were under a guardian who trained them in what was right. He describes this guardian as the law in Galatians 3:24:

Light To My Path Bible Notes

24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.
– Ga 3:24

The law of Moses showed us what God required but it was given only for a period of time – “*until Christ came.*” When Christ came, we who were under the law were set free to enjoy the fullness of our inheritance. Christ brought pardon and eternal life for all who received him.

Until Christ came, according to Paul, we were “*enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.*” He tells us that this slavery was to the “*elementary principles of this world.*” In other words, we were trapped in a world view that did not understand heavenly things. We did the best we could but did not grasp the forgiveness and power of God. We did not have the mind of God nor the life of the Spirit.

Verse 4

Paul continues with his illustration of a child waiting for the day of his inheritance. He tells us that the day finally came when God sent His Son Jesus Christ to this earth. It was He who would finally bring this day.

Paul tells the Galatians two things about the Lord Jesus. Notice first that He was born of a woman. This emphasizes the fact that He took on human form and became a man. He can identify with us in this humanity.

The second point Paul makes here is that Jesus was also born under the law. That is to say, He submitted to the requirements of the law just as any Jewish born man was required to do. He was accountable to live according to this law and any disobedience would render Him guilty before His heavenly Father.

Verse 5

Paul tells us that Jesus submitted to the Law for a purpose – “*to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*”

Galatians 4

Notice first that Jesus redeemed *“those who were under the law.”* The word “redeem” in the Greek language is ἐξαγοράζω (exagorázō) which means to buy out of or from. There was a cost to pay to set us free from the penalty of the law. The penalty of our sin was death. Jesus would pay this on our behalf so that we would be free.

There is a second point we need to see here from the word *“to.”* The word, “to” links this verse with verse 4 which tells us that Jesus was born of a woman under the law. What is important to note here is that these two qualifications were necessary for Jesus to redeem us.

In order to truly represent us, Jesus needed to be one of us. By becoming man, Jesus suffered just as we did. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that He was also tempted just as we are:

*15 For we do not have a high priest who is
unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but
one who in every respect has been tempted as
we are, yet without sin. – Heb 4:15*

Jesus was a perfect representative. He was one of us and identified perfectly with us. He understood our pain, our struggles and our temptations.

More than this, however, Paul tells us that Jesus placed Himself under the law. The one who represented us before the Father faced the law head on and overcame. As he stood before Father there was no sin in him. As he stood before Satan, the devil had no claim on Him. He identified with us as human being, but He also identified with us as one who lived under the law. He was a perfect representative to intercede on our behalf. Having paid that penalty for us, Satan now had no legal claim on us.

There is one final point Paul makes here. Notice that we were redeemed from the curse and penalty of the law so that we could be adopted as sons of God. Jesus did not pay our penalty and leave us on our own. He worked on behalf of the Father whose desire

Light To My Path Bible Notes

was to adopt us as His children. We now belong to Him who adopted us. He cares for us now as His own children.

Verse 6

One of the wonderful privileges of being a child of God is that God places the “*Spirit of His Son*” in our hearts. In other words, the Spirit of God lives in every child of God. The life we receive is not some impersonal force but the very presence of the Spirit of God in us.

Paul tells us that it is because we are sons (and daughters) of God that we receive the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Christian is defined as one who has been pardoned by Jesus Christ and in whom the Spirit of God dwells. This gives us a right standing with God and the power to live as He requires.

Notice what takes place when the Spirit of God comes to dwell in the hearts of His children. Those hearts cry out “*Abba! Father!*” The word “Abba” is a term of endearment used to speak of a father. It indicates intimacy and love toward the father. We see, in this term, the work of the Spirit of God. He comes to bring us into a deeper relationship with the Father. With all barriers now removed this is possible by means of the Spirit’s work in our lives. It should be noted here that the relationship we can now have with the Father is one of deep intimacy and tenderness.

Under the law, we were enemies to God and under His condemnation. We could not keep the law and stood helpless before our Judge. Jesus paid the penalty for our sin and the Spirit of Christ came to dwell in us, enabling us to experience intimacy with God and empowering in life and service.

Verse 7

Paul concludes this section by reminding the Galatians that they were no longer slaves to their guardian. They had been adopted by the Father, through the work of His Son Jesus Christ. As children of God now, the life of His Spirit dwelt in them. They were not the same people they used to be. The Spirit of God directed, led and gave them victory over their flesh. As sons and daughters of God,

Galatians 4

it was their privilege to know the life of God in them and the promise of eternal life in His presence.

This was something that law could not do for them. The Law condemned. The Spirit of Christ gave them life.

The challenge for us as believers is to learn to live as children of God. We who know the life of Christ in us, must learn to tap into this source of enabling and live in victory. This is our heritage and privilege as children of God.

Verse 8

Paul has been speaking here about the slavery and bondage of those who do not know the freedom found in the Lord Jesus. In this verse, he reminds the Galatians that before coming to know the one true God of Israel, they had been enslaved to *“those that by nature are not gods.”*

To understand this phrase, it is helpful to look at what Paul told the Thessalonians:

9 For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, – 1Th 1:9

Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, reminds them of how they had turned from idols to the *“living and true God.”* He expands on this in his letter to the Corinthians when he said: *4 Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” – 1Co 8:4*

The apostle tells the Corinthians that these idols had *“no real existence”* because there *“is no God but one.”*

It seems then that what Paul is telling us in Galatians 4:8 is that the Galatians, like other Gentiles in Thessalonica and Corinth were enslaved to idol worship. As such they believed these pieces of

Light To My Path Bible Notes

wood, gold and metal were gods when there is only one true God the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Verse 9

Paul tells us here that the Galatians had come to know God. Having said this, he seems to correct himself in mid sentence in order to be more precise and says, “*or rather to be known by God.*” What is the difference between knowing God and being known by God and why is this difference important enough for Paul to correct himself?

It is true that the Galatians had come to know God. They heard the message of the gospel and understood that Jesus came to pay for their sin. What was more important than knowing about God was the fact that God knew them. Now there is a sense that God knows everyone in a very general way. Paul is not speaking about this general knowledge of God about all things. When he tells the Galatians that they were “*known by God,*” he is telling them that God took a very special interest in them, send His Son to pardon their sin by His death, adopted them as His children, placed His Spirit in them and gave them an eternal inheritance in His presence. Yes, the Galatians knew God, but it was infinitely more precise to say that God knew them. It was because God took note of them that they came to know Him and all His wonderful blessings.

The blessing that came from God knowing the Galatians personally were such that it was unthinkable that they would ever want to return to their old ways and idols. But this is what Paul was accusing them of doing. They were being tempted to return to a religion of works and enslavement. The apostle rebukes them for this.

Verse 10

Paul accuses the Galatians of returning to a religion of enslavement in verse 9. He explains what he means more fully here in verse 10 when he says:

You observe days and months and seasons and years! – Ga 4:10

Galatians 4

Now Paul was not necessarily against the keeping of certain days for the Lord. In fact, he encouraged the Romans to respect those who chose to esteem one day better than another:

5 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. – Ro 14:5-6

While Paul encouraged respect for those who held one day above another, he taught that this was not to be imposed on everyone. Just as one person had freedom to eat all things and another chose to abstain from certain foods for the Lord, so it was with the celebration of religious days, months and years.

When Paul speaks about the Galatians observing days, months and years, he is speaking about the practice of the law as a requirement in their mind. He is reminding them that the observation of a day does not make one holy. By falling back into a system of rules, regulations and laws, the Galatians were failing to understand that true holiness is not the result of what we do. It is the inner work of the Spirit of Christ that makes us holy and not our personal efforts. Instead of looking to Christ for holiness, they were falling back into the ways of the law and looking to themselves.

Verse 11

Paul expresses his concern that his teaching about the grace of God and the work of Christ was in vain. He does not question the validity of his message here, but rather the effort he made for the Galatians. By returning to the law and its observation, they were falling way from the central teaching of Paul that Christ's work and the resulting presence of God's Spirit in them was sufficient for their holiness and acceptance before God. He expresses his

Light To My Path Bible Notes

disappointment that these Galatians had not fully grasped this teaching.

Verse 12

Paul's words to the Galatians here can be quite confusing and there are various interpretations of what Paul means here. The apostle says three things in this verse.

First, speaking to the Galatians as “*brothers*,” Paul pleads with them to become as he was – “*Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am.*” What do we know about the apostle Paul? Listen to how he described himself to the Philippians:

*4 though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:
5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; – Phl 3:4-5*

Paul tells the Philippians that if anyone could have confidence in the flesh it was him. He was a “*Hebrew of Hebrews*,” observing the law to the smallest detail. The apostle goes on, however, to tell the Philippians:

*7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ
9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— – Phl 3:7-9*

Paul tells the Philippians that he came to a place where he counted all his observation of the law to mean absolutely nothing compared to knowing Christ. This was where his heart was now. To know a

Galatians 4

righteousness that was apart from the law by faith in Jesus Christ. When the apostle tells the Galatians to become like him, he is pleading with them to follow his example and make Christ and the righteousness that comes by faith in Him their sole focus.

Paul tells the Galatians here in this verse secondly that he had become like them. Remember here that Paul, as a “Hebrew of Hebrews” (Philippians 3:5) was called to preach to the Gentiles. These Gentiles did not observe the law of Moses, nor did they see themselves as obligated to the customs and traditions of the Jewish nation. While Paul was a zealous Jew who practiced the law faithfully and observed every Jewish tradition, he gave that up to follow the Lord Jesus. He became like the Gentiles in that he no longer saw himself as being under the Jewish law or obligated to it. The verse concludes with the words: “*You did me no wrong.*” It is likely best to see these words as belonging to what Paul is going to say in the verses that follow. In verse 13-15, the apostle focuses on his time with the Galatians and how, despite his ailment they received him and cared for him as a genuine messenger from God.

Verse 13

Continuing from his introduction in verse 12 – “*You did me no wrong,*” Paul reminds that Galatians that it was because of a physical affliction that he first preached the gospel to them.

Some of the principal cities of the region of Galatia were cities such as Antioch, Pisidia, Lystra, Iconium and Derbe. Consider what Acts 14 has to tell us about the time when Paul was in these Galatian cities:

19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. 20 But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. 21 When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. – Ac 14:19-22

While Paul does not specifically say what his physical affliction was when he preached the gospel to them, there is clear evidence that he had been stoned and left for dead because of his preaching in the region.

Verse 14

What was the response of the Galatian church to Paul's physical condition in those days?

First, it was a trial to them. Paul does not explain this any further. It may be that they felt burdened because he had suffered so much to bring the gospel to them. It may be that the trial was related to their attempt to help him through this affliction.

Second, Paul reminds the Galatians that they did not scorn or despise him. When Paul was among them, he was physically afflicted. He did not come among adorned in fancy robes and a large following. He may have come among them in tattered robes, bleeding and dying from being stoned and rejected in other towns of their region. These Galatians had compassion on him, however, and received him in his humbled condition.

Third, the Galatians received Paul “*as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.*” An angel is a messenger. Paul is telling us that the Galatians received him as a messenger of God. They also received him as a messenger of Jesus Christ and His representative. Obviously, Paul was grateful to the Galatians for the compassion, hospitality and friendship demonstrated to him in his time of need.

Verse 15

Paul has expressed his gratitude to the Galatians for their compassion and genuine concern for him and the message he preached among them in his affliction. In fact, Paul declared that

Galatians 4

they would have gouge out their eyes and given them to him if it was possible.

Over time, however, that relationship with Paul began to diminish, and the Galatians distanced themselves from him and his teaching. This may have been due to the false teachers who had come among.

Notice Paul's question here: "*What then has become of your blessedness?*" Paul wants to know what the cause for their loss of compassion and friendship was and why they were turning against him.

Verse 16

Paul questions the Galatians on why they were distancing themselves from him in verse 15. He attempts to answer this question himself here: "*Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?*"

Paul understood that the Galatians were being influenced by false teachers who were leading them astray from the truth he had taught them. This accounted for their coldness toward him. Instead of seeing Paul as a messenger of God, they saw him as a false teacher who took people away from the law and its requirements.

Paul does not back down here. He clearly states that he was telling them the truth in what he taught. He would not compromise the truth of the gospel just to be their friends. He clearly longed to experience this friendship again, but he would not do so at the expense of truth.

Verse 17

Paul understood that the reason for the coldness in a once warm relationship with the Galatians had to do with false teachers. These false teachers were causing the Galatians to question the truth Paul taught about salvation by faith in Christ alone. Instead, these teachers were promoting a Christianity based on the Jewish law. Paul has two things to say here in this verse about the motivation of these false teachers.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

First, *“they make much of you, but for no good purpose.”* These false teachers were friendly and knew how to flatter their students. They had mastered the art of befriending and gaining the favour of those they taught. They were easy to get along with and enjoyable to be with. While this is a good thing, there was a motivation behind this friendliness that was somewhat sinister.

Paul tells the Galatians that the intention of these friendly false teachers was to *“shut you out, that you may make much of them.”* There is some debate here about the words *“shut you out.”* The idea seems to be that the intention of these false teachers was to cut these Galatians off from the fellowship of the church, and the teaching of Paul. More than this, however, they were looking for their own disciples who would look up to them and respect them as great spiritual leaders. The concern of these teachers was for themselves and not for the truth.

Verse 18

Paul tells the Galatians that it is *“good to made much of.”* In fact, listen to what Jesus had to say about this:

14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. – Mt 5:14-16

16

Jesus tells us that we are to live our lives to be seen by others. We are not to hide our light under a basket. People need to see the light of Jesus in us.

What Paul is telling the Galatians here is that it is always good that people see the light of Christ in us. There is, however, a *“being made much of”* that is not good. These false teachers of Paul’s day were not concerned about the light of Christ shining through them. Their only concern was for themselves and gaining a following.

Galatians 4

Notice also in this verse that there is another kind of *“being made much of”* that Paul addresses. He does so in the words *“not only when I am present with you.”* These words show us that there are those who change how they act depending on the group they are with. The focus of this type of people is to fit in and be respected as one of the group. They do not have deep convictions, however. They sway from one thing to another like a tree blowing in the wind. These are not individuals you can depend on. Once again, their concern is not for the truth so much as it is for themselves.

Verse 19

Paul speaks of the Galatians as children here. They were immature in their faith and being influenced by false teachers who deceived them and made much of them.

Notice the phrase *“my little children.”* These words demonstrate Paul’s compassion for the Galatian believers. He was like a loving father to them. Even though they were wandering from the truth, the apostle had a deep concern and love for them.

Paul goes on to tell the Galatians that he was *“again in the anguish of childbirth”* for them. The word *“again”* shows us that this is not the first time he experienced this anguish. He likely experienced this before they came to Christ. He anguished for them to be born again as children of God. Paul tells the Galatians, however, that once again he was experiencing this anguish. This time, however, he anguished *“until Christ is formed in you!”*

The idea of Christ being formed in us is powerful. Scripture is quite clear that the life of Christ is in every believer. What Paul is teaching us here, however, is that that presence of Christ needs to be formed in us. While the Spirit of Christ lives in every believer, not every believer is mature. Maturity comes through surrender to the presence of Christ and His purpose. This is a lifelong process.

The Spirit of Christ works in the lives of all who belong to Christ. He convicts us of sin, teaches us the heart of the Father and leads us into His purpose. While I have known the Lord for many years, I am seeing that this work does not stop. The Spirit of God in me

Light To My Path Bible Notes

continues to show me areas of my life that need to be fully surrendered and matured. I don't ever expect to reach perfection in this world. I expect that the Lord Jesus will continue to be formed in me until I stand before him on that final day. I expect also that there will be a tinge of shame because I did not allow His character to be formed even more.

Paul's great passion was that the Lord Jesus and His character be formed more and more in the Galatians.

Verse 20

Paul expresses his desire to be with the Galatians. Notice two details here.

First, Paul wanted to change his tone, toward them. We get a sense of that tone from his letter. He speaks of the Galatians as believers who were wandering from the truth, as little children who were immature in the faith, and as brothers and sisters who were growing cold in their relationship to him as an apostle. Paul did not want to remain in this kind of feeling toward the Galatians. He wanted to know that they were growing and maturing in Christ. His desire was to know unhindered fellowship and love for them. His desire was to be with them to work out these hindrances so that he could speak more positively of them.

Second, Paul tells the Galatians that he was perplexed about them. The word used for perplexed is ἀπορέω (aporēō) which literally means to be without resources. The idea is that he had no direction or knowledge about how to proceed. This would have been a burden on the heart of the apostle. It was likely for this reason that he wanted to be with them. Remember that communication was not what it is in these days. The only way the apostle could minister to these Galatians was through letters that took a long time to arrive or by his physical presence in their midst.

Verse 21

At one point in his life Paul was a very diligent teacher and observer of the Jewish law. When he met the Lord Jesus, however, all that

Galatians 4

changed. He found in Jesus the answer the law could never provide. Notice here how Paul questions the Galatians: “*Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?*”

The apostle speaks here as one who himself had not fully understood the teaching of the law, though he followed it strictly.

Verse 22

Paul explains here what he discovered from the law after he came to Christ. He reminds the Galatians that Abraham had two sons.

The first son was born through his wife’s servant Hagar. His name as Ishmael (Genesis 16:116). The second son was born to Sarah, Abraham’s wife when she was beyond the years of childbearing. He was the result of a miraculous work of God in her life and the fulfilment of a promise God made to Abraham. His name was Isaac (Genesis 21:1-7).

Notice how Paul told the Galatians that Ishmael was born to a slave, while Isaac was born to a free woman. The implication here is that God was wanting to communicate something very important to His people through the birth of these two sons.

Verse 23

Paul tells the Galatians here that Ishmael, the son of Abraham, through his wife’s slave Hagar, was born “*according to the flesh.*” That it to say, he was born in a very natural way, just as every child is born.

On the other hand, Isaac, the son of the free woman, Sarah, Abraham’s wife, was born in fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham. He was born in a miraculous way, when Sarah should not have been able to conceive and bear children.

This fact was very important to Paul. God was communicating to His people through these two children. He was revealing His purpose for the days to come.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 24

Paul goes on to explain the significance of the story of Hagar, Sarah and their two sons. He tells the Galatians that the story could be “*interpreted allegorically.*” In other words, God intended to communicate His purpose through the birth of Ishmael and Isaac.

According to Paul, Hagar and Sarah represented two covenants. Hagar, the slave, whose son was born by natural means, represented the covenant made through Moses at Mount Sinai.

Notice that Paul tells the Galatians that the children of Hagar were slaves. As the child of a slave, Ishmael would not be Abraham’s true heir.

Genesis 21:9-12 recounts how after the birth of Isaac, Sarah demand that Hagar and Ishmael be driven away. When Abraham protested, God reminded him that it was indeed through Isaac that “*his offspring would be named.*”

11 And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. 12 But God said to Abraham, “Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. – Ge 21:11-12

The Jewish Scriptures taught that while Ishmael was a son of Abraham, it would not be through him that the promise of God would be fulfilled.

Verse 25

According to Paul, Hagar represented Mount Sinai and the “*present Jerusalem.*” That is to say those who were remained under the law of Moses and all its requirements.

The picture here is of a slave woman, who was banished from the blessings of Abraham’s true family. This picture would not have gone over well with the Jews of that day. Paul saw them as spiritual

Galatians 4

descendants of Ishmael, under the bondage of the law and separated from the promised blessings of God. Of course, all who continue under the law are descendants of Ishmael in this sense.

Verse 26

Paul compared Hagar, Sarah's slave to the "*present Jerusalem*" under the law but separated from the promised blessings. He moves now to the "*Jerusalem above*." He says two things about this Jerusalem.

First, the Jerusalem above or the heavenly Jerusalem, represented by Sarah, was free. In this sense, she was free from the law. She was free from sin and the curse of sin. All this comes about as a result of the work of Jesus Christ the promised Saviour.

Second the heavenly Jerusalem is our mother. Paul speaks here to believers in Jesus Christ. Our citizenship is in heaven because of the forgiveness offered by Jesus Christ.

Verse 27

Paul backs up his illustration of Hagar and Sarah by quoting from Isaiah 54:1. In his prophecy, Isaiah, calls the "*barren one*" (Sarah) to rejoice and cry aloud. The reason for this rejoicing was that her children would be more numerous than the woman who had a husband.

We should not see Isaiah as saying that the barren woman had no husband or that her children would be illegitimate. She would not have known her barrenness if she had no husband. The idea here is that this woman and her husband, like Sarah and Abraham, could not bear children but God promised them numerous descendants.

Paul uses Isaiah's words here to show how Isaiah picks up on this idea of God's promise to a barren couple. Like Sarah, the descendants of this barren couple would fill the earth.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 28

Paul explains his quote in verse 27 from Isaiah 54:1 by telling the Galatians that they were, like Isaac, children of promise. God promised through Abraham to raise up a people to be His children. They would be born miraculously into a new nation. That new nation is the heavenly Jerusalem he speaks about in verse 26. Those who would be citizens of this heavenly kingdom were born as a result of the work of the promised Messiah.

Verse 29

Paul reminds the Galatians of a time when Ishmael persecuted his half-brother, Isaac. This may be a reference to what took place in Genesis 21:8-9 where Ishmael laughs mockingly at Isaac.

Paul seems to be telling the Galatians that those who belong to the Lord Jesus, born *“according to the Spirit,”* will be persecuted by those born *“according to the flesh.”*

What is important for us to note in this context is how Paul distinguished between those born according to the flesh and those born according to the Spirit. One is born to *“this present Jerusalem”* and the other to the *“Jerusalem above.”* One is of this world and the other is born of God. One is under the law and its condemnation. The other is free from the law and experiences the forgiveness of God’s Son.

Once again, Paul shows how the law illustrated the message of the gospel and that living out that gospel in a dark world would be difficult.

Verse 30

Continuing his illustration of how Ishmael persecuted Isaac, Paul quotes the words of Sarah to her husband:

“Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.”

Galatians 4

Unknown to herself at the time, Sarah speaks prophetically. Hagar's descendants would not inherit the blessing of Sarah's descendants. God would make a distinction between the two. According to Paul, the descendants of Isaac were not the Jewish nation but all those who would accept the Lord Jesus and experience new birth into the kingdom of God. This was the great nation God promised Abraham. It was a kingdom that would span generations and cultures. It was a generation of individuals born again as children of God's promise to bless all nations through the coming Messiah. It was an exclusive nation of people from every language and tribe born again through the Spirit of God as inheritors of eternal life through the work of Jesus Christ, apart from the law.

The son of the slave woman Hagar would not inherit this kingdom. Only those who were born again of the Spirit would experience the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham as the father of those who were free from the law and pardoned by Jesus Christ.

Verse 31

The apostle concludes by telling the Galatians that if they had been born again through the work of God's Spirit, they were no longer children of the slave Hagar but of the free woman Sarah. Their new birth set them free from the burden of the law. As children of the free woman, they were pardoned and accepted by the work of Jesus Christ on their behalf.

As children of Sarah, the free woman, they were not to return to the bondage and slavery of the law but rather rejoice in their acceptance and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Galatians 5

Verse 1

Paul begins chapter five with a statement about freedom.

First, “*Christ has set us free.*” The idea is that we were in bondage. That bondage came from sin and the law. These held us under the judgement of God. The sinful nature kept us hostage to its lusts and desires. The law was powerless to free us. What the law could not do, Jesus Christ did through His sacrificial death for us.

Second, notice why we were set free – “*for freedom.*” Jesus Christ came to this earth so that we could be freed from sin and the sinful flesh. He came to release us from the condemnation of the law. He set us free from the way of the law with its impossible standards. His death provided full atonement for our sin. All who accept Him and His work, experience full and total pardon.

It is the desire of God that we walk in this freedom and pardon. It is not His purpose that we spend our lives bound up in a system that can never give us assurance and right standing. He wants all who belong to Him to know that they are loved by the Father, indwelt by His Spirit and eternally and fully saved by His Son. There is no more condemnation for those who have come to Christ. They are freed from the obligations and condemnation of the law.

Finally, the apostle Paul tells the Galatians that they were to stand firm. They were not to give in to the teaching of the false teachers who were telling them that they should return to the bondage of the Jewish law and its obligations.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

According to Paul, they were free from the obligations of the Jewish law. Their salvation was completely in the work of the Lord Jesus. Their acceptance was not based on how well they observed the requirements of the law. To believe this, was to depreciate what the Lord Jesus had done for them. Paul challenged the Galatians to walk in the freedom they had in the Lord Jesus, and not trust in their own efforts through the law for a right standing.

Verse 2

The apostle continues what he began in verse one here. He speaks to the Galatians about their freedom from the Jewish law through the work of the Lord Jesus.

The false teachers circulating in Galatia were telling the Galatians that they needed to submit to circumcision if they were to be true children of God. We need to understand here that Paul is not just speaking here about a medical procedure. Circumcision, in our day, is practiced for a variety of reasons. When Paul speaks of circumcision here, he speaks about a religious practice and belief, held by the Jews, that circumcision was a required sign of a covenant relationship with God and obligation to His law. If you wanted to know whether a man was a Jew, and by extension, a child of God, you would ask if he was circumcised. This was the sign that they belonged to the people of God.

Notice what Paul tells the Galatians about this mentality: *“if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.”* What Paul is saying here is this. If you believe that circumcision and following the Jewish law makes you a Christian, then what is the purpose of Christ and His work. Why not just convert to Judaism.

Paul is telling the Galatians that they cannot turn to Judaism and the practice of its laws and call themselves Christians. The work of Christ set us free from the Jewish law. His death made a difference and radically changed our relationship with the Father.

Galatians 5

Verse 3

Paul tells the Galatians that if they accepted circumcision, they were then obligated to keep the whole law.

Notice first the words “*accept circumcision*.” Paul speaks here about men who accept circumcision. Usually, we speak of infants being circumcision, but Paul speaks here about men. Many of those who were accepting the Lord were of Gentile background and had never been circumcised as children. These men were being asked by the false teachers to submit to the Jewish laws and traditions.

Paul tells these men, that if they accepted circumcision as their entrance into relationship with God, then they were also required to keep the rest of the Jewish law as well. In other words, if they chose the Jewish law as the means to God, then the only way that they could achieve their goal was to keep that law perfectly. This was something no one apart from Jesus Christ had ever been able to do.

Verse 4

Paul tells the Galatians that anyone who accepts circumcision, and the Jewish law has severed himself from Christ. The word used here is καταργέω (katargéō) which literally means to render inactive or useless. The idea is that if they choose the way of the Jewish law to be justified before God, they declare the work of Christ to be in vain.

The English Standard says that all who choose the way of circumcision and the law “sever” themselves from Christ. In other words, they cut themselves off from the work of Christ and attempt to merit their salvation on their own.

The New International Version interprets the word καταργέω (katargéō) with the word “alienate” saying: “*You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ.*” Once again, the sense is that they have pulled themselves away from the work of Jesus on their behalf.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

The King James Version seems to catch the sense of καταργέω (katargéō) a little more when it interprets: “*Christ is become of no effect unto you.*” That is to say, the work of Jesus has had no effect on them because they have turned from Him to the Jewish law.

What Paul is telling the Galatians here is that those who have turned to the Jewish law to obtain a right standing with God have “*fallen from grace.*” They have rejected the offer of salvation through Christ and have chosen a futile and hopeless path that will lead them astray. The apostle Paul could offer no hope to anyone who chose a path other than the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead.

Verse 5

The only hope of a right standing with the Father, according to Paul, was “*through the Spirit by faith.*”

First, our right standing with God is “*through the Spirit.*” The implication is that it is not about anything we do. It is a miraculous work of God’s Spirit on our behalf. He opens our heart. He gives us understanding. He comes to dwell in our lives giving us new life.

Second, our right standing with God is “*by faith.*” Where there is faith, there needs to be an object of that faith. Faith must be in something or someone. That “someone” is the person of the Lord Jesus and His work on the cross. His work is sufficient to pay our penalty and bring us into a right standing with the Father. The Spirit of God convinces us of this reality.

Notice what Paul told the Galatians about the work of the Spirit in their lives by faith. The apostle and those who experienced this gracious work of God’s Spirit by faith, “*eagerly awaited for the hope of righteousness.*”

Notice first that these believers were eagerly awaiting. There is confidence in these words. There is no fear in this eager anticipation. There is only confidence. The work of God’s Spirit by faith was sufficient. They eagerly awaited now to stand before the Father, forgiven and cleansed, to receive their eternal inheritance.

Galatians 5

Notice also the phrase *“hope of righteousness.”* Hope in this sense does not portray any uncertainty. On the contrary, it is a certain expectation. That certainty is not based on their ability to keep the law of God and measure up to God’s standard. Instead, it is a conviction and confidence in the work of Christ and His Spirit who cannot fail. What the law could never give, the Spirit gives with absolute assurance.

Verse 6

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Light To My Path Bible Notes

conviction and confidence in the work of Christ and His Spirit who cannot fail. What the law could never give, the Spirit gives with absolute assurance.

Verse 7

Notice how the apostle tells the Galatians that they had been “*running well*.” The writer to the Hebrews challenges his readers in a similar way when he encourages them to “run with endurance.”

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us – Heb 12:1

The idea here is that the Galatians had been faithful to the Lord and the truth Paul had taught them. This, however, was no longer the case. Paul asks them now: “*Who hindered you from obeying the truth?*”

There is a very important reminder to us here in this verse. Paul addresses those who walked in the truth but wandered from it through false teaching. It is all too easy to be influenced by false teaching in our day. This teaching distracts us from Christ and His purpose. Paul does not accuse those who had fallen into false teaching of not being believers. If anything, he speaks of how they had, at one point, run a good race. Even sincere believers can be distracted in their Christian life.

The second lesson we need to see here is the influence of our teaching. Consider the words of James to teachers:

1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. – Jas 3:1

When Paul asked the question, “*Who has hindered you from obeying the truth?*” he speaks directly to teachers. There is a great responsibility placed on teachers. This is something we dare not take for granted. There was a great judgement coming for these

Galatians 5

false teachers who had hindered the Galatians in their walk with Christ by teaching error.

Verse 8

False teachers had persuaded the Galatians to return to circumcision and the Jewish law. In doing so, they had set them on a path of error and hindered their spiritual walk.

Paul boldly tells the Galatians that this “*persuasion*” was not from “*Him who calls you.*” That is to say, the instruction of these false teachers was not from God. They were being deceived and led down the wrong path.

Verse 9

Leaven was put in dough to make it rise. Just a little bit of leaven was required for this to take place. Because of this quality, it is used in Scripture to illustrate the effects of sin in the church.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul addresses a problem of immorality in the life of an individual in the Corinthians church. Paul rebuked the church for not removing this person from fellowship. Listen to what he wrote to the Corinthians about this matter:

*6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know
that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?
7 Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a
new lump, as you really are unleavened. For
Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.
– 1Co 5:6-7*

Paul reminds the Corinthians that just “*a little leaven will leaven the whole lump.*” In other words, by leaving this individual in the church, he would have a negative impact on the members. This is what the apostle is telling the Galatians here. These false teachers were like an evil leaven that hindered the fellowship and blessing of the entire church.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 10

Paul begins verse 10 with a declaration of confidence in the Lord. This confidence is twofold:

First, *“that you will take no other view.”* Paul had been called to preach the gospel among the Gentiles. He took his role seriously. The fact that he wrote this difficult letter is an indication of just how serious he took this responsibility. It grieved Paul deeply that the Galatians were wandering into error. Despite this, the apostle’s confidence was not in himself, but in the Lord. He understood that the Lord was also concerned for the Galatians. As a tender shepherd, the Lord would work among them and reveal the truth to them. He had to believe that the Lord would not abandon his children into the hands of falsehood and error.

The apostle was also confident in a second great truth. That is that the *“one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.”*

Notice here that Paul did not know who it was who was disrupting the church with falsehood. Paul was sure, however, that God knew this individual and would call him to account for his falsehood. Paul is quite specific in this verse: “the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty.” There are two details to note in this phrase.

First, God will punish those who lead His children astray. It is a serious matter to cause one of God’s children to wander from the path of truth. This places a serious obligation on any teacher of the Word to be diligent and faithful in the proclamation of the truth for we will be held accountable to God.

Second, the fact that God will punish those who lead His children astray, ought to be a blessing and encouragement to us. This demonstrates just how much He cares for us. He will hold anyone who misleads us accountable. He will punish anyone who leads us astray. He values our relationship with Him and will punish anyone who does anything to hinder that relationship.

Galatians 5

Verse 11

Paul reminds the Galatians that the preaching of the cross was offensive to many. He could have avoided much persecution, if he had preached circumcision and the observation of the Jewish law.

There was a cost for Paul to preach the truth of the gospel. This, however, was a cost he was willing to pay. The cross stood in opposition to the law. It demonstrated that human effort was insufficient to give one a right standing with God. It underlined our sinfulness and helplessness before a holy God, and demanded surrender, submission and death to self.

The cross is the central focus of the gospel. Though offensive to this world, its message must never be compromised or watered down. The death of our Lord on this cross is our hope and confidence of forgiveness and eternal life. The apostle Paul willingly suffered and died to share this truth with the world.

Verse 12

Paul felt strongly about the message of the cross. It grieved him deeply that false teachers opposed this message and turned people back to the Jewish laws and traditions. In fact, this grieved him so much that that he said: *“I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!”*

The interpretation of this phrase is varied among Bible commentaries. The word translated “emasculate” is ἀποκόπτω (apokóptō). It is derived from two words. The first is *apó* which means, from or away. The second part of the word is *kóptō*, meaning to cut down, to cut off, or to cut away. It could also be interpreted by the word amputate.

Most commentators agree that Paul is using that illustration of circumcision and the cutting of the foreskin when he speaks here. But not all commentators agree as to what Paul was thinking when he said that he wished these false teachers, who promoted circumcision, would emasculate themselves.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

There are those who interpret this to mean that Paul wished that these men who were so keen on cutting off their foreskins would cut off their entire genitals. This interpretation, however, is quite harsh and apart from finding some sinful satisfaction in the suffering and pain of these false teachers, would accomplish nothing for the sake of the kingdom. This is hardly the godly wish of the apostle here.

A better way to understand what Paul is saying is that his wish was that these false teachers would remove themselves from the people of God. He wanted them to be cut off (circumcised) from the church and their impact on the church. Their presence was only having a negative impact and he wanted to see their influence cut off.

Verse 13

Notice how Paul tells the Galatians that they were called to freedom. That freedom is from sin through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross:

18 and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. – Ro 6:18

It is also a freedom from the law:

2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. – Ro 8:2

This call to freedom came by means of the gospel message and the work of God's Spirit through that message in their hearts. It was the message of salvation by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ and His work alone.

Paul tells the Galatians, however, that being free from the law did not mean that they could do what they wanted. They were not to use this freedom for the flesh and its satisfaction. When the apostle speaks of the flesh here, he refers to our old nature with its lusts and evil desires. Paul teaches that we are to die to these fleshly passions.

Galatians 5

Instead, they were to use their freedom to love and serve one another. In other words, their freedom in Christ was not to become all about them, their passions, desires and ambitions but about others. They were to be willing to sacrifice their personal freedom for others.

This is a very different way to think of freedom. But consider this for a moment. When we were still in sin or focus was on ourselves. We took from others, hurt them with our words, and took advantage of them. We used them to advance our own interests and ignored their needs to satisfy our lusts. This world is filled with sinful pride, selfishness and greed. The freedom the gospel gives us is a freedom from this selfish pride. It frees us to care for each other. It frees us to sacrifice for our brother and sister. It releases us to love and minister just as Christ did for us. This is true freedom.

Verse 14

Paul reminded the Galatians in verse 13 that their freedom from the law was not for the purpose of satisfying the flesh, but rather to minister and love each other. He goes on here to say that *“the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

Jesus was asked one day about what he considered to be the greatest commandment.

Listen to His response:

29 Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” – Mk 12:29-31

This law about loving one's neighbours comes in the context of Paul's statement about being freed from sin and the law. Remember that under sin, we were unable to love one another as

Light To My Path Bible Notes

God intended. The law mandated responsible behaviour, and compassion but was powerless to change human nature. When Jesus died, he opened the door, not only for our pardon, but also for the indwelling of His Spirit in our lives. The very life and power of God is given to all who believe in Jesus Christ. That power not only pardons us but also enables us to live as God intends. The Spirit of God begins to do a work in our hearts, transforming them day by day into the image of Jesus Christ. He does what the law could never do. Freedom from the law implies greater holiness and love for each other. What the law, with all its mandates could not do, the Spirit of God is doing in our hearts. He is enabling us to love God and our neighbours. Despite all our efforts to obey the law in the flesh, we could never do what God's Spirit is doing in us. We are without law, but we are not lawless. The Spirit of God replaces the law in our lives. Living in us, He transforms and shapes us into the image of Christ. He directs us into holiness and love for God and our neighbours.

Verse 15

Paul seems to address a particular issue in the churches of Galatia. They were being divided and arguing with each other. This may, in part, be the result of the false teaching that was circulating in the region. We have clear evidence of the presence of Judaizers in Galatia who wanted to bring believers back to Judaism. This would likely have divided the church.

The apostle speaks directly to this. He reminds them that this infighting among themselves would only destroy them and the work of the church in Galatia.

In essence, he is calling them to a greater submission to the work of God's Spirit. His role was to enable and teach them to love each other. He would point them to Christ and the sufficiency of His work for their salvation. The Galatians were free from the law, but they were called now to submit to the work and conviction of God's Spirit who would direct them in more loving relationships with each other and in the knowledge of the truth.

Galatians 5

Verse 16

While Paul was convinced that the believer was no longer under the law, he also taught that they were now under the Lordship of the Spirit of Christ. He challenges the Galatians, therefore, to “*walk by the Spirit.*”

What does it mean to “*walk by the Spirit.*” Our understanding of this phrase hinges on the little word “*by.*” The word “*by*” implies that we walk under the direction and in the enabling of the Spirit of Christ. In other words, we allow Him to lead and empower us.

Paul tells the Galatians here that if they walked by the Spirit, they would “*not gratify the desires of the flesh.*” In other words, the Spirit of Christ would give them victory over the flesh with its sinful desires and passions.

If we want victory over our sinful passions and desires, we must learn to walk by the Spirit. This is not so much an effort of our flesh as it is a surrender of our spirit to the work and leading of God’s Spirit. To do this, we must accept the reality of His presence in our lives. We must accept His leading, warning and conviction, and commit ourselves to walk in obedience. His heart is to lead us into victory. It is to our great disadvantage that we ignore or deny His presence in our lives.

Verse 17

In verse 16 Paul told the Galatians to walk by the Spirit so they did not gratify the desires and passions of the flesh. He explains why it is important not to gratify these lusts and desires here in verse 17.

First, note that “*the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit.*” What the flesh longs and craves for is not in tune with the purpose of the Spirit of God. It is affected by sin and does not take God into account. Consider what would happen if you did whatever your flesh wanted to do without restraining it. What would happen if you allowed the sexual desires of the flesh to have whatever they wanted? What would be the result if you let the angry outburst of the flesh have free reign? Even the unbeliever knows that the flesh

Light To My Path Bible Notes

and its impulses need to be restrained for the good of society. Our prisons are filled with people who followed the impulses and desires of the flesh without restraint.

Second, Paul tells the Galatians that the *“desires of the Spirit are against the flesh.”* What God wants and what the flesh wants are not the same. As believers we struggle with this. We want to do great things for God. We see the needs around us and determine that we are going to do something about them. We build big ministries and make great plans to serve God. The problem, however, is that all of this is done in the flesh. Even the unbeliever could do the same. The question is: What is the desire of the Spirit? What does God’s Spirit want to do? Have we been in tune with God in this matter or have we pushed forward our own agenda. The words, *“the desires of the spirit are against the flesh,”* ought to speak deeply to our soul. Don’t trust what your flesh leads you to do. Don’t trust what you are able to reason out in your mind. Don’t trust your own ideas and experience. Listen to the words of God through Isaiah:

*8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither
are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. 9
For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so
are my ways higher than your ways and my
thoughts than your thoughts. – Isa 55:8-9*

God’s ways are not our ways. He doesn’t think the way we do. His desires are contrary to our fleshly ways. The older I get, the more I understand just how much I cannot trust my understanding and experience. I must learn to listen to and discern the desire of the Spirit.

Paul tells us that the flesh and the Spirit of God *“are opposed to each other.”* To follow one is to abandon the other. You cannot follow the flesh and God at the same time. We must decide between one or the other. Either we will be guided by the flesh and its wisdom, or we will be guided by the Spirit. We cannot have it both ways.

Galatians 5

The apostle concludes here by telling the Galatians that this battle between the Spirit and the flesh will keep us from doing what we want to do. Let's consider this from the perspective of the believers in Galatia. They were saved by faith in Christ Jesus. They had a desire to follow Him and His ways. What would keep them from pursuing this? The answer is the flesh. By living the Christian life in the flesh, trying to change in their own strength what could only be changed by the Spirit, only led to defeat. Trying to accomplish in human wisdom what could only be achieved by the wisdom and leading of the Spirit only led to disappointment. The desire to honour, know and please God could never become a reality in the flesh. This was the work of God's Spirit.

As believers we need to understand this vital truth Paul teaches here. The flesh cannot please God. The flesh cannot accomplish the purpose of God. This is the work of God's Spirit. Only as we "*walk by the Spirit*" can we live as God's intends. Just as we cannot save ourselves, neither can we live the Christian life apart from the ministry of His Spirit in and through us.

Verse 18

Paul tells the Galatians here that if they were led by the Spirit, they were not under the law. Consider what the apostle is saying here.

What is the role of the Spirit? He comes to point us to Christ. He will teach us the things of God and direct us into the purpose of God for our lives. More than this however, He will remove the obstacles and hindrances in our life that keep us from walking in that purpose. He will cultivate and mature our character so that it reflects the image of Jesus. He is the very presence of God in us, transforming and shaping us into the person God wants us to be. As God, He is fully able to change us. As the source of all truth and righteousness, He will never lead us astray. He will do what the law could never do. His presence in us is greater than that law. In fact, with Him directing, maturing and empowering, there is no more need of the law for He fulfills in us all that the law intended and more.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 19

Paul has told the Galatians that the flesh and the Spirit are opposed to each other. He takes the time here to explain this more fully by examining the fruit of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. He begins with the fruit of the flesh.

The apostle begins by telling the Galatians that the first fruit of the flesh is *sexual immorality*. The word used here is πορνεία (porneía) which is a general term used to speak of any sexual sin forbidden by the Word of God.

It is worth noting that the King James Version of the Bible, following the Textus Receptus

Greek texts, adds the sin of adultery to this list. This word is not included in the Westcott and Hort Greek texts and, therefore, not in translations using these manuscripts of the Bible. While not included in the English Standard Version and others, it is quite clear that adultery is another fruit of the flesh. It is a sexual sin involving at least one individual who is being unfaithful to his or her marriage vows.

The next fruit of the flesh is “*impurity*.” The word ἀκαθαρσία (akatharsía) is a general term that refers to uncleanness in a variety of forms. The word speaks of physical or moral uncleanness, but it can also refer to ungodly characteristics such as demonstrated in the hypocrisy of Pharisees in Matthew 23:27

*27 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees,
hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs,
which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are
full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness.
– Mt 23:27*

In this case, Jesus described the hypocrisy of the Pharisees’ hearts as an uncleanness.

Paul uses this word in Romans 1:24 to refer to individuals who dishonoured their bodies with each other:

Galatians 5

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, – Ro 1:24

The apostle would go on to connect this “*impurity*” to homosexual acts in the verses to follow.

Finally, in this verse, Paul speaks about *sensuality*. The word ἀσέλγεια (asélgeia) refers to an absence of restraint and an excessive desire for pleasure and the satisfaction of the flesh.

Verse 20

Paul continues his list of the fruit of the flesh here from verse 19. The next fruit is *idolatry*. The word εἰδωλολατρεία (eidōlolatρεία) comes from two words. The first is *eídōlon* meaning idol and the second word *latreía* meaning service or worship. Together these words refer to the worship of idols. Of course, idols do not have to be made of wood, stone or metal. They can be anything that we live for or desire more than God.

The next fruit Paul mentions is *sorcery*. The Greek word is φαρμακεία (pharmakeía). The word comes from the Greek word *phármakon* meaning, a drug. The word φαρμακεία (pharmakeía) speaks of occultic activities, use of drugs or a combination of both. There may be a sense here of giving control of our bodies to either evil spirits or drugs.

Enmity is the next fruit on Paul’s list. The word ἐχθρα (échthra) refers to hatred, and hostility. This is demonstrated in relationships between human beings.

Closely related to this is the fruit of *strife* (ἐρίς, éris). The word speaks of contention. The idea here is that this fruit causes discord and division among brothers and sisters.

Jealousy is next on Paul’s list. The word ζηλος (zēlos) comes from zéō meaning to be hot or zealous. This can be a good thing but, in this case, we should see this in a negative sense. The person who experiences this emotion can become angry or hostile. This

Light To My Path Bible Notes

emotion is produced when it sees someone else with something it does not have.

The apostle goes on to describe *fits of anger* next. θυμός (thumós) refers to a violent motion or emotion. It can be used to speak of a strong wind that blows with force. The idea here is that an individual, no longer in control of his emotions, bursts out in a fit of rage either by means of a physical action or angry words.

The next fruit is *rivalries*. The Greek word ἐριθεία (eritheía) literally means, to work for hire. While this can be a good thing, the word is used here in a negative sense. Consider a hired killer for example, hired to take the life of someone else for money. This person cares nothing for the life of the one he targets. His only concern in the money it will bring him. It can also be used to speak of individuals, hired to scheme and deceive in order to make a profit. There is deep insensitivity toward other people here. The individuals involved in rivalries seek to promote their own ideas and interests at any cost.

Paul goes on here to speak about *dissensions*. The word διχοστασία (dichostasía) refers to division. Those in whom this fruit grows, cause division. This may be over some theological, political or cultural issue. These individuals do not seem to be able to let issues go but use them to trouble and divide those with whom they come in contact.

Finally, in this verse Paul lists the fruit of *divisions*. The word αἵρεσις (haíresis) means heresy. The idea here is that of an opinion or belief that is contrary to the norm or standard.

This causes trouble in the body to which this individual belongs.

Verse 21

Paul lists three more fruit of the flesh here. Once again, we have a difference in this verse between the Greek texts. The Westcott and Hort Greek New Testament includes, envy, drunkenness and feasting on the list. The Textus Receptus lists these three fruits but also adds murder. As a result, the King James Version and the New King James Version derived from the Textus Receptus manuscripts

Galatians 5

include murder in the list while other English versions tend to omit it. Of course, it is obvious that murder is a fruit of the flesh.

Paul begins verse 21 with the fruit of *envy*. The Greek word φθόνος (phthónos) refers to a sense of jealousy when we see someone do something better than we can, or experience something that we only wish we could experience. This leads to a negative or critical attitude toward that individual. Envy cannot rejoice in the blessing of another person. Instead, it becomes angry or bitter toward that individual.

The meaning of “*drunkenness*” is obvious. It has to do with being controlled by alcoholic drinks. Paul is not telling the Galatians here that they cannot drink in moderation. He does, however, speak of drunkenness as a fruit of the flesh and a sin to be avoided.

The final item on Paul’s fruit of the flesh is *orgies*. The Greek word κῶμος (kōmos) literally means, “feasting.” While feasting is not wrong, the word came to be associated with wild parties where there was feasting and drinking and immoral activities.

The apostle concludes his list of the fruit of the flesh with the words:

*I warn you, as I warned you before, that those
who do such things will not inherit the kingdom
of God.*

Paul tells the Galatians that those who do these things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Have you ever felt jealousy or envy in your heart? Have you ever caused division? To be honest, even as believers we have experienced the lusts of the flesh. We have had times when that flesh exploded in an angry outburst. We are called daily to die to the fruit of the flesh and to resist its temptations. This is why the words “*those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God,*” are so concerning for us. What does Paul mean when he says that those who practice the fruit of the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

First, to understand what Paul is saying to the Galatians we need to see it in the light of what he wrote to the Corinthians. The apostle told the Corinthians something very similar when he wrote:

9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. – 1Co 6:9-11

The Corinthians lived in the fruit of the flesh prior to coming to know the Lord Jesus. While guilty before God, they experienced His wonderful forgiveness and pardon. There is forgiveness for living in the fruit of the flesh. If you are surrendering to any of the fleshly fruits, you need to confess this to God, make no excuse for your actions, and seek His forgiveness. He is willing to forgive.

Second, consider the words John heard in his vision on the island of Patmos. Speaking about the heavenly city John says:

24 By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, 25 and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. 26 They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. 27 But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. – Rev 21:24-27

John makes it quite clear that nothing unclean, detestable or false will ever enter that heavenly city. It is only those who have been pardoned from their sin who will enter. There will be no more

Galatians 5

struggle with the flesh in the heavenly city for its desires will be destroyed.

You see, the fact of the matter is this. God has something much greater for us. This world with all its lust, anger, jealousy and pride will only drag us down and keep us from the true purpose of God for our lives. Our challenge is to die to the fruit of the flesh and let God produce the fruit of heaven in us.

Verse 22

Paul moves next to the fruit of the Spirit which he contrasts with the fruit of the flesh he has just described.

The first fruit of the Spirit, according to Paul, is *love*. The word ἀγάπη (agápē) is the word used when speaking of God's love toward us. It is a love that loves the unworthy, and sacrifices for those who are its enemies. This is not a love that comes naturally to us but is given as a fruit of the Spirit who lives in us.

The second fruit of the Spirit is *joy*. The Greek word χαρά (chará) refers to gladness and rejoicing of heart. Joy is not a fluffy emotion dependant on our life circumstance, but a character trait being built in us by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This joy is not dependent on circumstances but reveals itself even in the most trying circumstances. It is the heart of God to fill us with joy, rejoicing and gladness.

Peace is the next fruit listed here by the apostle Paul. The word translated *peace* is εἰρήνη (eiréne). This peace is reflected in harmonious relationships or in the assurance of a right relationship with God. Peace is also the result of a confidence in God, His purpose, and His care for us in every circumstance of life.

The word *patience* is translated from the word μακροθυμία (makrothumía). The word speaks of someone who is long-suffering. I like to think of it in the sense of an individual bearing a heavy load from point A to point B. He does so faithfully without giving up, despite the weight he bears.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

The word μακροθυμία (makrothumía) does not relate only to trials and suffering but also to our relationships with brothers and sisters. Patience is the ability to bear with other people, their insults and difficult personalities. The patient person refrains from seeking revenge or exploding in angry outbursts when under pressure or in a difficult relationship. Instead, they endure with grace, trusting God for the strength necessary to continue.

Kindness, the next item on the list is translated from the Greek word χρηστότης (chrēstótēs) meaning useful or profitable. It is also used to express gentleness of character that is not demanding but generous and compassionate.

Goodness (ἀγαθωσύνη, agathōsúnē) refers to the character of an individual who is motivated by what is right and holy. This person strives for holiness not only in his or her person but seeks to influence or challenge others toward this holiness of life and heart.

Finally in this verse Paul adds *faithfulness* to the list of the fruit of the Spirit. The word πίστις (pístis) can literally be translated by the word “faith.” It is a conviction and solid belief in the truth. More than this, however, it is a commitment to that truth no matter the cost.

Verse 23

Paul concludes his list of the fruit of the Spirit here with two last fruits. The first fruit is *gentleness*. The word πραότης (praótēs) speaks of a calmness of soul and the acceptance of the circumstances that God brings into one’s life with grace.

The final fruit of the Spirit is *self-control*. Remember here that this is the fruit that the Spirit of God produces in the life of the believer. It is the God-given ability to hold one’s actions, emotions, attitudes and thoughts in check.

Paul concludes this list of the fruit of the Spirit with the words, “*against such things there is no law.*” What Paul appears to be saying is that when the Spirit of God is in control and produces this fruit in our lives, there is no need of a law to show us what is right. What the Spirit of God produces in us is in line with the purpose of

Galatians 5

the Father for our lives. How much better it is to have the Spirit of God produce His fruit in us that to attempt to follow the law in our human strength.

Verse 24

Paul goes on to tell the Galatians here that *those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

Consider this for a moment. Why did the Lord Jesus die on the cross? He died to set us free from the penalty of sin in our lives. That penalty was death. Jesus died in our place.

That, however, is not all that Jesus accomplished on the cross. He also set us free from the curse of sin. What is the curse of sin? Genesis describes how when Adam and Eve fell into sin they were cursed by death and suffering. Eve would give birth to children in great pain. Adam would work by the sweat of his brow to bring crops from the soil. The death of Jesus Christ sets us free from this in that we are promised victory over death and eternal life. We will dwell eternally with Christ where there will be no more suffering. Even now, the Spirit of God is demonstrating the power of the kingdom of God over sickness and suffering on this earth. Countless men and women around the world have experienced healing of body and soul through the power of prayer on their behalf.

Finally, the death of Christ sets us free from the power of sin over us. With the indwelling of God's Spirit in the believer, there is power now to overcome sin.

Christ died so that the sinful flesh with its passions and desires would no longer have any authority over us. He died so that the power of sin could be broken in us, and we would be set free to walk in a right relationship with the Father.

Those who belong to Christ have been set free from the power and authority of sin with all its passions and desires. I have often compared this to a divorce. When a man divorces his wife and remarries, he has no right to return to his former partner. She may

Light To My Path Bible Notes

live nearby and want to return to him, but he resists every temptation to be faithful now to his new partner.

The illustration may not be the best, but it shows us that when Christ died, he broke the hold and relationship we had with sin, our former partner. When that happened, we entered a covenant relationship with Him as our new partner. Yes, sin and the flesh will tempt us, but we have no longer any right to them. We must consider ourselves dead to them for this is what we are legally and spiritually before Christ.

Verse 25

The apostle encouraged the Galatians to consider the flesh with all its sinful desires and passions crucified to themselves. Instead, they were to *“live by the Spirit.”* They were to live under His authority and direction and in His power. They were to allow Him to transform them in character and action.

Notice also how Paul encourages all who lived by the Spirit to *“keep in step with the Spirit.”* To keep in step with the Spirit is to walk with Him and in His leading. It is to always have an ear open for His direction. It is to have our eyes open to see what He is doing and stand with Him. It is to have our minds in tune with His heart for our lives and our churches. If we are not under the law, we must learn to discern the leading and direction of the Spirit.

Verse 26

Paul concludes the chapter with a challenge to the Galatians about their relationship with each other. He has encouraged them to walk by the Spirit, but he also wants to see them live in harmony with each other.

The testimony of the church and its effectiveness depends on its love for one another. The apostle challenges the believers, therefore, not to let conceit and pride stand between them and a brother or sister. Paul reminds that Galatians of what conceit would do.

Galatians 5

First, conceit would cause them to provoke one another. Pride tends to look down on a brother or sister. It hardens us to their needs. It makes us say and do things that divide the church and cause bad feelings between brothers and sisters.

Second, conceit would cause them to envy one another. They would not be able to accept a brother or sister being able to do something better than or receive more recognition than them. They would resent the fact that a brother or sister had something they didn't. Envy would stir up division and hard feelings among sincere believers.

Instead, they were to be humble, and rejoice with a brother or sister who was blessed by God. They were to be willing to take a back seat and give place to someone else.

Galatians 6

Verse 1

Paul begins this chapter with a word about how to deal with a brother or sister who has fallen into a transgression. It is important to define the word transgression here. The word παράπτωμα (paráptōma) refers to an error, mistake or weakness which makes us guilty before God. It is *not* a wilful sin committed as a deliberate act of rebellion against God, but rather a sin committed by mistake or in weakness. While the sin may not have been deliberate, it nonetheless renders the individual guilty before God, and in need of repentance.

What is important to note here is that even those who attempt to walk by the Spirit fall into error. The flesh is weak. We do not always walk in the leading of the Spirit of God. We continue to fall short of God's standard for our lives even as believers. Nonetheless, we do have forgiveness in Christ and the presence of the Spirit of Christ in us to support and enable us as we rely on Him.

What should be our response when a brother or sister is caught in a transgression? Paul tells the Galatians that those *who are spiritual should restore him*.

There is often the temptation for a local church to cast those who fall into error and transgression out of their fellowship. The idea here is that we want to maintain the purity of the church. We fall into error here because the church is not contained inside four walls. The church is comprised of brothers and sisters who belong to the Lord Jesus. Taking someone off a membership list does not maintain the purity of the church, it simply removes a person from

Light To My Path Bible Notes

our building. Only by correcting and restoring that person to fellowship with Christ can we maintain the purity of the church.

Notice also that it was those who were spiritual who were to restore this person to fellowship. How can we discern a spiritual person? Paul answered this in the last chapter by listing the fruit of the Spirit. A spiritual person is one whose life demonstrates the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Paul places special emphasis here on the fruit of gentleness in this verse. It is these kinds of individuals you want to restore a brother or sister who has fallen into a transgression. When those who do not demonstrate this fruit are given the task of restoring a brother to faith, the result is often catastrophic. Paul hints at this when he says: *“Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”*

In my life I have seen great sin committed by unspiritual leadership against those who trespassed. God sees our pride and anger. He is aware of bitter words and demands. When we treat a brother or sister God loves with contempt, we will have to answer to God for this. This is why Paul demands that only those who are spiritual, demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit, seek to restore a brother. He challenges them also to beware lest they be tempted by the enemy in this process of restoring a brother or sister to faith.

Verse 2

Paul tells the Galatians that they were not to live for themselves alone. Instead, they were to *“bear one another’s burdens.”* How easy it is for us to live with eyes only for our own needs. Paul has just told the Galatians that they were to restore someone who transgressed. In other words, they were to assist them to get back on their feet again and restored to fellowship with Christ. This bearing of burdens is not just related to helping a brother or sister who has fallen, however. Paul’s exhortation to bear each others burdens also requires caring for the emotional and physical needs in the body of Christ. This means a willing sacrifice for one another of time, resources and energy.

Galatians 6

Paul tells the Galatians that by bearing one another's burdens, they were fulfilling the law of Christ. This law is recorded in John's gospel where Jesus said:

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. – Jn 13:34

The command of Jesus was that we love one another just as He loved us. It is the duty and responsibility of every believer to follow this command of Jesus by bearing each other's burden.

Verse 3

Notice that verse 3 begins with the word "*for*." The implication is that the thought relates to what Paul has just said in the previous verses. The apostle has just reminded that Galatians that they were to restore a person who was caught in a transgression with gentleness and bear each others' burdens. All of this takes great humility and sacrifice.

There would be, however, those who felt superior to a brother or sister who had fallen into transgression or found themselves in desperate need. Paul describes these individuals as those who thought they were *something*. That is to say, they believed they were important, spiritual and superior to the brother in need or the brother who had fallen into transgression.

By looking down on their brother in need, however, these individuals proved that they were just as much in transgression as their brother. By refusing to bear their brother's need, they showed themselves to be nothing. They proved their pride, hardness of heart and lack of empathy and compassion for their brother and sister in Christ.

According to Paul, these individuals deceived themselves into thinking they were something when their actions were proof that they were worse than their brothers and sisters.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 4

Paul speaks in this context about a brother who was caught in a transgression or found himself in a need that required the support of the larger body. In verse three, the apostle speaks particularly to those, who, upon comparing themselves to these brothers in need, felt superior.

The apostle warns the Galatians not to judge themselves by comparing themselves to other people. Instead, they were to *test their own work*. We will not have to answer to God based on how we did in comparison to a brother or sister, but rather by how we did with what God has given us personally. Imagine the athlete boasting that he can run faster than the cripple or the scholar that he understands more than the toddler. Paul speaks here about how foolish it is to boast that we are better than our neighbour. God does not expect you to do as well as your neighbour, He expects you to do and be everything He has called you to be. Take pride not in the fact that you did better than your neighbour, but in the fact that you did the best you could before God.

Verse 5

Paul continues his thought from verse four here. In verse four he told the Galatians that they were not to compare themselves with their brother and sister but be everything God had called them to be.

The apostle reminds the Galatians that God has given us each a burden to bear that is unique to us alone. Your burden may be a result of a troubled past or a present infirmity. This is a unique cross you must bear before God. As you bear that burden, you demonstrate the power of Christ in your life. That burden may be in the form of God's gifting or ministry calling in your life. You may be called as an evangelist and bear the burden on your heart for the lostness of humanity. Maybe the weight you carry is a pastoral one with a deep passion for the hurts and needs of God's people. Not everyone will have the same burden to bear, but we must bear the burden of responsibility God has given to us and be faithful in what He has called us to do. Not everyone is gifted and called to the

Galatians 6

same ministry but each one is called to faithful to the ministry and calling God has personally placed on their life.

Verse 6

Paul's ministry of teaching brought him to many places and people. All this cost him a significant amount of money. He supported these missionary journeys with a job making tents on the side. This, however, did not always provide for all his needs. Listen to how he describes these times to the Corinthians:

27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. – 2Co 11:27

For Paul the *“one who is taught the word”* should *“share all good things with the one who teaches.”* The idea here is that teaching the Word of God was a noble profession and one that was worthy of a salary. It would have been easy for the early believers to neglect the financial needs of their teachers. Under the law, there was a requirement of paying a tithe, and bringing sacrifices to the temple. The needs of the priests were provided for by this means. Now that the believers were no longer under the law, those who served the Lord had no guaranteed wage. Paul tells the Galatians that they were to recognize this need and do what they could to minister to their teachers. He says the same thing to the Corinthians when he writes:

11 If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? – 1Co 9:11

What Paul is saying here is that the church was to do all they could to provide for the needs of those who taught the Word of God among them.

Verse 7

Verse 7 begins a section about sowing and reaping. It is written in the context of restoring a brother who has fallen, bearing one

Light To My Path Bible Notes

another's burdens, providing for the needs of teachers among them, and doing good.

Paul begins the verse with a warning — “*Do not be deceived: God is not mocked.*” We should understand this in the context of generosity, and compassion which surrounds the verse on both sides.

God knows our heart. He knows what motivates us and what it truly important to us. He will not be deceived by external shows of generosity when He sees us give grudgingly. He will not be mocked by hypocritical demonstrations of compassion when He sees anger and hatred in our heart. Paul tells us that what we sow will come back to us. People around us may see our “generous gifts” but God sees our heart and the attitude with which those gifts have been given.

Verse 8

Continuing from verse 7, Paul goes on to say that “*the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption.*” When our desire is to invest in this world, its pleasures, and delights, we will, according to Paul, “*reap corruption.*” The word corruption is translated from the Greek word φθορά (phthorá) which refers to things that spoil or decay and eventually come to nothing. When we invest in the flesh, we must realize that we invest in something that is temporary and will eventually waste away.

On the other hand, Paul tells the Galatians that when they sow “*to the Spirit*” they “*will from the Spirit reap eternal life.*” In other words, what is invested in the work of the Spirit will produce eternal fruit and eternal blessing. This was true for example when the Galatians provided for the needs of the teachers of the gospel. By supporting them to share the good news, they were investing in what would endure throughout all eternity. Paul encourages the Galatians here to examine their priorities.

Galatians 6

Verse 9

One of the things about sowing *“in the Spirit,”* is that we will not always see the fruit for our labours. For example, I write this commentary for the purpose of investing in the spiritual lives of those who read it. I may never know if anyone has been touched by this effort and must content myself with sowing this seed by faith that God will use it whether I see any fruit or not.

At other times, we may be mocked for our passion to sow spiritual fruit rather than invest it into our own lives. Missionaries leaving the prosperity of their homeland to serve in impoverished countries may not be understood. They may even serve for years without seeing fruit for their labours. We may be unappreciated for our efforts. Jesus was mocked and crucified for His spiritual efforts. The apostle Paul, who writes this letter, understood how easy it is to be discouraged when being stoned, mocked, cast out of cities imprisoned for the faith he preached.

It is for this reason that the apostle tells the Galatians not to grow weary of doing good. He challenged them instead to continue sowing good seed and assures them that by doing good and walking faithfully in the call of God on their lives, they would reap the harvest God intended for their lives. That harvest may not look like we anticipated, but their sincere efforts for the kingdom would not be unrewarded.

Verse 10

Knowing that their efforts would not be unrewarded, Paul encouraged the Galatians to use every opportunity available to them to do good to everyone.

By using the word *“everyone”* Paul is telling the Galatians that they were not to limit their acts of compassion, mercy and generosity to any special group but to be willing to minister to everyone who had need whether they be believer or unbeliever, sinner or saint.

Notice, however, that while they were to do good to everyone, there was a special obligation to care for one another in the family of God.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

As brothers and sisters, they were to see it as their special obligation to care for each other.

Verse 11

As the apostle concludes his letter, he draws attention to the large letters he had written with his own hand. This comment has perplexed commentators and there are a variety of opinions on how to interpret what the apostle is saying here.

Notice first the word “large.” The word here is *πηλίκος* (*pēlíkos*). It can refer to something that is either large in size or length.

Second, the word “letters” is translated from the Greek word *γράμμα* (*grámma*) which refers to something that is written such as a letter of the alphabet, a book or a letter.

The question we are left to answer is whether Paul’s use of the word letters (or “a letter” in the KJV), refers to letters of the alphabet or his epistle.

Those who see Paul referring to large letters of the alphabet refer to the practice of Paul in dictating his letters and signing them with his own handwriting. Here in this case, however, he wrote a section of the epistle in large characters.

It is obvious that writing large letters was not common as paper was not as readily available as it is today. There was obviously a reason for Paul to write in large characters. Some believe that it was because he had poor eyesight. Others believe that his hands were crippled in some way, and he did not have the dexterity to write small letters as was customary.

Other commentators believe that the word letters refers to Paul’s epistle. This seems to be the understanding of the translators of the KJV when they translated:

*11 Ye see how large a letter I have written unto
you with mine own hand. – Ga 6:11*

Galatians 6

The insinuation in the KJV is that Paul is referring to His epistle and that it was a long epistle. Those who interpret the word “letter” to refer to Paul’s epistle, emphasize the fact that he must have written the whole epistle with his own hand. The implication here is that it was genuine.

Verse 12

Paul speaks here about the motivation of the false teachers in their midst.

First, they “*want to make a good showing in the flesh.*” To make a good showing is to look good before others. In other words, they wanted to be able to report how many converts they had to their teaching. They wanted a large following and for people to think highly of them.

Notice also that Paul tells the Galatians that they “*force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.*” Who was persecuting for the preaching of the cross. It was often the Jewish religious authorities who objected the most strongly. Paul, himself, at one time, was one of these religious leaders who persecuted followers of Jesus.

Many of these Judaizers heard the message of the gospel and were impacted by it but were afraid of the Jews. We read about these people in the Gospel of John:

42 Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. – Jn 12:42-43

The individuals Paul speaks about here were unwilling to suffer for Christ. They would not commit themselves wholly to the message of the gospel but compromised for their own comfort.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 13

Continuing his thought from verse twelve, the apostle reminds the Galatians that those who taught that circumcision was a requirement still disobeyed the law – *“for not even those who are circumcised keep the law.”* The implication is that these individuals, turned their back on the cross of Christ, as the means of pardon, and chose the law of Moses instead. The problem, however, was that they could not keep that law perfectly and were still guilty before God as lawbreakers. Circumcision did not remove their guilt. Only the cross of Jesus could bring this pardon.

If circumcision did not remove guilt or give a right standing before God, why then did these false teachers require their followers to practice this Jewish tradition? Paul tells the Galatians that it was to boast in their flesh. That is to say, to boast in their following.

I have seen pastors and churches where it is more important for them to have a following than it is to be true to the Word of God. These churches are willing to compromise the truth for a following. They have been so caught up in seeking glory for themselves that they no longer honour God or His Word but mislead His people into error. This is a grave sin for which they will one day be accountable to God.

Verse 14

Contrary to the false teachers who boasted in their following, the apostle Paul made it his goal and commitment to boast in nothing but the cross of Jesus Christ.

This cross was a symbol of Paul's inability to save himself. It revealed to the world that he was a sinner in need of a Saviour. Paul's boasting was not in his sinfulness, however, but in the cross of Jesus that removed his guilt. He made it his ambition to lift up this cross as the solution to the problem of sin and a right standing with God. He chose to preach Christ crucified and risen from the dead as the hope of humanity. His boasting would not be in himself but in the work of Jesus Christ. He sought no glory for himself but desired that all praise and recognition go to the Lord Jesus alone

Galatians 6

as Saviour and Lord. This is in direct contrast to the false teachers in Galatia who gloried in their following.

Notice also the impact of the cross of Jesus in Paul's life – *“by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”* When the Lord Jesus died on the cross, Paul understood that it was for him. Jesus died because Paul was caught up in this world's system with its desires and sins. Jesus died to set him free from the curse of sin on his life. He had been married to this world and under obligation to it, but the Lord Jesus set him free from that obligation. He divorced this world and entered a new relationship with Jesus Christ at the cross. Now that he was in Christ, he had no more right to the world. His allegiance was now to Christ. For Paul, the cross changed everything. His sin and obligations to the flesh were crucified with Christ on that cross. He lived now for Christ and His glory.

Verse 15

For Paul, being *“in Christ Jesus”* was all that mattered. To be in Christ, in this context, is to be under His pardon and forgiveness. It is to be indwelt and enlivened by His Spirit. This is all that mattered to Paul. It did not matter if a person was circumcised or uncircumcised, if they had Jesus Christ, they were new creatures. It was the presence of Christ that made all the difference. To have Christ is to be forgiven of sin. To have Christ is to become a new creation, a child of God and inheritor of eternal life.

Verse 16

The apostle Paul offers a blessing to all who will walk *“according to this rule.”* The rule Paul refers to here relates to what he has spoken about in verses 14-15. In these verses Paul tells the Galatians three things.

First, that his boast was in the cross of Jesus alone. That the cross of Jesus Christ is the only hope of pardon and right standing with God.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ – Ga 6:14a

Second, because of the cross, Paul chose to consider himself dead to the world and no longer under any obligation to it. Instead, his complete allegiance was now to Christ and His purpose.

by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. – Ga 6:14b

Finally, Paul experienced a new birth in Christ Jesus. This new relationship with Christ through the cross, removed all obligation to do anything else to assure His salvation.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. – Ga 6:15

The cross of Jesus Christ, death to the world and becoming a new creation is the rule Paul refers to here.

Paul told the Galatians that those who walked according to this rule would know the peace and mercy of God. That peace come through the total forgiveness and pardon offered by the cross. They would also experience God's wonderful mercy through His inner work in their lives, making them new creatures and inheritors of eternal life and fellowship with God.

Notice how Paul calls all who have this hope, "*the Israel of God.*" They are the true people of God, a new Israel.

Verse 17

It was the desire of Paul that his letter would resolve this matter of false teaching in Galatia. He expresses this in the words: "*from now on let no one trouble me.*" The idea seems to be that the influence of these false teachers impacting the church was troubling to Paul. His heart was that the Galatians walk in the truth. It was his hope that this letter would enlighten their eyes so that they would resist the error in their midst and return to Christ.

Galatians 6

Paul concludes the verse with the words: *“for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.”* Some commentators see here a reference to what would happen to slaves in the day. They would be branded with a mark, indicating to whom they belonged. Paul may have been telling the Galatians that he bore the mark of his calling for Jesus Christ and was His true servant. He appeals to them as one who had been called as an apostle to listen to what he wrote.

Beyond this, however, was the reality that the marks on Paul’s body were the result of persecution and rejection for preaching the truth. He was willing to suffer physical and even die for the truth he preached. Unlike the false teachers in Galatia who were only looking for a following, Paul risked his life for the sake of the truth. He challenges the Galatians not to be afraid to suffer for the truth.

Verse 18

The apostle ends with his blessing. He prays here for the grace of Jesus Christ to be with their spirit. Throughout the entire epistle, the apostle has been communicating that salvation was by grace. His prayer now is that the truth he had been communicating would now be the experience of the Galatian church. He commits this matter to God now to make what he has taught real in their lives

Introduction to Ephesians

The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians was written while Paul was in prison. He writes about the great salvation, planned from eternity past, accomplished in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and applied through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. His heart is to share the richness of this salvation and the implication of what the Spirit of Christ was doing in their lives.

Paul teaches the importance of the unity of the body in the bond of love and shows how that body works together for the expansion of the kingdom of God. He teaches the Ephesians how their relationship with Christ impacted how they lived in society, how they treated their slaves or lived together as husband and wife.

Of particular significance in the book is Paul's emphasis on the spiritual battle that raged around them. In a world filled with spiritual forces in dark places, Paul teaches the Ephesians the importance of putting on the armour of God if they were to overcome and live the victorious Christian life.

Ephesians 1

Verse 1

Paul introduces himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. The word Apostle is ἀπόστολος (apóstolos) which literally means, one sent. An apostle is one who is sent by Jesus Christ as an ambassador or representative.

Paul did not take this privilege on himself. He was an apostle “*by the will of God.*” Paul had this special calling and gifting from God to represent His Son Jesus Christ. We do not take on these roles of our own accord. God chooses whom He will have to represent Him.

The letter is written to the saints in Ephesus. Paul describes them as “*faithful in Jesus.*” That is to say they walked in obedience and love for the Lord Jesus.

The city of Ephesus was a significant centre at this time. It was the centre for the worship of the goddess Diana. A great theatre, said to hold up to 50,000 people, was in the city as well as a great stadium where competitions were held, and criminals were torn apart by wild beasts to the entertainment of spectators.

It was in this worldly city that God was doing a work and raising up a people who belonged to Him.

Verse 2

Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians was for grace and peace. This seems to be a customary greeting and blessing.

Grace is the unmerited favour of God. Peace relates to our relationship with God and is a result of the work of His Son Jesus

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Christ in our lives. The need for God's grace and peace is ongoing in the life of the believer. There are many things that can strip away our peace in this life. Paul's prayer is that the Ephesians would walk always in the peace of God and experience afresh his grace each day.

Verse 3

Paul begins his letter with a word of praise to the Father – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The word “*blessed*” refers to something that is well spoken of and worthy of praise. It is Paul's desire that the Father be worshipped and adored by all.

Notice that Paul speaks here of the “*God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Of course, as God, the Lord Jesus always existed with the Father. Realize, however, that He came to this earth and took on the form of man. He had no earthly father. Mary's conception was not of natural means but a miracle of God who placed His Jesus in her womb as a seed. He matured in her womb and was born as a human child to her. While Jesus had an earthly mother, His father was God, Himself. By calling God the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul is recognizing both his human and divine nature.

Paul reminds the Ephesians that this God and Father of Jesus Christ has blessed us in His Son with every spiritual blessing. Notice four things about these blessings.

First, they are “*in Christ.*” The blessings the apostle speaks of here are through the work of the Lord Jesus.

Second, the blessings we receive in Christ are “*spiritual blessings.*” It is true that we receive also many material blessing, but the focus of Paul's prayer here is the spiritual blessings we receive through the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross.

Third, note the words “*every spiritual blessing.*” The word “every” indicates that all true spiritual blessings are the result of the work of

Ephesians 1

Jesus Christ the Son of God. There is no spiritual blessing apart from Him and His work. If you want to know this blessing, you must go to Him.

Finally, the blessings that come from Jesus are “*in heavenly places*.” While there are many earthly blessings from God in this life, the great hope of the believer is not here, but in heaven where they will be forever with the Lord, free from sin, enemies to the Gospel, and in perfect fellowship with their Creator.

Verse 4

The apostle tells the Ephesians that God the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ “*chose us in him before the foundation of the world*.” Notice two details in this phrase.

First, God chose us “*in Him*.” The word “*him*,” clearly refers to the Lord Jesus. Every one of us was a sinner by birth. This matter of sin needed to be addressed if we were to have any kind of relationship with God. The solution was in the person of Jesus Christ who would come to this earth and take our penalty upon Himself. God took the initiative to restore us to Himself through the work of His Son Jesus Christ. Salvation begins with the choice of God.

Second, that choice of God took place “*before the foundation of the world*.” Sin did not take God by surprise. Even before there was a need for salvation, God had it already planned out. Before He created the world as we know it, God determined to set apart a people for Himself through the work of His Son Jesus.

The people that God would call to Himself would be “*holy and blameless before him*.” That is to say, they would be forgiven, and every sin paid for by the work of Jesus Christ. This is not to say that they were perfect in and of themselves, but rather that they would be pardoned by His Son’s work on the cross.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 5

Verse four ends with the words “*in love.*” Many commentators believe that these words belong to verse 5 so that they read, “*in love he predestined us for adoption to himself.*”

Let's break this phrase down. God's love for His human creation was such that it moved Him to respond to their need. Paul tells us that His response was to predestine us for adoption to Himself. The word translated, predestined here is προορίζω (proorizō). It comes from two root words, *pró* meaning, before, and *horizō* meaning to determine. In other words, the apostle is telling us that God determined beforehand to adopt us as His children. This determination of God to adopt a people to Himself took place, according to verse 4, before the foundation of the world. It was His loving response to the problem of sin that would result from the fall of Adam and Eve. Paul tells us three things in this verse about this adoption.

First, God would adopt us “*as sons.*” He would make us His children with all the privileges and blessings that being a child of God involved.

Second, this adoption would come at a cost. The cost to adopt us would be the death of Jesus Christ. This adoption is only possible through the work of Jesus, God's Son.

Finally, our adoption would be “*according to the purpose of his will.*” It would all be on His terms and for His purpose.

Verse 6

In verse 5, Paul told the Ephesians that God chose to adopt a people to himself according to the purpose of his own will.

Notice here in verse 6 that this purpose was to “*the praise of his glorious grace.*” The adoption of sons and daughters was an act of “*glorious grace,*” according to Paul. It was an undeserved and unmerited favour towards those who were adopted. These individuals were sinners by birth and alienated from God. This was

Ephesians 1

the result of the sin of Adam and Eve that was passed on to their children. While God could not accept them with their sin, He chose to send His Son to die for their pardon. God was not required to do this, but He did so “in love” (Ephesians 1:4) as a gracious act of compassion and mercy.

This gracious act was to His *praise*. In other words, He deserves to be praised and worshipped because of this act. Those who have benefitted from this marvellous pardon must give Him praise. In fact, it is the will and purpose of God that He be praised and honoured as a result of this grace.

Paul concludes the verse with a reminder that this “*glorious grace*” is a blessing that comes to us in the “*Beloved*.” In other words, the Lord Jesus Christ is that one who made this wonderful grace of salvation and adoption possible. It is His work alone that restores us to a relationship with the Father.

Verse 7

It is in and through the work of the Beloved Jesus Christ, that we have redemption and forgiveness of sin.

The word for redemption here is ἀπολύτρωσις (*apolútrōsis*). It has the sense of letting something go for a price. It is different from purchasing in that an object that is redeemed is usually restored to its rightful place by means of a payment. In our case sin had separated us from our Creator and only the payment of the penalty could restore us. This was the work of Christ Jesus who by His death, paid the penalty so that we could be released back to the Father. Our redemption was through the blood of Jesus Christ shed at the cross for us.

This death of Jesus Christ brought us forgiveness of sin. Forgiveness was not just a quick word, hastily offered but required the payment of a great debt and cost the life of Jesus Christ. The payment of this price secured our forgiveness.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

According to Paul this gift of redemption and forgiveness came from the rich storehouse of God's grace. It was undeserved but given graciously by God as a gift.

Verse 8

Paul tells us that the grace of God was lavished upon us. The word lavished (περισεύω, perisseúō) refers to something that is given in excess, or more than is required. I often think about this world in which we live. God could have created a single planet but chose to give us more than we could possibly see with our most powerful telescopes. He could have created a world in black and white but chose to create it in multiple shades of colours that we cannot even distinguish with our human eyes. The beauty that surrounds us with all its complexity, reveals the lavish nature of His grace in this physical earth. How much more is He willing to shower upon those who belong to Him?

Paul goes on to tell us that this grace is lavished on us "*in all wisdom and insight.*" Consider the wisdom that created a universe that is too big for us to see or understand. Think about the mystery of life and how we walk, talk, think and relate to those around us. How does all of this happen? It is the result of the incredible wisdom and insight of God. What is true in this physical world is also the case in the spiritual realm. Can you explain the mystery of salvation? How do you understand how a man like Paul was on the road to Damascus to persecute Christians and was radically changed by an encounter with the Lord Jesus who had died on the cross years earlier? There is a mystery and wisdom that is far deeper than we can understand. We are beneficiaries of a grace and salvation that we can never hope to understand.

Verse 9

Paul has been speaking about the redemption and forgiveness offered through Jesus Christ. He calls this "*the mystery of his will.*" For years this will, and purpose of God had been hidden from His people. They had heard of the Messiah and looked forward to His coming, but they did not understand the purpose of God in the Messiah. Many thought He would be a political king, but few

Ephesians 1

understood that it was His death that would bring us the victory. The Messiah and God's plan through Him, was a mystery to God's people.

When the Lord Jesus came to this earth, He unveiled that mystery by "*making it known to us.*" He revealed the purpose of the Father which He had for Him as the sacrificial lamb who would die to pay for our sin.

Verse 10

This plan of the Father through Jesus Christ came "*in the fullness of time.*" In other words, the Lord Jesus came when the Father intended Him to come.

Notice the purpose of God in the death of His Son: "*to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*"

This immediately causes a problem for us. How does the Father unite all things in Christ. Listen to the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:34-36:

34 "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. 36 And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. – Mt 10:34-36

Believers will not always be accepted. Jesus declares that we will be hated by all nations because of Him (Matthew 24:9). How can it be said then that the work of Jesus unites all things in heaven and on earth?

To answer this, we need to understand that while, at present, this world is filled with sin and rebellion against the Lord God, it will not always be this way. Consider the words of Paul to the Philippians about Jesus:

Light To My Path Bible Notes

9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. – Phl 2:9-11

There is a day coming when every knee will bow to Jesus Christ and recognize Him as Lord. There is a day coming when Satan, his angels, and sin itself will be cast into the bottomless pit. On that day, heaven and earth will be united under Christ to the praise of His name. It is the work of the Lord Jesus that will bring this unity of heaven and earth under God in the fullness of time.

Verse 11

Paul tells the Ephesian believers that “*in him*,” that is, in Jesus Christ, they had obtained an inheritance. This shows us something important. The work of Jesus Christ did not just forgive the sins of the believer but also made him or her a child of God with an eternal inheritance. God’s goal in sending His Son Jesus, was not just to free us from the penalty of our sin, but also to enter an eternal relationship with us. Paul does not go into detail about this inheritance in the verse but recognize that if you are a believer today you have a rich eternal inheritance from your heavenly Father. That inheritance is a result of the work of the Lord Jesus on your behalf.

Paul tells the Ephesian believers that they had been predestined to receive this inheritance. The word “predestined,” (προορίζω, *proorízō*) means to decree or determine beforehand. He expressed this same thought in Ephesians 1:5 when he said:

5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, – Ep 1:5

What Paul appears to be saying, in verse 5, is that God determined beforehand to adopt the Ephesian believers through the work of His Son Jesus Christ. He repeats this again here in verse 11, except

Ephesians 1

he tells them that they had been chosen beforehand to receive an inheritance through the work of Jesus. In other words, the adoption and the inheritance were God's choice. My salvation is due entirely to the fact that God chose to adopt me and give me an inheritance before I even knew Him.

Paul goes on to tell the Ephesians that this decision was made *"according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will."* Notice two details here.

First, this decision was made according to the purpose of God. It was God's plan to have a people who would inherit His eternal blessings and live obediently in His presence forever. Paul told the Ephesians when that plan was formulated in the mind of God when he wrote in Ephesians 1:4:

*4 even as he chose us in him before the
foundation of the world, that we should be holy
and blameless before him. In love – Ep 1:4*

The Ephesian believers were chosen by God to be holy and blameless as His adopted children before the world was created. Even before these believers in Ephesus were born, God had chosen them to be His children.

Second, God could make this happen because He "works all things according to the counsel of his will." As human beings we have plans but find that those plans often change. This is not the case for God. He works out everything according to His plan. Nothing can stand in his way. Nothing can change His purpose. He accomplishes all He sets out to do. Paul reminded the Ephesians here that they were children of God because God determined before the world was created that they would be adopted and receive an eternal inheritance.

He then worked out the details in their lives to make that happen.

Verse 12

Notice the reason God adopted and provided an inheritance for His people – *“so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.”*

Consider first the phrase *“we who were the first to hope in Christ.”* There is some debate over the “we” Paul is referring to in this verse. Many commentators believe that “we” refers to the Jews who converted to Christianity. Jesus came as a Jewish man and preached to the Jewish nation. The apostles who accepted the Lord Jesus were Jews as well. The early church shared the Gospel with their Jewish neighbours. When persecution broke out against them, and believers were scattered, Acts 11:19 tells us that they spoke the word only to Jews:

19 Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. – Ac 11:19

It is quite possible that when Paul speaks of *“we who were the first to hope in Christ,”* he is speaking of the Jews who were the first to hear and come to Christ. Members of the Jewish nation were the first to be adopted and receive their eternal inheritance.

The reason God opened their eyes and heart to His Son was so that they could be to the *“praise of his glory.”* Let me say two things here.

First, the Lord revealed His glory to us through His Son Jesus Christ. Christ reflected the holiness, compassion, love, justice, mercy, and power of the Father. Those who came to Christ saw the Father in Him. As a result, they were moved to praise and honour the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Their hearts were drawn to Him in worship and praise for what He had done and what He revealed of Himself to them. It was the will of God in adopting a people, that they would honour and worship Him.

Ephesians 1

Second, we are to the praise of God's glory when we demonstrate through our lives the character and person of God. Our lives reflect his glory as He changes us. Like Jesus, we begin to reflect His character in this world. We are called to be lights in this dark world, revealing the person of Christ in our actions and attitudes. Our lives demonstrate the purpose and character of God in a sinful world. It is the heart of God in adopting a people for himself that they would reflect His character and glory.

Verse 13

Paul told the Ephesians that they were among the first to hope in Christ. Notice how it these Ephesians came to hope in the Lord Jesus Christ – *“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth...”* The Ephesians heard the word of truth. It was the word of truth that brought a change in their lives. We must never underestimate the power of the truth of God's word. In our day we have often depreciated the power of that word alone to transform a life. Paul tells us that this word of truth brought hope to the Ephesians.

The word of truth, according to Paul is the *“the gospel of your salvation.”* It is that good news that Jesus, fully God, came to this earth and became a man. He lived a sinless life but took our penalty and died in our place so that we could be forgiven. He proved the effectiveness of his work on the cross by overcoming death and ascending to sit at the right hand of the Father. Through Him, there is forgiveness of sin for all nations. It was this gospel that transformed the lives of the Ephesians and gave them hope of victory over sin, adoption through Jesus Christ, and an eternal inheritance.

Paul tells us here that when the Ephesians heard that truth of the gospel and believed. It is not enough just to hear the Gospel; we must also believe it. The word Paul uses for believe is πιστεύω (pisteuō) which can mean to believe, to have faith or to trust. To believe in this way means that I will not trust in anyone else or any other means of salvation. He alone will be my confidence. In fact, I will renounce any other way and place my full and entire trust in Him.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Not only did the Ephesians believe the word of truth but at that time they were “*sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.*”

A seal was applied to a document to secure it. For example, if a document was private or secret, it would be sealed to keep it from being opened and read by anyone other than the intended person. The seal was also a mark of authenticity. For example, a king would seal a document or letter with his personal identification to identify it as his. Paul is telling us that when God wants to protect and identify a people as His, He seals them with his Holy Spirit. That is to say, He places His Holy Spirit in them to protect them. The Holy Spirit convicts the believer of sin and instructs him or her in the purpose of the Father. His presence in the believer proves that they belong to Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is God’s seal of authenticity in our lives.

Verse 14

It is the Holy Spirit in us who is the guarantee of our inheritance in Christ. We know that we belong to Jesus Christ because of the presence of His Holy Spirit in our lives. The Holy Spirit opens our eyes to the things of God. More than that, however, He is the very life of God in us. The presence of God in the person of the Holy Spirit dwells in the believer. We know we belong to Christ because we have His life in us. That life is transforming us and shaping us into the image of Christ. This life is the Holy Spirit – the guarantee of our eternal inheritance.

Notice how Paul tells the Ephesians that they had not yet acquired possession of their full inheritance. It is true that we have the presence of God in us, but there is much more that God has in store for all who believe in Him. Heaven and eternal life are yet to come for all who have the seal of their salvation in them.

Paul reminds us that the sealing of the Holy Spirit, and the promised eternal inheritance will all be “*to the praise of his glory.*” All this work of God in us will bring Him great praise. We will rejoice in Him and His purpose. We will delight in Him and His person.

Ephesians 1

Verse 15

As Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians, he was a prisoner (see Ephesians 3:1; 4:1). He had heard a report, however, about the church in Ephesus. Notice two things Paul heard about the church.

First, Paul learned of their faith in the Lord Jesus. This church believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and trusted Him and His work.

Second, the apostle also heard of their love toward all the saints. These two qualities needed to work together for the church to function as it should. In fact, you cannot truly love the Lord Jesus if you do not love those who belong to Him.

A healthy church must focus and maintain both their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for the saints. To fail in either one of these areas is to fall short of God's standard for the church.

Verse 16

Hearing of the faith of the Ephesian church and their love for the saints stirred Paul's heart to give thanks to the Lord God for them in his prayers.

Often our prayers are petitions and pleas to God for blessing. Paul, however, found his heart overflowing in thanksgiving and praise to God for His many blessings. Seeing believers walk in faith and love for one another was one of those things that rejoiced the heart of the apostle and exploded in praise and thanksgiving to God.

Verse 17

While Paul thanked God for the faith and love of the Ephesian church for the saints, he also prays that God would them *"the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him."*

Notice first what Paul says about God here. He is the *"God of our Lord Jesus Christ."* We know that the Lord Jesus was God. He was equal to God in all things but notice here that Paul tells us that God the Father was also the God of our Lord Jesus. Jesus, Himself tells us this when he said to Mary:

Light To My Path Bible Notes

17 Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” – Jn 20:17

Throughout His earthly life, the Lord Jesus worshipped and obeyed the Father. He bowed in reverence to Him and willingly laid down His life for Him. He prayed to the Father, lifted up His name and submitted to His will. As man He saw the Father as His God.

Second, Paul tells us that God was the “*Father of glory*.” The word for glory here is δόξα (dóxa) which comes from the root *dokéō*, meaning to think. The idea is to think favourably about or to praise. The Father is one worthy of praise and recognition.

Paul’s prayer to God was that He would give the Ephesians “*the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him*.”

The Spirit referred to here is the Holy Spirit. Paul has already told the Ephesians that the Lord had sealed them with His Holy Spirit when they believed (see Ephesians 1:13). The understanding here is that these believers already had the Spirit of God in them as a guarantee of their salvation. When Paul speaks about God giving them “*the Spirit of wisdom and revelation*” here, the idea is that His Spirit would fill them with wisdom in living the Christian life and deeper revelation of God and His purpose.

Verse 18

Paul continues to reveal his heart for the Ephesian church. His desire is that their eyes and hearts would be “*enlightened*.” Paul speaks here to believers. While they had come to the Lord Jesus, their understanding of Him and His purpose is not complete. They need the Spirit of God to shine light on those truths that had not yet been revealed to them. I have met believers who have told me that they know all there is about Christ and the Christian life. It may be that they have a general sense of who Jesus is and what He expects, but I suspect that the Spirit of God wants to reveal the truth in a deeper way to them. I suspect that we all have much maturing

Ephesians 1

to do. Paul did not want the Ephesians to become lazy and complacent in their spiritual lives. His prayer was that the Spirit of God continue to reveal Christ to them, mature them, and open their eyes in a greater way to the truth of God. Notice particularly what Paul wants to see the Spirit of God illumine in the lives of the Ephesians.

First, that they “*would know what is the hope to which he has called you.*” What is our hope as believers? It is that our sins have been forgiven through the work of Jesus Christ. That we have been adopted as children of God and given an eternal inheritance. That God has filled us with His Holy Spirit to give us life in Him. That no matter what happens to us in this life, we have a Saviour who watches over us. That in the Lord Jesus we are more than overcomers. That we will be forever with Him, free from sin, sickness and death. There are so many aspects to the hope of the believer. It is one thing to know this hope in theory, but quite another to experience it amid struggle and pain. Paul’s prayer is that the Ephesians would experience and understand more and more the reality of this hope that had been given them through the work of the Lord Jesus.

Second, Paul prays that the Ephesians would understand and appreciate more and more “*the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.*” One of the great tragedies in the Christian life is that all too many believers have never come to understand the riches that have been given to them in Christ. Certainly, some of these riches are stored up for us in heaven but notice the phrase “*his glorious inheritance in the saints.*” This inheritance is not just in heaven but “*in the saints*” right now. The very life of God is in us in the person of the Holy Spirit. Have we grasped the power that God has placed in us to overcome this world and walk in His purpose? The resources of heaven are placed at our disposal right now. What a shame it is that so many believers live in defeat and sin, when the power to overcome is their inheritance in Christ. Paul’s prayer is that the Ephesian church would come to a greater awareness of and tap into the inheritance that was given them through the work of Jesus on the cross and the indwelling of the Spirit in their lives.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 19

In verse 18 Paul prayed that the eyes and hearts of the Ephesians be enlightened to the hope they had in Christ and the richness of their inheritance. He continues with this prayer here in verse 19 by adding another request to the Father on their behalf – that they would know “*the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.*”

Paul speaks here about the power of God that is “*toward us.*” That is to say it is directed to us and focused on us or works on our behalf. He describes this work as immeasurably great. It cannot be measured.

What is this power to which Paul refers? It is the power that overcame sin and death. It is the power that sets us free from condemnation. It is the power that transforms the hardened sinner into a child of God. It is the power that overcomes the forces of hell and works all things for good for those who love Him. It is the power that directs each step of our lives and orchestrates every circumstance to accomplish the purpose of God for us. It is the power that works in us to overcome sin and temptation. It is the power that enables us to live the life God requires. It is the power to accomplish the calling of God on our lives and to do what we could never do in the flesh. In fact, it is the power of God’s “*great might*” that works on our behalf.

All too many believers live in the flesh. They only do what they can do in the flesh. They live the Christian life as if everything depended on them and their effort. These individuals are not aware of the powerful inner work of God’s Spirit to transform, renew and empower. Paul’s prayer for us is that our eyes would be enlightened to see the great might that is available to all who belong to Christ.

Verse 20

A clear demonstration of the power to which the apostle refers in verse 19 is seen in the life of Jesus Christ. Paul reminded the Ephesians of how the Lord God had raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at His right hand in heavenly places.

Ephesians 1

The power that God demonstrated toward Christ His Son is the same power that acts on our behalf. Just as Jesus rose from the dead so will those belong to Him. Just as the Father seated Christ at His right hand so will be bring us to be with Christ in heavenly places.

The power Paul refers to here is a power over sin and death. It is the power that transforms the sinner into the image of Jesus Christ.

Notice how God not only raised Christ from the dead but seated him *“at his right hand in the heavenly places.”* To seat someone at your right hand was to honour them. The Father honoured the son because of His willingness to die for us. This act of honouring Christ is also a reflection on how God sees us as His children. He honoured the Lord Jesus and gave Him a position at his right hand because of what He did for you and me. God valued us so much that He bestowed the highest honour on the One who set us free from our sin.

Verse 21

From verse 20, we learn that the Father seated Jesus Christ at his right hand in the seat of honour because of His work on our behalf. The apostle Paul has two things to say about Christ's position of honour at the right hand of God.

First, his seat is *“far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named.”* The word *“above”* here refers to His authority, power, dominion and name. The authority, power, kingdom and name of Christ is higher than any other. He is to be respected, honoured and worshipped. His kingdom will prevail above all others. There is no power greater than His. He is the final authority on all things.

Second, this position given to Christ is a position he will hold throughout all eternity, *“not only in this age but also in the one to come.”* In other words, nothing will take this authority, dominion, and power from Him. His name will be lifted high and worshipped throughout all eternity.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 22

Paul explains to the Ephesians that when God seated Christ at His right hand, he did two things.

First, “*he put all things under his feet.*” To put something under one’s feet is to have authority and power over that object. If you can picture a soldier who has conquered his enemy, placing his foot on the body laying on the ground to indicate that he has conquered his foe and he will never rise again.

Second, the Father gave to Christ the position as head over all things. The conqueror now becomes the absolute ruler. It is true that the Lord Jesus was God from the beginning and as such ruler over all things. Paul speaks here, however, about a special glory the Father bestowed on Jesus Christ as a result of His work on this earth. He restored His people to the Father through His death on the cross and was honoured by the Father for His work. This honour was to confirm Him as King of kings and Lord of lords.

There is one final detail we need to see in this verse. Notice the words, “*to the church.*” Paul reminds the Ephesians that this Jesus who was put all things under his feet and was head over all things was given to the church as her head. There is something quite marvellous about this reality. Our true leader and head is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is Lord of lords and King of kings. He is over all, and all things are subject to Him. He has conquered sin and death. Satan and hell will be banished to the bottomless pit because of His work. Every knee will one day bow before Him and recognize His Lordship. This is not something we can take lightly. Our head cannot fail. The church over which He is Lord will triumph. Despite the hardship and trials, we must face in this sinful world, our Lord will lead us on to victory.

Verse 23

Paul concludes the chapter with a word about the church. Consider what he tells the Ephesians here.

Ephesians 1

First, the church is the body of Christ. Our bodies consist of many different organs and cells. Each of these individual parts plays an important role for the healthy functioning of the body. As each part faithfully performs its duty, the body works as it was intended. The image of the body is used often in Scripture to speak of how the church needs to operate. Each believer, under Christ and His headship, is unique but has a vital role to play. We are not the same but have a common goal – to serve our Head and King and accomplish His purpose.

Second, the church is “*the fullness of him who fills all in all.*” To understand what Paul is saying we need to see it from the perspective of the imagery of the body. The Lord God has given to the church various gifts and powers. Each of these gifts, personalities and powers represent something of God and His character. God has given to the church those who demonstrate His generosity and compassion. He also gives evangelists who reflect his passion for the lost. Teachers reveal His purpose for holiness. Others show us His power to heal. Others yet reveal Him as an all-knowing God by how He speaks so personally to us through them. As the body works together, each part reveals something of the fullness of God. Together we reveal to the world who this God is who fills us and whom the world cannot contain.

Ephesians 2

Verse 1

Paul begins the chapter by telling the Ephesians that they were dead in their trespasses and sin. Let's break this down and examine its individual parts.

First consider the word *trespasses*. The Greek word used here is παράπτωμα (paráptōma). It refers to weakness, mistakes or error. These shortcomings may not be intentional, but the individual is still guilty as a result.

The word sin is ἁμαρτία (hamartía) and refers to anything that does not meet God's standard. Sin may be intentional or unintentionally in nature.

Notice finally, the seriousness of these trespasses and sins. This is reflected in the words, *"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins."* Our trespasses and sins bring death.

The death Paul speaks of here is both physical and spiritual in nature. It is physical in the sense that sin brings physical sickness and death to us. God told Adam that because he sinned there would be a curse on the earth and that curse would bring death.

Our trespasses and sin also bring spiritual death. They break all ties with God and the spiritual life He gives. If sin stands in the way, there can be no relationship with God. It is only through the forgiveness of this sin that we can know the life of the Spirit and the eternal life that is our inheritance.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 2

Paul reminds the Ephesians that they were once dead in their trespasses and sins. In fact, as those who were spiritually dead to God and His ways, they lived and walked in sin and transgression of God's purpose. They knew no other way. Paul describes how the Ephesians walked prior to coming to know the life of God through Jesus Christ.

First, they followed the "*course of this world.*" The word Paul uses here for "course" is αἰών (aión) which refers to an age or time. Each age or time has its characteristics. Paul seems to be referring here to the age of this world under the curse of sin and rebellion against God. The Ephesians were products of their age under rebellion and sin. They lived as everyone else, with no concern for God, doing what naturally came to them.

Second, they followed "*the prince of the power of the air.*" The Jews believed that demonic forces lived in the air, travelling to and fro. The prince or the ruler of these demonic forces was Satan.

Consider how Satan has influenced the media, government, advertising, entertainment and many other aspects of our world. How many people have been caught up in his evil purposes through these means. It is not likely that these individuals would declare themselves to be followers of Satan, but they have certainly been caught up in his ways.

Paul goes on to say that this demonic spirit of rebellion and death is still at work in "*sons of disobedience.*" The term "*sons of disobedience*" speaks of all who have never surrendered to Christ and His purpose. Paul tells those who have never bowed the knee to Jesus Christ that they are living in disobedience and will eventually pay the price for this.

Verse 3

The apostle Paul reminds the Ephesians that all of us once lived as "sons of disobedience" (verse 2).

Ephesians 2

Paul describes the life of the sons of disobedience here as one that lived in the passions of the flesh. They sought to satisfy their fleshly desires and appetites with no regard for the purpose of God. Those desires and appetites were the passions and lusts of their eyes, heart, mind and body. If God is not our passion, the satisfaction of fleshly appetites will become our great temptation.

Paul reminded the Ephesians that, without God, their great passion in life was to “*carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.*” Those who do not know God live for this world, its pleasures, riches, comforts and satisfactions.

Notice one more detail here. Those who did not know God, were “*by nature children of wrath.*” Notice the phrase, “*by nature children of wrath.*” The words, “*by nature,*” are striking and imply that it is not so much what these individuals did or did not do that is in question here, but rather their nature. They were children of wrath because their nature was contrary to God and His purpose. If they were to be right with God, it was more than their actions that needed to change. They needed a whole new life and nature. They might be able to change their actions but only God could change their nature.

Paul concludes the verse by reminding the Ephesians that at one point, before they received a new nature in Christ, they were “*like the rest of mankind.*” They had been changed, however, and now the Spirit of God lived in them.

Verse 4

The Ephesians had at one time been “*by nature children of wrath*” under the judgment of God. Something happened, however, that changed their situation— God was “*rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us.*”

Consider what Paul has told us about the Ephesians and many like them.

First, they were “*by nature, children of wrath*” (Ephesians 2:3). They had a nature that was contrary to God and His purpose.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Second, they followed the “*prince of the power of the air*” (Ephesians 2:2). They were legally bound to Satan.

Third, they were dead (Ephesians 2:1). They had no connection whatsoever to God. They did not know Him, nor had they ever had a relationship with Him.

What obligation would you have to someone who was dead, married to another, completely uninterested in knowing you, and whose great desire in life was to keep following the passions of their heart without you getting involved in their life?

Despite this, however, verse 4 begins with the words, “*but God*,” indicating that while God had no obligation toward these individuals, He still chose to reach out.

Notice what motivated this reaching out – “*God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us.*” God’s love and mercy moved Him to do something about our condition.

Verse 5

Notice what God did for those who were dead in their trespasses and sin (2:1) and by nature children of wrath (2:3). Verse 5 tells us that He made them alive.

What is this life Paul speaks about here? Notice that he tells us that we were made “*alive together with Christ.*” The implication is that this life is in Christ and because of His work. It is a life that is so connected to Him that He literally becomes the life in us. In fact, Paul, writing to the Colossians put it this way:

*4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you
also will appear with him in glory. – Col 3:4*

And writing to the Galatians he says:

*20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no
longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And*

Ephesians 2

*the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the
Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for
me. – Ga 2:20*

In both verses, Paul describes the person of Christ as his life. We are made alive by means of the presence of Christ and His Spirit who live in us. The life we have is the life of Christ.

Paul goes on to tell us that we did nothing to deserve this life. According to the apostle it is *“by grace you have been saved.”* It is the unmerited mercy and favour of God that reached out to you. He chose to give life to you when you did not know Him and were living with a nature that was contrary to Him. You could not change that nature anymore than a pig could become a butterfly, but God did something wonderful and undeserved. He gave you a new nature, through the person of Jesus Christ.

Verse 6

Paul told the Ephesians in verse 5 that God made them alive in Christ. He goes on here to explain two more things that the Father did for them through the work of Christ.

First, He *“raised us up with him.”* How has God raised us with Christ? The word, “with” shows us that when Christ rose, we rose with Him.

In the context, Paul has been speaking about the Ephesians being dead in their sin but made alive in Christ. He has also been speaking about their promised eternal inheritance. To be raised up with Christ is likely connected to these two thoughts.

When the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead, he accomplished two things. He gave new life to those who were spiritually separated from God because of their sin and showed us that all who believe in Him will also conquer death and be raised on the last day. To be raised up with Christ then refers to the new life we were given and the hope of resurrection from the dead to enjoy our promised eternal inheritance.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Second, “*He seated us with him in the heavenly places.*” The idea here is that we have a place in heaven with Him. If I want to take an airplane and travel to a far away destination, I need to reserve a seat. The seat is bought and paid for and set apart for me. This is what is happening here. The Lord Jesus has bought and paid for our seat in heaven. It has been reserved for us and the day is coming when we will sit in that seat and fellowship with Him. This seat is reserved “*in heavenly places*” for all who belong to Jesus Christ.

Notice that Paul concludes the verse with the words “*in Christ Jesus.*” This shows us that all these blessings are obtained in Him and apart from Him none of this would be possible.

Verse 7

God raised us up and seated us in heavenly places, according to Paul for a reason – “*so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*” Consider several points here.

First, God wants to show us “*immeasurable riches.*” Consider the fact that we were dead in sin but given new life. Remember that we were sinners, but Christ died for us. Imagine the countless blessings of heaven placed before us. Remember the innumerable blessings on this earth that you have received from His hand. This God certainly gives richly and abundantly.

Second, notice that God wants to show the immeasurable riches of His kindness to the world. Like an artist demonstrating a masterpiece, God is proud of the work of His Son. What happens when you see a masterpiece? You give praise to the artist. Ultimately, God shows us these immeasurable riches so that we will rejoice in Him and worship His name.

Third, notice the phrase “*in the coming ages.*” The phrase, coming ages, does not necessarily speak of a future time. The time from which Paul wrote this letter until now were, from his perspective, “coming ages.” From today until eternity, from our perspective are the “coming ages.”

Ephesians 2

It was the purpose of God to demonstrate the riches of His immeasurable grace and kindness to the world throughout all time. He wants the world to know His grace and kindness in and through His Son Jesus Christ. He wants the unbeliever to see His kindness in the work of Christ “toward us.” It is our obligation to make that grace known by our words and our life.

Verse 8

The apostle Paul makes it clear that salvation is by grace through faith. Let’s break these words down to get a better understanding of what he is saying.

Paul speaks first about being *saved*. To understand what he means, we need to examine what he has been telling the Ephesians so far.

In Ephesians 2, the apostle told the Ephesians that they were dead in their trespasses and sin (2:1). They were following the prince of the power of the air, that is to say, they were subjects to Satan (2:2). Finally, he told them that they were by nature children of wrath (2:3). All of this meant that sin and Satan had brought death, they were enemies to God and under his condemnation and there was nothing they could do about it. They needed a Saviour.

The apostle went on to tell the Ephesians in chapter 2 that God was merciful, made them alive (2:5), and seated them with Christ in heavenly places (2:6). He forgave their sin, rescued them from death and gave them an eternal inheritance in His presence. Salvation, in this context, is the act of God rescuing us from sin and death and giving us forgiveness, new life and an eternal hope through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

The second word Paul uses here in this verse is the word “*grace*.” Grace is unmerited favour. In other words, God saved us out of the goodness of His heart when we were completely unworthy of any action on our behalf. He reached out to us when we were at our worst. Nothing obliged Him to do this, but He still chose to act in my favour.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Faith is the next word Paul uses here. It refers to a belief and trust that leads to a commitment. In this case, it speaks of our belief in Jesus Christ and His work on our behalf. It is a trust in Him and His work alone for our salvation and a commitment to follow Him.

Salvation then is an undeserved act of compassion and grace that creates belief, trust, and commitment in us, leading to forgiveness, new life, and an eternal inheritance.

The apostle tells the Ephesians something else about salvation here when he says: *“this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”*

Paul tells the Ephesians that they did nothing for their salvation. It was a gift of God from start to finish. Their new life, faith, forgiveness, and inheritance was completely undeserved and unmerited. All were gifts from God to them.

Verse 9

Paul reminds the Ephesians that their salvation was not a result of works. The word “*works*” refers to anything that we would do to merit our salvation. When an employee works, he is paid a salary as a reward for his or her efforts. Paul informs the Ephesians that this is not the case for salvation. Salvation is a gift and not a reward for anything we have done or deserved.

He goes on to say that this means that no one can boast. In other words, not one of us was worthy of salvation. When it comes to this matter of salvation, the only thing that counts is the work of Christ. God does not consider anything we have done or ever will do to be of any value in so far as our salvation is concerned. This places every believer on the same footing. No one is better than another, all have sinned and were under the condemnation of God. God, graciously reached out to us in our sin and rescued us. We were drowning in the sea of sin when the hand of God reached down to save us from certain death. We did nothing to save ourselves, God did everything. To Him alone belongs all the praise.

Ephesians 2

Verse 10

According to Paul, believers are the workmanship of God. The implication here is that God has done the work for our salvation. Beyond this, however, it is He who must also do the work of maturing us and shaping us into the image of His Son.

Notice that we were created in Christ Jesus. It was by means of the work of Jesus Christ that we were given life.

Paul tells us that God worked in us so that we could do “*good works*.” It is important to note that we were created in Christ first before these good works were possible. In other words, we were not saved *by* good works but *for* good works. These good works are the result and purpose of our salvation.

Finally, notice that God prepared these good works “*beforehand, that we should walk in them*.” God prepared good works for us to do before we can’t to Him. There is a task for every believer. God saves us and equips us for a kingdom purpose. We all have a role to play. The challenge is for us to be open to letting God reveal that purpose and faithfully walk in it.

Verse 11

The apostle Paul speaks particularly here to Gentiles. A Gentile was a person who was not a Jew. Notice particularly that Paul speaks about “*Gentiles in the flesh*.” This is a reference to the practice of circumcision which was a Jewish tradition and requirement. In the Jewish mindset, circumcision was a sign of their covenant relationship with God.

The apostle tells us here that Gentiles were also called “*the uncircumcision*,” in reference to the fact that they did not carry on their flesh the physical sign of a covenant relationship with God. On the other hand, Jews spoke of themselves as the “*the circumcision*,” or the circumcised ones.

Notice that the apostle concludes the verse with the words, “*which is made in the flesh by hands*.” All this talk about the

Light To My Path Bible Notes

circumcised and the uncircumcised, the Jew and the Gentile, referred to a simple procedure made with human hands. In other word, the division between Jew and Gentile was all about the cutting off the foreskin.

Verse 12

Paul continues his discussion about the Gentiles here. Let's take a moment to see what he says about them.

First, they were *"at that time separated from Christ."* The Jews were the chosen people of God. He chose to reveal Himself to them and work in their nation. Up until the days of Paul, even the Jews who came to Christ were uncertain if the Gentile could be saved. For the most part, the Gentile had not yet come to Christ nor had the church accepted that it was even a possibility that a Gentile could be a Christian. The Gospel was going out only in those early days to Jews alone.

19 Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. – Ac 11:19

Second, the Gentiles were *"alienated from the commonwealth of Israel."* God chose to work in the nation of Israel. He rose up prophets and kings for the nation. They were a people under God and connected to Him by means of a covenant. God's particular blessing was upon the Israelite nation. He revealed His presence to them and chose to bless and protect them as His chosen people. Foreign Gentiles lived in the dark in so far as God was concerned. Many of them had never heard of the God of Israel nor did they experience His presence and blessings as the nation of Israel had experienced. The Gentiles did not have the same rights and privileges as the people of Israel, they were strangers to God and His covenant blessings.

Paul tells us finally that these Gentiles had *"no hope"* and were *"without God in the world."* They had no understanding of the

Ephesians 2

salvation of God or hope of forgiveness. They lived in spiritual death and darkness.

Verse 13

The Gentiles were strangers to the covenant God made with the Israelites. Paul tells us that the Gentiles “*once were far off*.” In other words, they were separated from God and His blessings.

All this changed when the Lord Jesus came. The door was opened for the salvation of the “uncircumcised” Gentile. They were “*brought near by the blood of Christ*.” Salvation was no longer just for the Jewish nation, but also for the rest of the world. The blood of Jesus Christ, shed on the cross, was for people of every nation, and language. From that time forward, the Gospel has been going to every nation. People of every language and tribe are coming to know and experience the salvation of God.

Verse 14

Paul teaches the Ephesians that this “*dividing wall of hostility*” between Jews and Gentiles was “broken down” in the flesh of Jesus Christ.

In the Jewish mind, and religion, the Gentile was unclean. They would not enter a Gentile home, nor would they allow a Gentile into their place of worship. Jews were not permitted to marry Gentiles. It was unimaginable that a Gentile could experience the salvation of God. A “*wall of hostility*” separated the Jew from the Gentile.

That wall was broken down, according to Paul, “*in his flesh*.” When Christ died on the cross, He died not just for the Jewish nation but also for Gentile nations. His death opened the door for forgiveness for people of every tribe, language and nation.

Paul tells the Ephesians that Christ became our *peace*. This peace was two-fold. First, it restored our relationship with God. Second, it restored the relationship between Jew and Gentile and placed them both under one God and Saviour.

Verse 15

Paul has just told the Ephesians that the Lord Jesus broke down the wall of division between the circumcised Jews and the uncircumcised Gentiles. He goes on here to tell us how He did this – *“by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances.”*

According to Paul, Jesus abolished the *“law of commandments.”* The word for abolished here is καταργέω (katargéō). It comes from the root word argéō which means to be idle. The word katargéō means to make something inactive or of no more use.

The commandments Paul refers to here are those given to the Jewish nation. What Paul is telling us is that Jesus made these commandments of no more use as far as salvation is concerned. Consider the thief on the cross beside Jesus. He had disobeyed the command of God and hung on the cross to die as a result. Jesus told him, however, that he would be with Him in paradise. His disobedience of the commandment of God did not keep Him from heaven. Obeying the commandments of God are not the key to the door of heaven. Paul tells us that salvation is by grace through faith in what Jesus has done on the cross.

The principles of the Old Testament laws and commandments still have much to teach us about God and His purpose, but they will not save us from our sin. The Law of Moses has no power to save our soul. Only Jesus can do that.

Notice also that these commandments were *“expressed in ordinances.”* The word translated ordinances is δόγμα (dóγμα). This same word is used by Paul in Colossians 2:14 when he told the Colossians what the work of Jesus did:

14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. – Col 2:13-14

Ephesians 2

The King James Version translates the phrase “*record of debt*” by the words “*the handwriting of ordinances*.” The ordinances here were the record of our debt to God.

Paul uses the Greek word “*dógma*” once again in Colossians 2:20 when he said:

20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations – Col 2:20

The word translated “*regulations*” is the Greek word “*dógma*.”

What Paul seems to be saying to the Ephesians when he tells them that the law of commandments was expressed in ordinances is that these laws of God were expressed as regulations and rules for God’s people to follow.

Paul reminds us, however, that those who belong to Jesus Christ are no longer under the old way of the Law. Christianity is not about a series of written ordinances we must follow but about new life and forgiveness in the person of Jesus Christ.

This “*abolishing*” of the law of commandments and ordinances, according to Paul created “*one new man in place of the two*.” In other words, it brought Jews and Gentiles together in one family under Christ. The work of Jesus is for every nation. The Jew and the Gentile can both experience salvation in Christ and live in peace with God as brothers and sisters.

Verse 16

Through the work of Jesus on the cross the Father reconciles “us both to God in one body.” There is no more division between Jews and Gentiles under Christ. At one time there was a great wall separating the two people. The cross of Christ abolishes that division and kills “the hostility” between them.

Prior to Paul’s day it was unthinkable that the Jew and the Gentile could worship together. In fact, it took the early church years to truly

Light To My Path Bible Notes

accept that Gentiles could be equal partners in salvation. The work of Jesus unites all who believe, regardless of nationality in one body under Him.

Verse 17

Paul has been speaking about the Lord Jesus and how He has united both Jew and Gentile in His death. Here in this verse, he tells the Ephesians that Christ preached peace to those who were far off and to those who were near.

Consider first the preaching of peace. This preaching of peace refers to the message Jesus brought.

Writing in Ephesians 2:14 the apostle said about Jesus:

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility – Ep 2:14

He repeats much that same thing in Ephesians 2:16 when he says about the work of Jesus:

16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. – Ep 2:16

The message Jesus preached then was a message of reconciliation with God and the breaking down of the barrier between Jew and Gentile through His work on the cross.

This message of peace went to two different people groups. First, it went to those who were “far off.” The words far off can be taken in two ways. They can refer to the geographical distance from the nation of Israel, or to the relationship these individuals had with God. The reference to those who are far off likely refers to the Gentile nations around the world who were geographically distant from Israel and who had never even heard of her God. This message of peace was intended for the whole world.

Ephesians 2

The second group mentioned here is “*those who were near.*” It is generally agreed that this refers to the people of Israel. Their nation was the centre of God’s activity. They were in a covenant relationship with God and knew His presence among them. This message of peace with God was for them as well.

Verse 18

Paul reminds the Ephesians of the result of Christ’s work on the cross. Through His work, we have access to the Father through the Spirit. Notice all three members of the Trinity here.

The work of Jesus brought forgiveness and pardon for sin. He died on the cross taking our penalty upon Himself, granting us access to the Father.

The work of the Spirit is to apply this pardon to our lives. It is by means of His work that our eyes were opened, and salvation applied.

The goal of what Christ and the Spirit do is to bring us to the Father. That is to say, to restore our relationship with God and bring peace and fellowship with God the Father.

Verse 19

Because of the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross, the application of that work by the Spirit to our lives, and the grace of Father in accepting us, we are “*no longer strangers and aliens.*”

Before coming to faith in Christ, we were strangers to God. We had no relationship with Him and would be eternally separated from Him. The work of Jesus Christ changed all this. We who were strangers to Christ, have now become “*fellow citizens with the saints.*”

This citizenship is in the eternal kingdom of God. As members of this kingdom, we have a relationship with God, forgiveness of sin, and an eternal inheritance with all those who love and worship the Father. There in that kingdom we will rejoice with our brothers and

Light To My Path Bible Notes

sisters in Christ and delight for all eternity in His presence and blessing.

Paul tells the Ephesians that they were not only fellow citizens with the saints but more than that, they were “*members of the household of God.*” In this world it is possible to be a citizen in a country but not a member of the king’s family. While a citizen has his rights and privileges, the family member enjoys greater intimacy and connection with the leader of that country. Paul is telling the Ephesians that through the work of Christ, they were not just citizens of the kingdom of God but were brought into the very family of God to enjoy His presence and fellowship.

Verse 20

Paul has two things to say here about the kingdom to which believers now belonged.

First, the kingdom was built on the *foundation of the apostles and prophets*. This is to say, it was built on their teaching. As apostles and prophets, they were inspired by God in what they taught. Their words have been recorded for us in the pages of Scripture. The kingdom of God is founded on the Word of God as spoken by the prophets and apostles.

Second, Christ Jesus was the *cornerstone*. The cornerstone was the first stone to be laid in the foundation. Once set in place, every measurement would be taken from it. To assure that the foundation was level, it would be compared to this cornerstone. The length and width and height of the building would be determined from this stone. The builder would constantly refer to this cornerstone as he laid the foundation. Jesus is compared to that cornerstone. He is the measure of what God requires. If we want to know if we are walking in righteousness, we must look back to Jesus and His example. If we want to understand the purpose of God, we must once again consider Jesus, His teaching and His example. He is the measure of all that is right, good and holy. Any foundation that is built without referencing Him will surely crumble.

Ephesians 2

Verse 21

Paul continues his example of Jesus being the cornerstone from verse 20. Notice how he tells us that it is from this cornerstone, that the whole structure is built and joined together (see note on verse 20). He is the example and measurement of all that is right, good and holy.

With this cornerstone securely in place, the *“whole structure”* would be joined together and *“grow into a holy temple in the Lord.”* This “holy temple” is a reference to the church of Jesus Christ with its various members. Each member is a brick in this temple. Each brick is joined to another to form the whole. The purpose of this temple is for the praise and glory of God.

Verse 22

Paul has been comparing the church of Jesus Christ to a great temple being built for the glory of God.

He tells us that in Christ Jesus we are “being built.” No building can be complete unless all the various parts are put together. According to Paul the church is still *“being built.”* There are still many people who need to come to Christ and be added to this great structure called the church. God’s work is not yet complete.

Second, Paul tells the Ephesians that the structure is *“being built together.”* The word translated built together is one Greek word. The word συνοικοδομέω (sunoikodoméō) is comprised of two root words, sún, meaning, together, and oikodoméō, meaning to build. God is joining various pieces together to form a unified structure. Each piece has a place and role to play. Each brick is specifically laid in its proper place.

This magnificent structure is being built as a *“dwelling place for God.”* In other words, God chooses to dwell among His people and be surrounded by their praise and grateful service. With His presence, of course, comes His protection and love.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

This great work of God is being accomplished “*by the Spirit.*” It is the Spirit of God who is moving in the hearts and lives of His people. He applies the salvation of Christ to their hearts and transforms them so that they can be added to the temple. He equips each of them for their role in that temple and gifts them for service to their God.

Ephesians 3

Verse 1

Paul tells us two details about himself in this verse.

First, *he is a prisoner of Jesus Christ*. Notice that he was not just a prisoner. He was a prisoner of Jesus Christ. It is not that Jesus was holding him as prisoner. The apostle was a prisoner because of the message he preached about Jesus. He was a prisoner because of his devotion to Jesus and the work to which He called him.

Second, Paul was a prisoner on behalf of the Gentiles. It was because of his passion to carry the message of the Gospel to the Gentile world that Paul was put in prison.

Verse 2

The apostle assumes that the Ephesians had heard of the stewardship of grace God given to him. He is saying something like this: I am assuming that you have heard of the stewardship God has given me. Notice three details here.

First, this was a *stewardship of God's grace*. The Greek word *οἰκονομία* (*oikonomía*) refers to a manager of a household. In this case Paul is a manager of God's grace. God wanted to pour out His grace on Gentile nations and it would be through the preaching of Paul, that this grace would be showered on them. Paul was aware that God had called Him and given him an obligation to share His grace. This was a responsibility Paul took seriously.

Second, this stewardship was given to Paul. God chose to share this grace and salvation through the preaching of the messages of Paul and his interactions with the Gentile community. Like Paul, we

Light To My Path Bible Notes

are the channels through which the Lord Jesus imparts grace and salvation to those around us. He uses us to preach the message of salvation. He uses us to provide for the needs of neighbours and friends. His grace pours through you and me to the world.

The stewardship of grace that God gave to Paul was for the Gentiles. This was not to say that Paul was not also used to bring Jews to the Lord, but his primary calling was to share the grace of God with Gentiles. God gives us a stewardship of grace in various areas. Not only does He give us gifts, but He also calls us to a particular role in demonstrating that grace for the sake of His kingdom.

Verse 3

Paul has been speaking about the stewardship that God had given him to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentile community. Here in verse 3, he tells us how he came to know this Gospel message.

Notice first how Paul speaks of the mystery that was made known to him. He speaks of this in chapter 1 when he said:

*9 making known to us the mystery of his will,
according to his purpose, which he set forth in
Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to
unite all things in him, things in heaven and
things on earth. – Ep 1:9-10*

The mystery spoken of in Ephesians 1 is described as God's purpose "*set forth in Christ*" which would "*unite all things in Him.*" In other words, it was God's purpose of salvation through His Son.

Paul lays out this "mystery" in point form when he writes to Timothy:

16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:

- *He was manifested in the flesh,*
- *vindicated by the Spirit,*

Ephesians 3

- *seen by angels,*
- *proclaimed among the nations,*
- *believed on in the world,*
- *taken up in glory. – 1Ti 3:16*

The mystery that Paul was given as a stewardship, was the message of Jesus Christ become flesh, raised from the dead, proclaimed as Saviour in the world and taken up to reign with the Father. This is the message of the Gospel

Why was this Gospel called a mystery? It was a mystery to many prior to Paul. The Jews understood there would be a Messiah, but they did not understand the true nature of His work. They understood that He would come to save, but they did not know how that salvation would be procured.

This mystery was made known to Paul by revelation. In other words, God revealed Christ to Him personally. We are not told here in the passage how that revelation came to Paul. What is clear, however, is that Paul had a very powerful encounter with the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus. His world was turned upside down as a result of that encounter with the resurrected Lord. He came away from those days with a transformed life and understanding of the stewardship given to him by God.

Paul tells the Ephesians in concluding this verse that he had written briefly on this matter already. He may be referring to what he told them about this mystery in Ephesians 1:9-10.

Verse 4

As we read the first two chapters of the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, we discover that he speaks much about God's purpose of salvation through Christ for the world. In fact, the first two chapters are devoted to this teaching. Paul told the Ephesians that God made this mysterious Gospel known to him by means of a revelation.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

This is an important statement. It shows us that what Paul wrote in those days, was not his own thoughts or understanding. These truths were revealed to Him by God. They are reliable because they come from God and are not the inventions of human thought or philosophy. It was the privilege of Paul to be able to share that revelation with all who would listen.

Verse 5

The mystery of Christ and His salvation was not just made known to Paul but also to men who lived long before Him in previous generations. While these generations did not have as full an understanding as those who lived after the death of Christ, they still prophesied of His coming and work. Great prophets of old, predicted even the smallest details of Christ's life and ministry. The tabernacle, its implements, its requirements all pointed forward to this coming Lord and Saviour. Every Jew knew that the Messiah was going to come to bring salvation. Admittedly, many did not accept Him when He came, but the Spirit of God spoke through the prophets about Him.

Just as God spoke to the Old Testament Jews and revealed to them that the Messiah was coming, so He spoke to the apostles and prophets of the New Testament about Jesus as the Messiah. Paul was not the only one to receive this revelation. Other men of God in His day confirmed and attested to the truth he had heard from the Spirit of God.

Verse 6

The apostle tells us clearly here that the mystery that was revealed to Him was that the Gentiles were fellow heirs with the Jews in salvation. That is to say, God's plan was to reach the whole world with the message of forgiveness through the work of His Son. Paul says three things about the mysterious purpose of God here.

First, that Gentiles "*are fellow heirs.*" That is to say, they can become children of God along side of the Jews and heirs to an eternal inheritance in heaven.

Ephesians 3

Second, the Gentiles are “*members of the same body*” as the Jews. As members of equal standing, they have the same rights and privileges as the Jews regarding salvation and walk with God. Through the death of the Lord Jesus, this distinction between Jews and Gentile is no more. All who accept God’s Son are members of the same body.

Third, the Gentiles were “*partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*” What is the promise in Christ? It is the promise of forgiveness of sins and eternal life in His presence. The Gentile and the Jew both have access to these promises.

These were radical statements for the day. It would have been blasphemous for Paul to speak this way in the Jewish mind. The Gentile was unclean and unworthy of salvation in their mind. The Jews would not allow a Gentile into the temple to worship. To do so was a sin worthy of death.

In Christ, according to Paul, however, all of this changed. People from all nations, denominations and languages will populate the shores of heaven. The poor and the rich, young and old, popular and outcast all will partake in the wonderful pardon and privilege of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Verse 7

Paul tells the Ephesians that he was made a minister of the Gospel that brought the Gentiles to salvation through Jesus Christ. He has two things to say here about this calling and stewardship.

First, he was made a minister of this gospel “*according to the gift of God’s grace.*” Remember that the apostle Paul was a persecutor of the church. He actively sought out Christians and attempted to make them blaspheme the name of Christ.

11 And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities. – Ac 26:11

Light To My Path Bible Notes

At one point in his life Paul was the greatest enemy to Christians. What would it take to change him into Christianity's greatest ambassador? What would it take for Him to be forgiven of all his sin? Nothing but the gift of God's grace showered upon Him. This is what Paul is telling the Ephesians. It was the gift of God's wonderful grace that took a blasphemer and hater of Jesus Christ and made him a minister of the Gospel.

Second, this gift of God's grace was given to Paul *"by the working of his power."* It was the power of God that stopped Paul on his route to Damascus. It was the power of God that changed the bitterness in his heart toward Christians into love. It was the power of God that humbled him and empowered him in service. Nothing but the power of God working through grace could bring about these changes in his life. Paul testifies here to the grace and power of God to transform even the hardest heart.

Verse 8

As the apostle Paul looked back on his life, he saw how wrong he had been. He was aware of the pride of his heart and the hatred that fed his mission to remove Christians from the earth.

In response to this past, Paul sees himself as the *"least of all the saints."* The word Paul uses here is ἐλαχιστότερος (elachistóteros) literally meaning less than the least. The apostle never forgot how he had persecuted believers in his early years. While God had forgiven him, somehow the apostle lived with the shame of his attitude and actions in those days. The realization of his sin, however, did not stop Him from accepting God's call and serving His Lord with all his heart.

Paul accepted the call of God, (as unworthy as he knew he was), to preach to the Gentiles, *"the unsearchable riches of Christ."* Understand here that Paul was forgiven much. He knew how unworthy of Christ's pardon he was. He had become a leader in the persecution of the church. He watched as Stephen was stoned to death for preaching this very gospel.

Ephesians 3

If there was anyone in those days who understood the “*unsearchable riches*” of Christ’s mercy and grace, it was Paul. The worst enemy of the Church was fully pardoned. Not one of his sins would be held against him. For the rest of his life, the apostle would preach about these unsearchable riches.

Verse 9

It was the calling of Paul to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ and to “*bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things.*”

First, Paul’s calling was to bring God’s plan “*to light for everyone.*” This plan of God for the world, had not been revealed to everyone. There were many who had never heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ and were living in darkness. It was the passion of the apostle, to reveal God’s purpose through Jesus Christ to everyone possible.

The plan of God had been a “*mystery hidden from ages in God.*” Prophets spoke about the Messiah who was to come, but no one knew the details of when He would come, or what His mission from the Father really was. God alone knew this plan and purpose.

Finally, Paul reminds the Ephesians that this was the plan of God from ages past. In other words, it was the plan of an all-powerful, awesome God of grace who created the world and everything in it. That plan was for you and me. The great creator has compassion and mercy on us. This was too marvellous to comprehend in the mind of Paul.

Verse 10

It was the call of God on the life of Paul to bring to light the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ (see verse 9). There were many reasons why God had called him to bring this mystery to light. Paul declares one of those reasons here in verse 10.

It was the purpose of God to make His plan of salvation known through that church, so that His wisdom would be revealed to rulers

Light To My Path Bible Notes

in heavenly places. Let's break this down to examine what Paul is saying.

First, notice the words, "*so that through the church.*" God intention was to bring the gospel to light so that those who received it could become part of His church. More than this, however, the words, "*so that through the church,*" imply that God has a purpose for His people.

Second, the purpose of God for the church is declared in the words, "*the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known.*" The church is comprised of people from all ages, nationalities and languages. Each member has been forgiven through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. They are indwelt by the Spirit of God and are being transformed by His inner work. Through this multinational, and diverse group of people the purpose of God is being fulfilled and the kingdom of Satan challenged. Paul tells the Ephesians that the church reveals the manifold wisdom of God.

The word "manifold" in the original Greek is πολυποίκιλος (polupoíkilos) It come from the word *polús*, meaning much, and *poikílos*, meaning diverse. The general sense of the word "manifold" then is varied and multifaceted.

The word wisdom generally refers to the skill of living life but also refers to one's ability to manage the affairs of life with skill and competency. What Paul seems to be saying here is that the church reveals the diversity of God's skill in managing and orchestrating the affairs of life in the expansion of His kingdom.

Consider how the Lord has orchestrated the events of your life. How he opened your heart to the message of the gospel. How he brings people and circumstances together for your good and His glory. Consider how every believer down through the ages has a testimony of God's incredible work in their lives. Consider how God uses you to do what you could never do in the flesh. Consider how He has been transforming your life and shaping you into the image of His son. What He is doing in you, He is doing in billions of people from various nations and cultures around the world. I suppose if we

Ephesians 3

could look back from the perspective of heaven and understand the incredible way in which God put all these pieces together, we would be overwhelmed simply by what He did in our own lives. God is working out His purpose through the church with a wisdom that is beyond anything we could ever imagine.

Finally, notice how Paul tells us that through the church, God is revealing His manifold wisdom to *“rulers and authorities in heavenly places.”*

Many commentators believe that these rulers and authorities are angelic beings. Remember that not all angelic beings serve the Lord. Satan and his angels are demonic and opposed God and His kingdom. Understand here that God is using you and me as members of the church, to reveal His wisdom to all angelic beings whether they be evil or good. He is showing them what He can do through pardoned sinners. He is building His kingdom to the amazement of the demonic forces of hell and the angelic hosts of heaven. They marvel at the wisdom that has built the church, broke the power of sin, and established the kingdom of God.

Verse 11

Notice here that the purpose of God for the church was an “eternal purpose.” This is to say that it was before the creation of the earth in eternity past. Before there was a need, God had the solution to the need. More than this, however, when Paul speaks of the eternal purpose of God, he also speaks of the future. This eternal purpose has no end. Forever and ever, the plan of God will be unfolded in our lives. This plan is from eternity past into eternity future. There is nothing more secure and trustworthy.

This purpose of God for the church, is being *“realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* The Lord Jesus is at the very centre of this purpose of God for the church. Without Him and His work this purpose would not be unfolded. His death and resurrection made the kingdom possible.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 12

Paul reminds the Ephesians here about their access to God through the work of Jesus Christ.

He tells them first, that they have “*boldness*.” Consider what took place in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned. Genesis tells us that they hid from God because they were afraid. Sin and disobedience bring fear. What sinner can stand before a holy God without fear? All of this changed, however, when the Lord Jesus paid for our sins on the cross. With our sins forgiven, we were given access to the Father without condemnation and judgement.

Paul goes on to tell the Ephesians that because of the work of Jesus, we can have access with “*confidence*.” If our salvation were based on our own works, we would never have confidence. We have all met people who are uncertain of their salvation because they are not sure if they were good enough. The Lord Jesus changes this also. Our salvation is not based on our efforts, but on His final work. He paid the price in full. Because our salvation is based on Christ’s work, it cannot fail. We can stand before the Father with great confidence because Jesus paid what we could not pay.

Finally, Paul tells us that we have access to God “*through faith in Him*,” that is, in Jesus. The faith referred to here is a complete confidence in what He has done for us. When it comes to our salvation and assurance of access to God, there is only one place we can look, and that is to Jesus. If we look to ourselves or our efforts, we will fall short. Where is your assurance of access to God? It is in the Lord Jesus. We trust by faith in what He has done alone.

Verse 13

Paul has reminded the Ephesians of the wisdom of God in salvation and the establishment of His church. This wisdom was to the amazement of rulers in heavenly places. Paul now goes on to tell them not to lose heart over what he, as an apostle, was suffering for them.

Ephesians 3

Remember that God had called Paul to share the message of the gospel with the Gentiles. The preaching of that message brought many to Christ, but it also caused him to be stoned, cast out of cities, persecuted and ultimately imprisoned. Paul suffered greatly to bring the message of Jesus Christ to the Gentile community.

The apostle tells the Ephesians, however, that the God of all wisdom was still in control. There was no reason for them to lose heart. Whatever happened would work out for good in the purpose of God. Paul trusted the Lord in His circumstance. He challenges the Ephesians to do the same.

Notice finally, how the apostle told the Ephesians that his suffering for them was their glory. Being thrown in prison is generally a shameful thing. But consider the cause of Paul's imprisonment –his faithfulness in preaching the gospel. Paul was not ashamed of his imprisonment. Nor should the Ephesians be ashamed of what he suffered so that they could hear that good new of Jesus Christ. In fact, it was a glorious thing to suffer for the Lord Jesus.

The word glory speaks of honour. What Paul is telling the Ephesians is that it was to their honour that he was suffering. He was willing to go to prison to get the message of salvation to them. Instead of feeling shame for Paul in prison, they were to feel honoured that he would willingly risk his life to bring them the message of hope and salvation in Jesus Christ.

Verse 14

Paul begins verse 14 with the words, "*for this reason.*" These words refer to what he has just told the Ephesians in the preceding verses. In verse 7, he explained that he had been made a minister of the Gospel by God's grace. As a minister of the Gospel, he was chosen to bring light to the Gentiles so that as they became part of the church of Jesus Christ. He also told them how the wisdom of God was being revealed to rulers in heavenly places (verses 9-10). He showed them that because of Jesus and His work on the cross, they had bold and confident access to the Father (verse 11).

Light To My Path Bible Notes

For these reasons, Paul bowed the knee before the Father. He worshipped and gave thanks to the Father for the work of His Son, and for calling him to be a minister on His behalf.

Verse 15

Paul told the Ephesians that it is from the Father that every family on heaven and earth is named. We should not limit the use of the word “family” to a mother, father and children. The term can also refer to any group of people with a common cause or purpose. A nation is a family of people with a common country. A church is a family with a common Saviour and Lord.

There is some debate over what Paul means when he speaks of every family being named. A name is an identification given to a person, family or nation when they are born, and distinguishes them from all other people.

When Paul speaks of families receiving a name, he speaks about the time of their birth. In other words, Paul is telling the Ephesians that God is the one who brought all families in heaven into being. He is their creator and Lord. It is by His power and will that they came into being and received a name and unique identity.

Verse 16

Paul tells the Ephesians here that he bowed the knee to God on their behalf. To bow the knee in this sense refers to petitioning God and pleading with God for them and their good. Notice what Paul requests from God for the Ephesian church.

First, he prays that God would bless, “*according to the riches of his glory.*” The apostle recognizes that God was the source of infinite riches. He come to Him on behalf of the Ephesians petitioning Him on their behalf.

Second, Paul prays that God would strengthen the Ephesians with power. The word δύναμις (dúnamis) refers to strength, ability and capacity to achieve. Paul did not want to see the Ephesians failing to walk with God. To walk in victory, they needed the power of God.

Ephesians 3

Third, notice the source of the power to live the Christian life — *“through his Spirit.”* The power we need is in the person of the Holy Spirit. The power Paul prays for the Ephesians was not in them and their natural ability. It was the power of the Holy Spirit they needed to live and serve as God intended.

Finally, notice what Paul says about the Holy Spirit in the words, *“his Spirit in your inner being.”* The Spirit of God, as the source of power, lived in the Ephesians. If the Spirit of God already lived in the Ephesians, why then would Paul need to petition God to give them strength. The answer lies in the fact that while the Spirit of God lives in every believer, not every believer relies on the Spirit of God. Instead, many seek to live in their own strength and wisdom. Paul’s prayer is that God would teach the Ephesians to tap into the source of power that God had already placed in them as His children.

Verse 17

Paul has been telling the Ephesians about his prayer for them. He prayed that the Lord God would strengthen them with power through the Spirit (verse 16). In this verse the apostle shares with the Ephesians what the result of the Spirit’s power in their lives would be.

First notice the phrase, *“so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”* What is the work of the Spirit in the believer? His first work is to introduce us to Jesus Christ. Any work of the Spirit will have Jesus Christ as the central focus. He not only introduces us to Jesus Christ, but it is also His purpose to prepare our heart so that Christ may dwell there as Lord. He does this by giving us faith in the work and word of Jesus. Paul prayed that the Lord would strengthen the believers in Ephesus through the Spirit so that they would know the presence of Jesus in their hearts by faith.

The second great work of God’s Spirit is found in the phrase, *“that you, being rooted and grounded in love.”* Where the Spirit of God is given freedom, love will reign. It is the heart of God that His children love. Jesus told us that the greatest commandment was to love God and our neighbour as ourselves (see Luke 10:27).

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Notice that Paul prayed that the Ephesians would be “*rooted and grounded in love.*” This shows us just how important love is. When a plants roots are solidly anchored in the ground it is able then to produce fruit. This is the work of God’s Spirit in our lives. He wants to break away bitterness, envy, strife and anger. He chips away at jealousy and opens our hearts to forgive. These are things that do not come naturally to us but when the Spirit of God works in us, He breaks these barriers to love and sets us free to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbour as ourselves (see Luke 10:27).

Verse 18

Paul continues his thought from verse 17. There he told the Ephesians that the Holy Spirit would fill their hearts with love. Here in verse 18, he takes this a step further and tells us that the Spirit of God will also give them strength to comprehend the love of Christ.

The word comprehend is καταλαμβάνω (katalambánō). The word has the sense of taking hold of something. We have an example of this in Mark 9:18 where Mark records what took place when an evil spirit took possession of a young man. Notice the word “seize” in this verse:

18 And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.” – Mk 9:18

The word translated, comprehend in Ephesians 3:18 is a strong word. Paul’s prayer is that the Ephesians be overcome by the vastness of the love of God and that this love would take possession or “seize” every part of them.

Verse 19

Paul’s prayer in verse 18 was that the Ephesians comprehend or be overcome by the vastness of God’s love. Here in verse 19, he prays that they would “*know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.*” The word translated, “know” is γινώσκω (ginōskō).

Ephesians 3

This word speaks about receiving knowledge or understanding. In verse 18, Paul spoke about the Ephesians being overwhelmed with the experience of God's great love. Here he speaks about their knowledge of the truth of God's love. He qualifies this, however, with the fact that this love "*surpasses knowledge*." This immediately brings up the question: How can I know the love of God if it surpasses knowledge?

Paul speaks here about the experience and knowledge of God's love. Both realities are important. There are times when we need to experience the love of God in a deep way in our lives. All of us, however, have gone through times of dryness in our spiritual lives. For years I struggled with depression and did not feel the love of God in my life. What carried me through those times was the knowledge of God's love as a truth that does not change with my feelings and emotions.

The Christian life is not all truth and no experience. Nor is it all experience and no truth. Both truth and experience must walk hand in hand. It is when the truth we believe is also our experience that we can truly be "filled with all the fullness of God."

Verse 20

After speaking about the power and love of God, the apostle is moved to praise and thanksgiving in verses 20-21.

He begins here by recognizing that the Lord Jesus Christ is "*able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think*." Consider two details in this regard.

First, understand the limitations of our human body and mind. As human beings there is only so much we can do. I would venture to say that there is also only so much we can imagine. Paul tells us here that God can do "far more abundantly" than we could "think." What is hopeless to us, is not with God. What is impossible to us, is not so with God. There is no limit to what God can do.

Second, consider also that Paul tells us that God can do "*far more abundantly*" than we could "ask." The assumption is that we will be

Light To My Path Bible Notes

asking God for His favour and blessing. This makes what Paul says here very personal. It is not just that we have a God who is able to do great and marvellous things, it is that this God is able to do these things for me when I ask Him. This is not an invitation to satisfy our sinful lusts and greed. It is, however, an invitation to seek His favour, provision and blessing on the work He has given us to do. It is an invitation to be bold in our requests for His glory.

Notice what Paul tells us about this power of God. It is “*at work within us.*” The power of God that can do more than we could ever ask, or think is already working in our lives. The very presence of the Spirit of God is in us, transforming and enabling us to do the will of the Father. The apostle John put it this way:

4 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. – 1Jn 4:4

The power at work in us is greater than Satan and the powers at work in this world combined. Paul explodes in thanksgiving to God for this reality in His life. It is also the reality for every child of God.

Verse 21

Paul begins this section from verse 14-20 by telling the Ephesians that he bowed the knee to the Father:

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father. – Ep 3:14

He concludes the section by telling us that this heavenly Father, whose power is beyond anything we could ever imagine, is worthy of all glory and praise. Notice how the apostle expresses this here in verse 21:

First, he tells us that the Father is to be glorified “*in the church.*” Those who are the recipients of this power and love are to lift up the name of the Father. He is to be worshipped and adored for His great power and majesty. We do this not only in our corporate worship but in our private lives as members of the body of Christ.

Ephesians 3

Not only is the Father glorified in the church, but He is also glorified in His Son Jesus Christ. The work of the Lord Jesus brought forgiveness and pardon to His people. They were restored to the Father through His death on the cross. The life and work of the Son continues to bring great glory to the Father as countless souls are rescued from sin and brought into His kingdom.

It was the cry of Paul's heart that throughout all generations on this earth and forever in eternity, the Father be honoured and glorified for the mercy and purpose toward those who did not deserve His forgiveness and power.

Ephesians 4

Verse 1

Paul declares himself to be a prisoner for the Lord. His crime was walking with the Lord and serving Him. He demonstrates that walking with the Lord will not always be easy or acceptable in the eyes of this world.

The apostle challenges the Ephesians to walk worthy of their calling as well. Their calling was to be sons and daughters of the King of kings. They had been called to be followers of the Lord Jesus. This required obedience, faithfulness and devotion to the one who had died for their forgiveness and eternal life.

Paul does not say that the Ephesians were worthy of their calling, for all of us are unworthy of the salvation and the promised inheritance. Despite their unworthiness, God reached out to them in His grace to save them. Their only acceptable response to that offer of grace was to love and serve Him with all their heart.

Verse 2

Paul challenged the Ephesians in verse 1 to walk worthy of their calling. He goes on to explain what he means here in verse 2. He lays out four qualities they were to cultivate in their lives as those called to be children of God.

The first quality they were to demonstrate was “*humility*.” The word ταπεινοφροσύνη (tapeinophrosúnē) refers to seeing ourselves as small. This does not mean that we belittle ourselves but rather that we have a proper understanding of who we are and do not see ourselves as being bigger or more important than we really are.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Pride will lead us into many sins. Developing a proper understanding of who we are will keep us from falling into pride.

The second quality Paul mentions is “*gentleness*.” The word used here is πραότης (praotēs). It refers to an ability to calmly accept the circumstances that God brings our way. The gentle person is not constantly fighting with God but willingly submits to His purpose.

Thirdly, Paul encourages the Ephesians to walk “*with patience*.” The Greek word, μακροθυμία (makrothumía) described the ability to control one’s passions and emotions without lashing out or responding inappropriately. That inappropriate response may be in words, thoughts, or deeds.

Finally, the apostle speaks of “*bearing with one another in love*.” The word ἀνέχω (anéchō) literally means to hold up or to hold back. The idea is to support and keep another person from falling. The implication here is that each believer has an obligation toward his or her brother and sister.

Verse 3

The apostle shares yet another quality of the person who walks in a manner worthy of his or her calling. Such a person is, according to the apostle, “*eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*.”

Notice first the word “*eager*.” To be eager is to be motivated and disciplined.

The eagerness Paul speaks about here relates a desire “*to maintain the unity of the Spirit*.” That is to say, the oneness of believers in purpose and love for Christ and each other. Notice that the apostle describes it as the “*unity of the Spirit*.” In other words, it is the work of the Spirit to bring this harmony of God’s children in service, devotion and worship. It is the responsibility of each believer to maintain that unity by standing with each other, accepting each other, and forgiving offenses.

Paul tells the Ephesians finally that they were to maintain this unity of the Spirit “*in the bond of peace*.” The idea is that believers are

Ephesians 4

bound together by peace. The peace referred to here is a peace with God that results in a peace with each other. Paul tells the Ephesians that they were to be eager to maintain this peace. The implication is that there to be disciplined and diligent in this matter.

The apostles show us that maintaining peace is very important. The testimony of the church has often been damaged because this peace between brothers and sisters has been broken. The work of the church suffers because believers are unwilling or unable to live together in peace. If we are to walk in a manner worthy of our calling, we must be eager to maintain the unity of the body of Christ and its peace.

Verse 4

Paul has been challenging believers to walk worthy of their calling. They were to do this by maintaining the unity of the body of Christ. He reminds them here that there is only *“one body.”*

In our day, there are many denominations and groups of Christians. Believers meet together based on their understanding of theology and practice. Realize, however, that in God’s eyes, what matters is the work of His Son to forgive and the presence of His Spirit in those who belong to Him. God’s children may belong to different churches and have different preferences but there is only one body.

Paul goes on to say that there is also only one Spirit. That Spirit lives in all who belong to Christ. Though believers my worship in different languages and cultures, the Holy Spirit works in them as he does in us. He does so with one goal in mind –to lift up the name of the Son to the glory of the Father.

Finally, Paul tells us that there is also only one hope. The word *“hope”* in our day often comes with a measure of uncertainty. A student may say, “I hope I will pass my exam.” The idea here is that he or she is uncertain but wants very much to have a passing grade. Hope, in the Biblical sense is very difference. Hope in the Bible is an expectation. The expectant hope of all believers is the forgiveness of sin and an eternal inheritance with Christ.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

No matter where you live or worship there is only one body. The same Holy Spirit works in every true believer. We all have a common expectation -the forgiveness of sin, and eternal life through Jesus Christ and His work on the cross.

Verse 5

In verse 4 Paul told the Ephesians that there was only one body, one Spirit and one hope. He continues here in verse 5 by adding three more things we all have in common as believers.

First, there is only one Lord. We all bow the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ and to Him alone.

Second, there is also only one faith. The word used here refers to the truth we believe. This is not to say that we do not have differences of opinion in certain matters of interpretation. It does mean however, that all believers accept Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Saviour. All believers accept that salvation is through Christ alone and His forgiveness offered at Calvary. The person who rejects Jesus as Saviour is not a believer.

Third, there is only one baptism. Baptism in the church is a sign of identification with Christ, His covenant promises, and His people. It was a command of God practiced by believers to publicly declare their commitment to Christ.

Some believers see here a reference to the baptism of the holy Spirit, not in the sense of a second blessing, but rather the infilling of God's Spirit at the time of salvation. While there may be some merit to this interpretation, the problem is that Paul has already spoken about the Spirit in verse 3. It may be best to see the baptism referred to here as water baptism which was practiced by all believers at the command of Jesus.

Verse 6

The apostle Paul continues his thought from verse 5 by revealing one more detail that all believers have in common — *“one God and Father of all.”*

Ephesians 4

All believers bow the knee to one Father. They believe Him to be God. They belong to Him as His children. As children of God, they understand three things about Him as their Father.

First, His is “*over all*.” He is greater than all, and rules over all.

Second, their Father is also “*through all*.” There are a variety of opinions on what Paul means here. The word through, for example, might be interpreted by the phrase, “by means of.” In other words, God accomplishes His purpose through us. “Through” can also express movement of an object from one point to another. A river might flow through a valley, watering it as it passes. The presence of God flows through us as He works out His purposes on this earth. We have the privilege as believers to be the instruments God uses as He flows in and through us.

Finally, believers understand their father to be “*in all*.” He lives in us in the person of the Holy Spirit. The oneness of the three persons of the Trinity is such that where one member is, so are the others.

Let me say one final thing here about the word “all.” When Paul tells the Ephesians that God is over all, through all and in all, it is good to remember that he is speaking to believers here. The words, over, through and in, have an application in the life of a believer that they do not have in the unbeliever.

Verse 7

Having spoken about the things all believers share in common, Paul now moves on to speak about the different gifts or offices God has given to the church (see context in Ephesians 4:11).

The apostle begins by telling the Ephesians that “*grace was given to each one of us*.” The word, grace here refers to a special gift or calling from God. Notice particularly that this special gift of grace was given to “*each one of us*.” God has given us each spiritual gifts and callings to use for Him. None of us are excluded.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Paul goes on to say that this grace was given “*according to the measure of Christ’s gift.*” To understand what Paul is saying here it may be helpful to examine what he told the Romans in Romans 12:

3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. – Ro 12:3

Paul tells the Romans they were to think of themselves “according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” He goes on to explain this more fully when he them:

6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith – Ro 12:6

We see here than, that God has assigned a measure of faith (Romans 12:3) and we are to use our spiritual gifts in proportion to the measure of faith we have received from Him (Romans 12:6).

It seems to me that it is best to understand Paul’s words, “*according to the measure of Christ’s gift*” in the light of what he explains about spiritual gifts in Romans 12. In other words, God gives a measure of faith along with the spiritual gifts and offices. Those who exercise these gifts must do according to the faith He God has given them. That it to say, according to the leading of His Spirit and His Word. The faith to trust Him and to step out is equally as much a gift as are the offices and spiritual gifts themselves.

Verse 8

Quoting from Psalm 68:18 Paul uses the illustration of a military commander who is coming back from a great victory. The Psalm has three things to tell us about this military conqueror:

First, “*He ascended on high.*” When the victorious king had conquered his enemies, he would stand on a high place, whether that be on his chariot or some other elevated platform, so that all could see him. We do this in sporting events. The winners stand on

Ephesians 4

a platform for all to see. In this case, the Lord Jesus, after His victory on the cross rose to be seated at the right hand of the Father.

Second, the conquering king “*led a host of captives.*” In this case, the king would take his enemies captive and lead them in chains to his homeland where they would become his servants. The Lord Jesus is pictured here leading His enemies into captivity where they would be judged.

Finally, the conquering king “*gave gifts to men.*” The wealth of the conquered lands would benefit the king’s subjects. The picture is of the king showering gifts on His subject as he returns from battle.

Paul uses Psalm 68:18 to describe what the Lord Jesus has done for us. He has conquered sin through His death on the cross and rose victoriously over death to be seated at the right hand of the Father. As a conqueror, He has defeated our foe and led it into captivity where it will never again stand against us. More than this, however, we benefit from His victory not only because He overcame, but also because, in His grace, He showers us with spiritual gifts and benefits beyond measure.

Verse 9

In verse 8 Paul quotes from Psalm 68:18. Here he emphasizes a particular point the Psalmist makes in the psalm by focusing on the words, “He ascended.” Paul tells us that when the Psalmist used the words, “he ascended,” the implication was that the individual spoken of had also “descended.” In other words, anyone who ascends, does so from a descended position. In order to stand up, you first must either be sitting or laying down.

Paul uses the words of Psalm 68:18 here to show what the Lord Jesus, as a triumphant military commander, did for us. Before ascending to the Father, the Lord Jesus “*descended into the lower regions, the earth.*” There is some debate about how to translate this phrase. The King James Version and the New King James Version both translate, “*the lower parts of the earth.*” While the New International Version uses the phrase, “*lower earthly regions.*” What is Paul telling the Ephesians?

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Paul seems to be saying here that the Lord Jesus descended from heaven to the lower region of earth. He did so to procure our salvation and forgiveness. For that to take place, Jesus not only humbled himself to come to earth but died on the cross and was buried in the grave or “*lower regions of the earth*” or the place of the dead, for our sin. Most commentators agree that “*the lower regions*,” either refers to the earth itself or to the grave.

Some people see the “*lower regions of the earth*” to be a reference to hell. The assumption is that hell is in the lower parts of this earth. Scripture teaches, however, that this earth will be destroyed:

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. – Rev 21:1

Even after the destruction of this earth, however, hell and the bottomless pit remain. The assumption then, is that hell is not on this earth that will be destroyed but located elsewhere. The lower regions of the earth, therefore, cannot refer to hell.

Verse 10

Paul continues in his explanation of Psalm 68:18 by telling us that the one descended “*also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.*”

After His work on earth was completed, and He rose from the dead, the Lord Jesus ascended, according to Paul “*above all the heavens.*” The Jewish understanding was that there were three heavens. The first is what we would describe as the sky with its clouds, birds, rain and snow. The second is what we call space, with the sun, moon and stars. Finally, there is the third heaven where God is preparing us a home to be with Him forever. What Paul is saying here is that Jesus ascended past the first and second heavens to be with His father in the third heaven. Paul speaks about this third heaven in 2 Corinthians 12:2 when he says:

Ephesians 4

2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven— whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. – 2Co 12:2

When teaching His disciples to pray, the Lord Jesus said:

9 Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. – Mt 6:9

It was the clear teaching of Jesus, therefore, that the Father was in this third heaven.

Notice the reason Jesus ascended to the third heaven to be with the Father – *“that he might fill all things.”*

How does the Lord Jesus fill all things? We know first that God is everywhere present. This is the clear teaching of Jeremiah 23:24:

24 Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD.

Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD. – Je 23:24

Paul speaks about something deeper than this, however, that is the result of Jesus ascending after His work on the cross. The filling of all things speaks about conquering sin and rebellion. It speaks about breaking all resistance to the will and purpose of God and the presence of Christ filling every heart. This is the work the Spirit of God is doing now. He is bringing men and women to Christ, transforming lives and preparing for the time when all sin and rebellion is banished to the bottomless pit. Jesus ascended so that the earth would be filled with the glory of God (Numbers 14:21).

Verse 11

It is this Lord Jesus whose desire is to fill all things, who gave the church, apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

There is something quite incredible about this statement. The Lord Jesus has chosen to fill the earth with His glory through ordinary people like you and me. To do this, He descended to this earth and secured our salvation and pardon. He then filled us with His Spirit, calling and equipping us for a particular role in His body. Paul tells us that God has given the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. Each of these offices has an important role to play in the proper functioning of the church.

Verse 12

According to Paul, God has given the church apostles, prophets, evangelists and shepherds and teachers for two reasons:

The first reason God gave these individuals to the church was to *"equip the saints for the work of ministry."* It is easy to assume that these individuals, because of their calling and gifting, are to do the work themselves. While they certainly have their role to play, the apostle tells us that their purpose is to equip the saints for the work. In other words, every one of us has a role to play. To help us in exercising that role, God has given us individuals to equip us by teaching and example.

I may have a role to play as a teacher of the Word of God, but I am not the only one who teaches the Word. By writing these Bible commentaries, my goal is to support those who teach and preach the word of God around the world. I serve as a pastor but realize that I cannot do the work on my own. It is my heart to demonstrate the love and compassion of Christ so that those in the congregation have an example to follow in their own conversations and dealings with those around them. God gives us pastors and teachers to stand with us and support us in our service for the Lord.

The second reason why God gives us these various offices in the church is so that the body of Christ is built up and strengthened. As each member learns to function as God intends and steps out to minister in His name, God's people are encouraged and strengthened. The kingdom of darkness is pushed back, and the name of the Lord Jesus exalted.

Ephesians 4

Verse 13

Paul has been speaking about the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers that God has given to the body. In the last verse he told the Ephesians that these offices were given to equip the saints for ministry. He goes on here to say that the ministry of these servants would be needed until four goals were achieved:

First, *“until we all attain to the unity of the faith.”* In Paul’s day there were many false teachers circulating among the churches. These teachers created division in the body of Christ by distracting people from the true faith taught by Christ and His apostles. In fact Paul warns the Romans about those who caused division in the church in Romans 16:17 when he wrote:

17 I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. – Ro 16:17 God has given the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to instruct the church in the true faith so that all true believers can stand unified in the true faith of Jesus Christ.

The second purpose of God for these various offices in the church is that we all attain to *“the knowledge of the Son of God.”* It is not enough that we know the truth. It is of vital importance that we come to know that truth in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. There are many in the church who proclaim their belief in Jesus, but they do not know Him as their Saviour and Lord. They attend church but they are not trusting Him for the forgiveness of sin. Paul tells us that God has given us apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to help these individuals to come to a true saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Third, God has given us these various officers in the church so that we can all attain *“to mature manhood.”* Not all who come to Jesus Christ grow in their relationship with Christ. The writer to the Hebrews addresses this when he says:

12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again

Light To My Path Bible Notes

the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, 13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. 14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. – Heb 5:12-14

The work of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers is to help these children in the faith, mature in their understanding of their responsibility before God and His call on their lives.

Finally, God has placed these offices in the church so that we can all attain *“to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”* This is the goal. It is the heart of the Father that we attain to the stature of Christ. That is, that we become like Christ in our thoughts, actions and attitudes. It is the desire of God that we experience the fullness of Christ in our live. In other words, that Christ fill every part of our life and that we know His transforming work in every thought, attitude and deed.

God has given to the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers so that we can stand united in the truth about Jesus and His work, come to know Him personally, mature in our walk with Him and ultimately become like Christ in thought and deed. Until this is the case, there is still much work to be done. Know, however, that God has gifted and qualified servants to whom he has given this charge.

Verse 14

The apostle has been speaking about how God has given the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. He has been emphasizing the importance of these various offices in the church. He continues here on this theme and tells the Ephesians that these servants of God were given to the church *“so that we may no longer be children.”*

Ephesians 4

Paul uses the illustration of children to convey immaturity. He is telling the Ephesians here that God gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to the church so that she might be matured (see verse 13). It is the will of God that we grow in our relationship with Him. Notice how Paul describes this immaturity here.

First, the immature believer is one who is *“tossed to and fro by the waves.”* Imagine a boat in the middle of the ocean during a great storm. These huge waves toss the boat about and threaten to sink it. There is nothing the captain of the ship can do. The boat is at the mercy of the waves. It is unstable. It is driven wherever the waves determine, and it does not have the strength to resist. This is what immature believers are like. The waves of false doctrine and temptation threaten to sink them, and they do not seem to have the ability to resist or the wisdom to discern the truth.

Second, the immature believer is *“carried about by every wind of doctrine.”* Where I live, in the autumn season, the leaves begin to fall off the trees. They lay on the ground and a gust of wind comes by, picks them up and scatters them. These leaves are not anchored to anything and so they are easily blown by the wind. Immature believers are not fully grounded in the truth of God’s Word, nor are they living in the power of God’s Spirit. The wind of temptation and falsehood quickly pick them up and drive them into error and sin.

Remember here that Satan is quite cunning, crafty and deceitful. He deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden and continues to deceive many in our day as well. It is the role of the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher to give these immature believers the tools required to resist falsehood, error and temptation.

Verse 15

Paul tells the Ephesians that they were to “grow up.” In verse 14 he used the illustration of an immature child. He tells the Ephesians here that they were to mature into adulthood in their faith.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Notice that the apostle tells the Ephesians that they were to “grow up in every way.” I have met believers who have had a very clear understanding of the truth, but who have not been able to love their brother or sister who differs from them in some minor doctrinal point or practice. There are believers who have never been able to forgive a brother or sister for an offense. Others never seem to be able to overcome some sin in their lives. Paul’s desire for the Ephesians was that they grow up in every way. That is to say, they learn to walk in the power of Christ in every part of their life. This of course, is a lifelong process but one that each believer must be committed to. Paul tells us two things about this maturing process.

First, we are to mature by “speaking the truth in love.” The implication here is that we influence one another as we speak the truth. That truth is laid out for us in the words of the apostles and prophets who were inspired by God. It is communicated by evangelists, pastors and teachers. It is shared between one believer to another. That truth corrects, warns and rebukes those who have gone astray. It comes in a word of encouragement from a fellow believer in a time of trouble. Paul tells the Ephesians, however, that this truth must be communicated in love. A harsh, judgemental and proud word, spoken in anger is not conducive to maturing a fellow believer in Christ. Truth and love must walk hand in hand if the words we speak are to have the effect of maturing the body of Christ.

Second, we are to mature *“into him who is the head, into Christ.”* The maturity Paul desired for the Ephesians was a maturity in Christ. They were to become more and more like Christ in word, thought and deed. They were to learn to abide in Him as the branch abides on the Vine. They were to die more and more to themselves and their own agendas and surrender more to Christ.

Verse 16

It was the desire of the apostle Paul that the Ephesians mature in the Lord Jesus Christ in every way. As each individual member of the body of Christ matured, they built up the whole. The unity and maturity of the church was dependant on the Lord Jesus and its response to Him. Notice what Paul teaches the Ephesians here.

Ephesians 4

First, the body of Christ is part to the Lord Jesus – “from whom the whole body, joined.” There are many things we try to base our unity on. Some base their unity on an agreement in every point of theology. Others feel they are one if they agree on a common lifestyle or worship. Paul tells us that our unity is in the Lord Jesus and our connection to Him. Through we differ in some doctrinal and lifestyle issues, we are one in our common salvation through Jesus Christ.

Second, it is from Christ that the body is *“held together by every joint with which it is equipped.”* Consider this illustration for a moment. The Lord God has designed our body of various parts. Consider the arm for example. It is joined to the body at the shoulder and held together by a joint. The upper arm is connected to the forearm by means of an elbow joint. The hand is connected to the forearm by a wrist joint. The fingers are connection to the hand by the knuckle joints. This is how the church has been designed. People with various gifts and functions are joined together by means of the salvation of Christ and the gifts of the Spirit. These members work with each other and function as a whole. How does the upper arm work with the forearm or the fingers with the hand? This is the work of God. In the same way, the church comprised of various members and personalities joined together to form one body functioning as a whole.

Third, Paul tells the Ephesians that *“when each part is working properly,”* it *“makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”* Consider this from the perspective of the church. When the teacher takes his or her role seriously, and grows in their spiritual gift, the church is instructed in the truth. When I overcome the sin that keeps me from relating to my brother or sister as I should, my relationship is healed and the church benefits as a whole.

The apostle teaches us here that the church is built up as each individual member matures in character and service.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 17

In this next section of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the apostle has some words of advice to them about living the Christian life. He begins by challenging them not to walk like the Gentiles.

Notice how the apostle begins the verse: *"Now this I say and testify in the Lord."* The word "say" here is λέγω (légō), which refers simply to speaking words. The word "testify" (μαρτύρομαι, martúromai) speaks more of being a witness or to affirm or attest to a situation or words spoken. Notice also that the saying and testifying is done *"in the Lord,"* declaring that what Paul has to say and testify to is from the Lord.

What Paul says and testifies to as being from the Lord is that the Ephesians (or all Christians, for that matter), were not to walk as the Gentiles do. These Gentiles did not know the Lord nor were they guided by His Word. The Ephesians were to be different. They were not to be influenced by the ways of the Gentiles or their manner of thinking.

It is easy for the church to become like the world in its thinking. Notice how the apostle defines the Gentile way of life as "futile." In other words, it was empty of meaning and worthless in the end.

Verse 18

Having described the Gentile way of thinking as futile in verse 17, the apostle goes on here to explain what he means. He says three things in this verse about unbelievers and the futility of their lives.

First, unbelievers (Gentiles) *"are darkened in their understanding."* This is not to say that they are not wise and skillful. The unbeliever is capable of great things. Paul refers here, not to their practical skill and wisdom but to their spiritual lives. The light of Christ is not in their hearts. They have never come to see the reality and delight of Christ and His work.

Second, unbelievers are *"alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them."* The ignorance Paul speaks about

Ephesians 4

here is the fact that they have never come to know Christ. In some cases, this ignorance is simply because they have never heard the gospel. In other cases, it is because, though they have heard it, they have turned their back on it. In either case, they do not truly know the salvation of Christ.

The result of this ignorance, according to Paul is that they are “*alienated from the life of God.*” They did not have the spiritual life that comes from a relationship with Christ. They are spiritually dead, never having been born again in the Spirit.

Finally, Paul tells us that unbelievers are alienated from the life of God, “*due to their hardness of heart.*” The blame does not fall on God for their alienation. Their hearts are naturally hardened to God and His purpose. Were it not for the grace of Jesus Christ in reaching out to me, and giving me a new heart, I would be among those whose heart was so hard, I too would be alienated from God and without His life.

Verse 19

Paul continues in his description of unbelievers from verse 18. He shares three more details about those who do not know or acknowledge Christ. We have all known unbelievers who live a decent and compassionate life. It should be noted here that these are general statements about unbelievers.

Notice that Paul told the Ephesians that unbelievers “*have become callous.*” The word translated callous is ἀπαλγέω (apalgéō). The word ἀπαλγέω comes from two words. The first is ἀπό which refers to an absence of something. The second word is αλγέω which refers to feeling. To be calloused then is to have no feeling. It speaks of those who have no longer any shame or feeling of guilt. Paul tells us that unbelievers have “*become*” callous. The implication here is that they have brought this upon themselves by their decisions and actions. It is easy to see how this callousness happens. Ultimately, we become desensitized to the sin around. We see sinful acts and attitudes so often that we begin to accept them as normal. Even the church can become calloused to the sin and evil around it.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Paul goes on to tell the Ephesians that unbelievers have given themselves to “*sensuality*.” Sensuality refers to the pleasing of the appetites of the flesh with its lust, pleasures, and perversions. Sensuality is the never satisfied passion to please the flesh. By “*giving themselves up to sensuality*” these individuals have made a choice to allow their fleshly appetites to govern their behaviour instead of keeping it in control.

Paul takes this further to say that unbelievers are “*greedy to practice every kind of impurity*.” In other words they lust after impurity. Their flesh longs passionately for these ungodly ways.

Let me just say one more thing here. Paul speaks in this verse about unbelievers. He begins this section in verse 17, however, by challenging the Ephesians not to walk as the Gentile unbelievers do. While Paul spends verses 18 and 19 describing the unbelieving lifestyle, his challenge is to the church. It is hard to read these verses and not think of how the church has indeed fallen into the Gentile lifestyle. These issues must be addressed in the church of our day. There must be a distinction between how the unbeliever lives and how the child of God lives.

Verse 20

Having described the heart of the unbeliever, Paul shows his confidence that the Ephesians had learned to live another way. Notice how he expresses this in the verse: “*that is not the way you learned Christ!*”

The expression “*that is not the way you learned Christ!*” makes this first and foremost about Christ and not just a way of living. How the Ephesians lived was determined by their relationship with Christ. When they learned about the Lord Jesus and experienced His gracious love, their lives were transformed. When the Spirit of God came to take up residence in their lives, they became new people. Their heart was to honour the Lord. The passions and appetites of the past began to fade away. The evidence of Christ in them was a changed heart, reflected in a changed lifestyle. They were not the people they used to be, because they had come to know Christ.

Ephesians 4

Verse 21

Paul assumes here in this section, about the Ephesians. But just in case, he takes the time to explain more fully what it means to live for Christ. He begins with a threefold assumption about the members of the church of Ephesus.

The first assumption is that they “*have heard about him.*” That it to say, that the believers in the church knew about the Lord Jesus and His work on their behalf. That truth in and of itself is a life changing truth.

The second assumption is that they “*were taught in him.*” It is one thing to hear about Christ but quite another to be “*taught in him.*” The expression “*taught in him.*” Implies a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus. The Ephesians are “*in Him*” and Christ in them. They know His presence and were being taught by His Spirit in their lives. They were being changed as the Spirit of Christ convicted and transformed them more and more into the image of the Lord Jesus. There is a difference between the phrase “about him” in Paul’s first assumption and the words “in Him” in his second assumption. Both are necessary. We must hear about Christ, but we must also be taught in Him.

Paul’s final assumption here is that “*the truth is in Jesus.*” While the unbelieving world followed the passions of the flesh, the believer chose instead to look to Jesus Christ as the source of all truth and righteousness. He showed them perfectly the will and purpose of the Father for their lives.

Verse 22

Paul reminded the Ephesians in verse 21 that the truth is in the Lord Jesus. He goes on here to explain what the Lord Jesus taught and expected of them as believers in His name.

Paul tells the Ephesians that the truth the Lord Jesus taught was that they were to “*put off your old self.*” The assumption is that they were no longer the people they used to be because of the presence

Light To My Path Bible Notes

of Christ in their lives. The salvation of Jesus made a difference in their character.

The other assumption Paul makes is found in the words “put off your old self.” While the Ephesians had been changed, that old nature was still present and needed to be “*put off*.” To put off is to renounce or lay down. Imagine a conquered soldier laying down his weapon in surrender. That soldier recognizes defeat and that his weapon is of no more value. This is how it is for us. We must concede the defeat of the flesh and that it is of no more value to us spiritually. The old ways must be surrendered to the Lord and all resistance stopped. In the place of these old ways is a commitment now to follow Christ and His purpose.

Just because we have accepted Jesus as our Saviour, does not mean that we will no longer struggle with the old nature. It will raise its head and reveal its presence on a regular basis.

When it does, we renounce it and choose instead the purpose and will of Christ.

Notice how Paul speaks about the old self as belonging to “*your former manner of life*.” The believer chooses to live in newness of life. As children of God, we must renounce our former way of living. Paul describes that former way of living as a life that was alienated from God (verse 18). This demonstrated itself in a hardness of heart to the things of God (verse 18), callousness (verse 19), and a passion for sensuality and impurity (verse 19). Here in verse 22 the apostle describes this former lifestyle as “*corrupt through deceitful desires*.” These desires and passions were corrupt in that they were sinful and contrary to the purpose of God. They were deceitful in that while those who practiced these desires filled their lives with pleasures and luxuries, they would pay the price in the end when they faced eternal separation from God.

Verse 23

Paul tells the Ephesians that not only were they to “*put off the old self*,” (verse 22) but they were to be renewed in the spirit of their minds.

Ephesians 4

The word renew carries the sense of being made new. That is to say they were to be changed from the old self to the new self. This change comes about as a result of the work of Christ through which we receive new life and forgiveness. Realize, however, that this renewing is not just a one-time event in our lives, but an ongoing process as the Holy Spirit of Christ changes us and transforms us day by day into the image of the Lord Jesus.

Notice the phrase “*be renewed*.” The implication here is that this is something that is happening to us as we surrender to the work of God’s Spirit. It is not primarily something we do so much as something that is being done to us that reflects in a change of attitude, action and behaviours.

Paul speaks about this renewal taking place “*in the spirit of your minds*.” The apostle expresses a similar thought when he writes to the Romans:

2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. – Ro 12:2

The mind is the place of rational decisions and understanding. It is the will of God that our minds be filled with an understanding of Christ and His purpose and that we would respond to circumstances in life in accordance with the will of God.

The mind is a secret place for our most private thoughts, attitudes and passions. We are good at hiding these things from the people around us, but our mind influences how we respond and act in life. It is the desire of God to penetrate deep into the innermost recess of our thoughts, attitudes, understandings and passions. He wants to renew us at the very core of our being so that from there our actions and responses will follow. Putting off the old self without a renewal of the mind is futile. For our old self to be truly “put off” we must be renewed in our mind. The Spirit of God will bring about this renewal as we surrender to His inner working in our lives.

Verse 24

In Ephesians 4:22, Paul told the Ephesians that they were to put off the old self. They were then to be renewed in the spirit of their minds in verse 23. Finally, here in verse 24 the apostle tells them that they were to “*put on the new self.*” The temptation here is to see how each of these points fit together and follow logically one after the other. The reality of the matter, however, is that they are all taking place at the same time throughout our lives. There never comes a time in this world where we stop putting off the old self. If we still struggle with sinful thoughts and attitudes, we will still need to be renewed in our mind. As long as we are not like Christ, we will need to put on the new self. Notice what Paul tells us here about this new self.

First it is created after the likeness of God. This new self in Christ-like. It walks in His purpose and desires His will.

Second, it is a life of “*true righteousness.*” Righteousness relates to conforming to the standard of God and refers to our stand before God through the work of Christ on our behalf. Because of sin, we were enemies to God and under His judgement. Christ’s death brought forgiveness and pardon, removing any condemnation. This places us in a right standing with God.

Third, the new self is a life of “*holiness.*” Holiness refers to living a life that is in tune with God and His purpose. If righteousness is our stand before God, then holiness is our walk with him.

Paul told the Ephesians that the new self was “*created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*” Notice the use of the word “*created*” here. The implication is that this new self is created by God.

There is a world of difference between me determining that I will be a different person and the work of God’s Spirit in me. One has to do with human effort to please God, and the other with the transforming work of God despite my weaknesses and failures. Consider Paul, the author of this epistle. His life was radically changed on the road to Damascus. The moment he met the Lord

Ephesians 4

Jesus, he was not the same person. His life, passion and heart were transformed by the Spirit of Jesus. This was not something Paul did for himself, it was a work of God in Him. The new self that God was creating in Paul was a righteous and holy character shaped in the image of God.

Notice one final detail here in this verse. Paul tells the Ephesians that they were to “*put on*” the new self. The Greek word translated “*put on*” is ἐνδύω (endύō) which means to enter, to go under or to put on. Because he loved his son Joseph, Israel, his father, made him a coat of many colours:

*3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other
of his sons, because he was the son of his old
age. And he made him a robe of many colors. –
Ge 37:3*

Joseph did not make this coat himself. It was the creation of his father. Having a coat and putting on a coat, however, are two different matters. It was Israel’s intention that Joseph wear and enjoy the coat he made him. It was Joseph’s privilege to receive what his father created for him and wear it proudly.

This seems to be the sense of what Paul is saying here. He is telling us that God has created the new self and is working by means of His Spirit in us to make us more like His son. He expects us, however, to take off the old rags and put on this cloak of righteousness and holiness that He has made for us.

Verse 25

Paul encouraged the Ephesians to “*put on the new self.*” He takes the time over the remainder of the chapter to explain what putting on the new self looks like. He begins here by telling his readers to “*put away falsehood.*” The new self is committed to truth. The apostle goes on to explain this by telling the Ephesians that each one was “*to speak the truth with his neighbor.*” By telling the Ephesians to “*speak*” the truth, Paul refers to the words we use with one another. In other words, when a believer makes a business

Light To My Path Bible Notes

deal with another, he or she is to keep that agreement. When a promise is made it is kept. The word of a believer is guaranteed.

Paul tells us here that the reason why we must speak the truth is because *“we are members one of another.”* No relationship can flourish if there is no trust. There can be no trust if we are not truthful to our word with each other. To put on the new self is to put away falsehood and speak truth one to another.

Verse 26

If we are to put on the new self, according to Paul, we must address anger in our lives. Paul has two things to say about anger here in this verse.

First, quoting from Psalm 4:4 the apostle says: *“Be angry and do not sin.”* We often think that anger is sinful. Jesus, however, was angry with the moneychangers in John 2:14-17. God was often angry with His people in the Old Testament. If God can be angry, then anger is not a sin. The fact that God gets angry shows us that there are times when we too should be angry. When we see injustice, the slaughtering of unborn children in the womb, and the moral decline of a nation that blasphemes a holy God, should this not stir up anger in our hearts?

One of the things about anger is that it can very quickly lead to sin. If we are not careful with our anger, it can cause us to say and do things we will regret later. Anger needs to be for the right thing and channelled into a godly response. Righteous anger is always surrendered to the Word of God and the leading of His Spirit. It will never leave the flesh in control.

The second thing Paul has to say about anger is that we must never *“let the sun go down”* on it. In other words, we must not hold onto it very long. Anger has a way of controlling those it possesses. When we surrender control to our anger it will not be long before sin will find its way with us. We must daily cleanse our hearts from defilement and anger lest they hinder our relationship with God and cause us to fall. To put on the new self, we must learn to deal with anger.

Ephesians 4

Verse 27

Speaking about anger in the life of the believer, Paul tells the Ephesians that they were to *“give no opportunity to the devil.”* There are certain areas of our life where the enemy can quickly find openings. One of those opportunities is when we are angry. In these moments we let down our guard. We surrender to the flesh and in an instant the enemy’s arrow strikes its mark through the opening in our armour. Before we know it, we have spoken ungodly words or responded toward someone in an ungodly way. Sometimes, years of godly testimony is destroyed in that instant. Satan has been given an opportunity and you can be sure that he will not miss it.

Verse 28

Paul has been speaking to the Ephesians about what it means to put on the new self. He recognizes that in the church of Ephesus were individuals who had lived a sinful lifestyle before coming to Christ. He reminds them that they were to put this lifestyle aside to life instead for the Lord Jesus.

Speaking particularly to those converted believers who had been former thieves, the apostle says: *“Let the thief no longer steal.”* Paul does not hold their past against these former thieves, but he does expect a change in behaviour. There was no place for this kind of behaviour in the life of the believer.

Paul challenges the former thief to find a job and work for a living – *“but rather let him labor doing honest work with his own hands.”* Notice, that the apostle expected that the thief does *“honest work.”* The implication here is that he would work to earn everything he made and that he would not take what was not his by right of hard work.

It was not enough for Paul that the thief no longer steals. Paul goes on to say that he was to work honestly *“so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”* The thief was motivated by greed before he came to know the Lord. He was now, however, to cultivate a spirit of generosity to provide for people who did not

Light To My Path Bible Notes

have. Some thieves were motivated by poverty to steal. If this was the case, then this former thief would be able to provide for these individuals by his hard work, so that they did not fall into the same trap as he did.

For the thief to put on the new self, he needed to put an end to his old ways and learn to work honestly and open his heart to be generous with those in need.

Verse 29

Another aspect to putting on the new self has to do with how we use our words. Paul begins verse 29 by telling the Ephesians that they were not to let any “corrupting talk” come out of their mouths. The word used for corrupt here is σαπρός (saprós) which speaks of something that has gone bad and is rotting. He does not go into detail here about this rotten speech. What he does do, however, is tell the Ephesians what kind of speech should come out of their mouth.

First, the speech Paul encouraged was “good for building up.” In fact, the apostle tells the Ephesians that they were to speak “only” what was good for building up. The question we need to ask here is what we are to build up with our speech. Ultimately it is the kingdom of God that we are building. We do this by encouraging believers. We do this by encouraging righteousness and holy living. In other words, everything we say should be for the glory of God and the expansion of His kingdom on this earth.

Second, our speech, according to the apostle is to “*fit the occasion.*” The writer of Proverbs 15:23 puts it this way:

*23 To make an apt answer is a joy to a man,
and a word in season, how good it is! – Pr 15:23*

Have you ever had a word of encouragement when you most needed it? A word spoken at the right time can bring great support and blessing to the one who hears it. On the other hand, words improperly spoken, can be a tremendous burden:

Ephesians 4

15 A continual dripping on a rainy day and a quarrelsome wife are alike – Pr 27:15

Nobody wants to hear the constant dripping of a quarrelsome person. It does not edify or encourage.

The writer to the proverbs tells us that there is a time for our words. Even good words, spoken at the wrong time or occasion will not be well received:

14 Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing. – Pr 27:14

The believer must use wisdom in the use of his or her words. There is a time to speak but there is also a time to refrain from speaking:

7 a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak – Ec 3:7

We must be sensitive to the timing of our words. The right word, spoken at the wrong time can be just as devastating as words spoken in anger.

The words we speak must communicate “*grace to those who hear.*” Our words must bring blessing and support to those who hear us. This is not to say that every word we speak will be easy or appreciated. Jesus spoke words that many people rejected because they were too hard for them to accept. He spoke a truth that sometimes hurt those who heard Him. Sometimes the gracious thing to say is difficult for the listener, but it will bring healing and correction for his or her good.

To put on the new self, we must learn how to use our words. Our tongues must be surrendered to the Lord and instruments for the building up of His kingdom.

Verse 30

If we want to put on the new self, then it is of utmost importance that we do not “*grieve the Holy Spirit of God.*” The work of putting on the

Light To My Path Bible Notes

new self is not one we can accomplish on our own. We can't just stir up within us a spirit of generosity when we have been a thief all our lives. How do we stop speaking corrupt words and only speak what is edifying? This requires a power greater than us. The qualities we put on as believers are not the result of our human effort at self-improvement but the fruit of God's Spirit in us. This is why it is so important that we not grieve the Holy Spirit by resisting what He wants to do in us.

Notice that Paul tells the Ephesians that they were sealed by this Holy Spirit for the day of redemption. A king would put a seal on an object to make it official, protect it, or identify it as belonging to him. This is what the Holy Spirit does for us. He sets us apart for God and keeps us secure for the day of redemption.

The day of redemption refers to the time when Christ returns to judge the world and we are raised to be with Him forever. The Holy Spirit in us is our guarantee in that day. He is a confirmation that our sins have been forgiven and that we have the life of Christ in us.

If we are going to put on the new self, we must be careful not to resist or grieve the work of His Spirit in us for it is His work in us that make us more like Christ.

Verse 31

To put on the new self requires putting off the old ways of the flesh. If those old ways still have root in our lives, we will never truly be able to put on this new self. Paul has a list of fleshly characteristics that need to be crucified in our lives for us to become more like Christ.

First "*all bitterness*" must be put away. The writer to the Hebrews describes bitterness as a root that springs up and defiles many:

15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled – Heb 12:15

Ephesians 4

Bitterness refers to an evil root in our lives that will cause us to become angry, resentful or even hostile toward another person or situation. There are various things that can cause us to become bitter. What the apostle tells us here is that “*all bitterness*” must be put away. Bitterness has no place in the life of the believer and will ultimately only hinder our walk with God and our ability to put on the new self.

Second, if we want to put on the new self, we must put off *wrath*. The word θυμός (thumós), translated by wrath means to move with a violent motion. In essence it is the response of a bitter or angry spirit that lashes out to harm or hurt.

The third quality that needs to be put off, according to Paul is *anger*. The word used for anger is ὀργή (orgé). It speaks of the passions of the mind. While wrath is an outburst, anger is what takes place in the mind and heart. This anger may or may not be expressed, but it is the breeding ground for evil and sin. Paul tells the Ephesians that it they not only need to put off outbursts of wrath but also deal with the hidden attitudes of the heart.

Fourth, Paul addresses “*clamour*” in the life of the believer. The word κραυγή (kraugé) speaks of controversy. There is certainly a time to stand up for what is right but there are also those who seem to desire to stir up controversy in the church and society. These individuals never seem to be content unless everything is going their way. They stir up division and strife. Jesus, however, challenges us to be peacemakers when he says:

*9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall
be called sons of God. – Mt 5:9*

Next Paul addresses the matter of slander. The word translated here is βλασφημία (blasphēmía) from which we get the word blaspheme. To slander is to blaspheme another person. To speak evil and disrespectfully of that person sometimes with an intention to hurt or damage their reputation. The words spoken here may either be true or false but the depreciation of their character and reputation is inevitably the result. Paul has already told the Ephesians in this chapter that they were only to speak what was for

Light To My Path Bible Notes

the building up of the body. Slander causes division, stirs up anger, and ultimately breaks down the relationship between brother and sister.

Finally, the apostle tells the Ephesians that they were to put away all malice. The word κακία (kakía) speaks of an attitude of the mind that thinks and responds sinfully toward another. While this is an attitude of the heart toward another, it is the breeding ground for sin and evil outbursts and must be addressed.

Paul shows the Ephesians that if they are to put on the new self, they must first take off the old self. In other words, they cannot put on new clothes over the old. The old must be removed and destroyed before they clothe themselves with the new.

Verse 32

Paul concludes the chapter with three final words of counsel to the church.

First, he tells them to “*be kind to one another.*” The word kindness here is χρηστός (chrēstós). It is defined as providing what it needed. In other words, Paul is telling the Ephesians not to think only of themselves but to consider the needs of their brother and sister as well. Where there was a need, they were to do what they could to minister or provide for that need.

Secondly, the apostle encouraged the Ephesian church to be “*tender-hearted.*” They were to be compassionate toward one another. This was not just in regard to physical need but also in emotional and spiritual struggles. The compassionate or tender-hearted person shows patience with a brother or sister who is struggling. They are not quick to judge but will seek to understand and come alongside to encourage and support.

Finally, Paul tells the church to forgive one another. There will be offenses in the church.

People will say things or do things that hurt us. Paul reminded the Ephesians, however, how God sent His Son to die for our forgiveness when we were His enemies. We who have been

Ephesians 4

forgiven at such a great cost, must forgive those who have offended us.

Ephesians 5

Verse 1

Paul begins this verse with the word, “*therefore*.” This connects it to what he has just been saying in chapter 4 about putting off the old self, being renewed in mind, and putting on the new self. It is in light of this three-fold challenge that the apostle makes his appeal here in verse 1: “*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.*”

Paul tells the Ephesians first, to be “*imitators of God*.” The word imitators is μιμητής (mimētēs) which can mean, imitator or follower.

There are many who claim to follow the Lord God who are not true imitators. There are also imitators of God who are not true followers. Both of these words are important if we are to understand what Paul is saying here. We must follow God with all our heart with the intention of being like Him in character.

Now there is a sense in which not one of us could ever imitate God. God is all-powerful, all knowing, everywhere present. None of us will ever achieve this in this world or the next. None of us will be gods, but we can follow Him and strive to walk in His purpose. We can make it our goal in life to be more and more like Him in character and manner of life.

The apostle concludes the verse with the phrase, “*as beloved children.*” We seek to imitate God as beloved children. Notice two details here in this phrase.

First, we are “*beloved*.” This gives us the motivation. This love was demonstrated to us when we were in our sin. Jesus died on the cross to save us from the penalty of death. There is no greater demonstration of love than that someone would lay down His life for us. Not only was our penalty paid, but we received new life and

Light To My Path Bible Notes

entered a relationship with God through the work of His Son. We have been rescued from death and given eternal life in the presence of God. If there was ever a motivation to be an imitator and follower of God, this is it.

Second, Paul tells the Ephesians that they were also “*children*.” If being loved is our motivation, then being children is our power. As children of God, we know the presence and power of His Spirit in us. We are the recipients of His grace and favour. He hears our prayers and desires our holiness. The authority and power of God our Father is at our disposal for every victory.

Verse 2

Paul challenges the Ephesians to imitate God in their character and behaviour in verse 1. He goes on here in verse 2 to explain how to do this. They were to “*walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us*.” Notice several details in this phrase about Christ’s love.

First, it is a love that gave itself up for us. This is not a selfish, feel-good type of love. The love Paul speaks about is a selfless, and self-sacrificing love that will suffer for those it desires.

Second, the example we must imitate is that of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to love as Christ loved. He left the glories of heaven, put aside His privileges and died a cruel death on the cross as an example for us to follow.

Third, Paul tells the Ephesians that they were to “*walk*” in this kind of love for one another. The word walk puts feet to this command. It is not just a feeling but a way of life. In other words, we demonstrate this love by practical actions and deeds.

Finally, notice how Paul speaks of this love as a “*fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*.” The love Paul speaks about here is an “*offering and sacrifice*.” That it is to say there is a cost to pay. It is also, a “*fragrant offering*.” In other words, it is pleasing to God and accepted by Him as an act of love. It is also a “*sacrifice to God*.” Those who walk in love, offer a sacrifice to God. When we respond

Ephesians 5

in loving sacrifice to a brother or sister in need, we honour the Lord God. We worship Him by serving others. We sacrifice to Him when we lovingly lay down our lives for a brother or sister.

Verse 3

The love Paul called the Ephesians to walk in was a love that respected brothers and sisters. This respect, according to Paul is demonstrated in three ways in this verse.

First, by abstaining from *sexual immorality*. The sexual relationship was to be reserved for a loving, exclusive, committed, lifetime relationship with a single partner of the opposite sex. Anything outside of this, was contrary to God's purpose. We demonstrate true love for God and for each other when we respect these barriers.

Second, we respect and love each other by refraining from impurity. The word used for impurity here is ἀκαθαρσία (akatharsía) which refers to uncleanness, either physical or moral. God is the definition of moral purity. What is forbidden by Him is immoral. This would include relationships or acts that are forbidden in Scripture. For example, adultery is forbidden in Scripture and would be an act of impurity and immorality. If we truly walk in love, we will refrain from any action, relationship or thought that God defines as impure.

Thirdly, if we truly love as God intends us to love, we will resist and cast off all "covetousness." The Greek word πλεονεξία (pleonexía) is derived from two roots. The first is *pleōn*, which means, "more," and *échō*, meaning, "to have." The word πλεονεξία (pleonexía) then refers to the desire to have more, or to be greedy and jealous of the blessings of others. Covetousness is the cause of many problems in relationships. Covetous people struggle to accept that someone has something they do not have. They cannot rejoice in the blessings of another and find themselves discontent with what they have, always wanting more. This ungodly discontent and greed, according to Paul, was not to be "named" among the Ephesians. We cannot truly love one another if we cannot rejoice with the blessings of a brother or sister and find ourselves jealous and resentful of everything they have. The love Paul speaks about here

Light To My Path Bible Notes

is a sacrificial love that gives what it has for the blessing of another. Covetousness wants to take what other have. The true believer who seeks to walk in love and imitate God, sacrifices what it has for others.

Verse 4

The believer who walks in love and imitates God, will be careful in how he or she uses their words. Paul gives and Ephesians an example of three types of speak to avoid as believers in this verse.

First, there was to be “*no filthiness.*” The word αἰσχροτήs (aischrótēs) refers to indecent actions, thoughts and words which, if revealed, would bring shame to the individual concerned. These actions, words, or thoughts are contrary to the will and purpose of God. Paul tells the Ephesians that there are some things that are so filthy that the believer should not even speak about them. Consider what Paul says to the Ephesians later in this chapter:

*12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things
that they do in secret. – Ep 5:12*

The words we speak should be free of filthiness. There is no reason for us to speak of shameful and filthy things that grieve the heart of God.

Paul speaks secondly about “*foolish talk.*” He does not define what he means by foolish talk here. The word used is μωρολογία (mōrología). It is derived from the word *mōrós* meaning stupid, silly of foolish. We get the English word “*moron*” from this Greek root. The second part of the word is *légō* which refers simply to speech. The idea here is that the words spoken are unprofitable, idle, vain, empty and devoid of any value. We need to be careful in how we use our words. We should treat our words like we treat our money, investing them wisely in what will be useful and beneficial and not wasting them on frivolous things.

Third, Paul tells the Ephesians that they were not to use their words in “*crude joking.*” The Greek word Paul uses here is εὐτραπεία (eutrapelía), which is derived from “*εύ*,” meaning, “*easily*,” and “*trépō*,” meaning, “*to turn.*” This Greek word does not appear

Ephesians 5

anywhere else in the New Testament, so it is somewhat difficult to get a clear sense of it's meaning. The word "*eutrapelía*" speaks about a type of speech that is easily turned off course. For example, in the interest of a good story, an individual may disregard the truth. That person may exaggerate facts in order to get a good laugh. Consider, however, the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:37:

*37 Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No';
anything more than this comes from evil. – Mt
5:37*

Jesus tells us that the more we move beyond the simple facts of a matter the more we are tempted to stray into error. It is easy to manipulate facts to prove our point. Paul tells the Ephesians that the words they use should not easily turn from the truth to serve their own purposes. They were to stick to the facts and the truth lest they fall into error using their words. Such a use of words, according to Paul, was "out of place," for the believer.

Before concluding his thought in this verse, Paul speaks about one more use of words when he says: "*But instead let there be thanksgiving.*" Thanksgiving is an expression of gratitude and an acknowledgement of grace. The believer is to be a thankful person and his or her words are to express gratitude to God and to others for blessings bestowed. This thankfulness is not just in times when blessings flow freely, but also in times of struggle and pain. Paul expresses this to the Thessalonians when he writes:

*18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is
the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. – 1Th
5:18*

Even in times of great suffering and trial, it is the will of God that we express words of thanksgiving and praise. This requires opening our eyes to see His presence, blessing and purpose in these times.

Paul encourages us to use our words wisely as believers. If we are to be imitators of God, then we will be careful in how we use our words.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 5

Paul begins verse 5 with a certainty – “*you may be sure of this.*” What he is about to say was clear in his mind and he assured the Ephesians that it was a true statement.

Paul tells the Ephesians that there were certain people who had “*no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*” This inheritance belonged to the children of God alone. Paul is telling the Ephesians that these individuals did not belong to God, nor were they part of His kingdom. He goes on in the verse to describe two groups of people who would have no inheritance in God’s kingdom.

The first group is those who are “*sexually immoral or impure.*” The apostle said something quite similar to the Corinthians when he wrote:

*(9) Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, (10) nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (11) And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.-
1 Corinthians 6:9-11 ESV*

What is important for us to note here in 1 Corinthians is the Corinthians who had formerly been sexually immoral but were forgiven and given an inheritance in the kingdom of God. The implication here is that there is forgiveness for sexual immorality.

Paul took this a step further in his letter to the Corinthians when he said:

(9) I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— (10) not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or

Ephesians 5

the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. – 1 Corinthians 5:9-11
ESV

According to the apostle, believers were not to associate with someone who bore the name of believer but lived a sexual immoral lifestyle. They were not even to eat with this person. In other words, they were to treat these individuals as unbeliever. Paul was telling the Ephesians that there was no place for sexual immorality in the church or the kingdom of God on this earth or in the age to come. Anyone who wants to be part of the kingdom of God, must confess sexual immorality as sin, give up this lifestyle and submit to God's purpose.

The second group that had no inheritance in the kingdom of God were the covetous and idolaters. A covetous person is one who has never learned to be content. This person always wants more and makes the accumulation of worldly possessions a god. Paul tells us that this type of covetousness is idolatry. That is to say, these individuals worship their possessions and turn their back on the true God and His purpose to obtain more of this world. The apostle James speaks about this when he says:

(2) You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. (3) You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. (4) You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. – James 4:2-4 ESV

Light To My Path Bible Notes

The apostle James speaks about how believers coveted and committed spiritual adultery in their pursuit of this world and its possessions. He tells them that by lusting after this world, they made themselves enemies to God and His kingdom.

When we come to the Lord Jesus, we surrender to Him. We turn our back on this world to serve Him. We commit all we are and have to Him. He is not only Lord of my life but also of my possessions. Anyone who chooses to put this world before God, is not worthy of the kingdom of God and has no place in it.

Just as the Corinthians were forgiven for sexual immorality, so there is also forgiveness for covetousness and idolatry. The true believer, however, must confess this, and surrender all he or she has to the Lord.

Let me make one final point in closing. Is it possible for the believer to fall into the sins of sexual immorality, impurity, idolatry, and covetousness. We do not have time here to speak of men like David, the man after God's own heart, who fell into adultery. No believer lives a perfect life.

Notice how the apostle Paul words his statement in the verse – *“everyone who is sexually immoral or impure,”* and *“who is covetous.”* The apostle speaks of these individuals in the present tense. In other words, they are currently living in this condition. They are living in sin and doing nothing about it. Until such time as these individuals confess their sin and turn from this sinful lifestyle, the church is to treat them as unbelievers who are not governed by the principles of God's Word, nor are they surrendered to Christ and His purpose.

Verse 6

Paul warns the Ephesians about those who would try to deceive them with *“empty words.”*

Empty words are devoid of any spiritual or moral value. This challenge of Paul comes in the context of his words about sexual immorality, covetousness and idolatry. They are followed up in

Ephesians 5

verse 7-12 by a discussion about “works of darkness.” This leads us to understand that these empty words relate to the deception of a sinful lifestyle.

Paul warns the Ephesians about being deceived with these empty words. Consider the words of the adulteress to her lover when her husband is away, as recorded for us in Proverbs

7:

(13) She seizes him and kisses him, and with bold face she says to him, (14) “I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows; (15) so now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I have found you. (16) I have spread my couch with coverings, colored linens from Egyptian linen; (17) I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. (18) Come, let us take our fill of love till morning; let us delight ourselves with love. (19) For my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey; (20) he took a bag of money with him; at full moon he will come home.” (21) With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. – Proverbs 7:13-21 ESV

The sinful life is certainly a temptation to the flesh. The fact that Paul warns the Ephesians about being deceived, shows us that even believers can fall for the clever and seductive words of the tempter. The unbelieving world around us promotes a lifestyle that focuses on worldly pleasure, comfort and riches. It is all too easy for the church to fall prey to this philosophy.

The apostle reminds the church of Ephesus, however, that it was “*because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.*” These sinful ways are contrary to the purpose of God for the believer. In fact, He will judge the world because of their impurity and sinful ways. We would do well to remember that as tempting as these things may be, they are not God’s purpose for His children.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 7

In verse 6, Paul challenged the Ephesians not to be deceived by the philosophy of the “sons of disobedience.” These unbelievers were living an ungodly and disobedient lifestyle, pleasing themselves and their fleshly lusts. Paul tells the Ephesians that they were not to become partners with them. They were not to join them in their evil ways.

All too often the church has allowed itself to be influenced by the world and its ways. How easy it is for the church to re-interpret the Word of God to suit the culture of the day. On other occasions it is completely ignored. In the guise of building up the church, we have compromised the truth and God’s standard. Paul’s words here are important – “do not become partners with them.”

Verse 8

The apostle warns the Ephesians about not becoming partners with the sons of disobedience (verse 7). He reminds them that this is how they once lived, but they had been rescued from that lifestyle to become children of light.

The Ephesians were at one time “*darkness*.” This darkness is a reference to sin and a life that does not walk in the light of Christ and His salvation.

The apostle reminds the Ephesians that while they had at one time lived in darkness, the Lord God had rescued them. They were now “*light in the Lord*.” When they came to know the Lord Jesus, it was as if someone turned on a light. They saw what they could never have seen in the darkness of sin. For the first time their eyes were opened to see their sin. The Spirit of God also revealed the Lord Jesus and opened their heart to Him. They came to see the futility of a life lived in the flesh and the blessedness of a life in Christ. This revelation of Christ was life transforming. They were renewed by the Lord Jesus and became children of God. Paul encouraged them now to “*walk as children of light*” and renounce the former deeds of darkness.

Ephesians 5

It is important to note that Paul speaks these words to believers in Ephesus. He does so because while they were “*children of light*” they could still be tempted by the deeds of darkness and needed to be on their guard lest they fall prey to these temptations.

Verse 9

There is some confusion in verse 9 about the original words used by Paul.

The “*Greek New Testament Editio Regia (1550) Textus Receptus*” literally reads:

*light walk the for fruit the spirit in all goodness
and justice and truth – Ephesians 5:9*

The “*New Testament in the Original Greek*” compiled by Wescott and Hort reads:

*child light walk the for fruit the light in all
goodness and justice and truth*

These two important Greek texts, from which our English Bibles are translated differ in the words used. The Textus Receptus reads “fruit of the Spirit.” The Westcott and Hort text reads “the fruit of light.” This accounts for the differences in the King James Version and more modern version.

The English Standard Version uses the Westcott and Hort text here and translates: *(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true).*

Whatever the correct translation may be, the sense is the same. The proof that something is the fruit of light, or the fruit of the Spirit, is found in the fact that it is good, right and true. The measure of good, right and true, of course is the Word of God. Whatever does not pass this test of goodness, rightness and truth does not come from God.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 10

Having told the Ephesians that the fruit of the light or the fruit of the Spirit is goodness, rightness and truth, Paul now challenges them to discern what was pleasing to God.

Remember that these Ephesians did not have ready access to the Scriptures. Copies of the Old Testament were likely available in the Jewish tabernacles, but the New Testament had not been completed at this time, so believers were dependant on the teaching they had heard from the apostles and the leading of the Holy Spirit to discern what was from God.

Paul encourages the Ephesians to “*try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.*” He encourages them to take a moment to consider their thoughts, actions and attitudes and to submit them to the test of truth, goodness, and righteousness. Anything that failed this test was not from God nor was it the fruit of light or the fruit of the Spirit.

Verse 11

Anything that did not pass the test of goodness, righteousness and truth was the “*works of darkness.*” Paul has three things to say about these “*works of darkness.*”

First, the Ephesians, having discerned that something was a “*work of darkness,*” were to have “*no part in it.*” They were to resist any temptation to participate in these works.

Second, notice that Paul speaks of these works of darkness as being *unfruitful*. In other words, they are of no spiritual or moral benefit to those who participate in them. The believer is to make the most of his or her time and effort. These unfruitful works were of no use in the expansion of kingdom of God nor did them elevate the person of Christ.

Finally, the believer upon discerning that a work was an unfruitful work of darkness, was to expose it as such. By exposing these unfruitful works, the believer kept others from falling prey to its temptations.

Ephesians 5

Verse 12

There is a strange paradox in this verse. Paul has just told the Ephesians that they were not to take part in the “*works of darkness*,” but rather to “*expose them*” (verse 11). After telling the church to expose the deeds of darkness, he goes on to say that it is shameful even to speak of the things unbelievers do in secret.

The question we must answer is this: How do you expose something that is too shameful to speak about?

Consider first that Paul tells us that it would be shameful to speak about the practices done in secret. There are some things that are not helpful for people to know. These things serve no purpose in the edification of the church. By openly sharing these details, we may provide a foothold for Satan to infiltrate with division, gossip, bitterness and many other temptations. It is not helpful for the believer to focus on such activities and behaviours. Why should we fill our minds with impurity and immorality, things that God hates?

Our bodies and minds are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We are to do our best not to let anything impure or ungodly enter, lest they defile the place where the Spirit of God dwells.

This means paying attention to the kind of things we listen to and watch.

On the other hand, if we allow ungodliness, immorality and impurity to remain in the church, it will fester and drive away the blessing of God, putting us under His judgement instead. Where there is sin, it must be exposed and addressed for the glory of God. We must do our part to maintain the purity of the church as the body of Christ.

There is a balance we must learn to maintain here. We must expose and root out evil in our midst, but it is not helpful to focus on it, lest it take root once again. When dealing with sin in our midst we must remember two things. First, sin is shameful and grieves the heart of God. Second, we have a sinful flesh that is attracted to it and but for the grace of God we would speedily fall prey to its cry.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Sin in our midst must be addressed with the utmost of care. It is the source of the problems we see in our world. Its curse has brought sickness, death and disasters of all kinds. It is not something we can play with. It is not something we can take lightly. We must root it out of our midst with the utmost caution and under the protection and grace of God.

Verse 13

Paul continues to speak about exposing sin. He tells the Ephesians that when something is exposed by the light it becomes visible.

There are times when we become blinded to the truth. Satan has a way of dulling our sensitivity to what it is happening around us. People are very adept at hiding what they do not want us to see. Have you ever been surprised to find out that someone you greatly admired for their spiritual walk has fallen into grievous sin? What is going on in the hearts and minds of the people around us? What is happening behind closed doors when no one is present?

There are times when God brings these things out into the open and we see things for what they really are. It's like He kicks in the door, and, to our utter shock, the deed is exposed. As Paul says here: *"When anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible."*

What we need to understand is that this exposure is an act of grace on God's part. Until the deed is exposed there can be no resolution. Exposure is the first step to victory.

Verse 14

Things become visible when they are exposed to the light. Paul explains what he means by quoting an unknown passage: *"Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."* There is no Scripture passage that corresponds completely with these words, so we are not sure what Paul is quoting here.

The meaning of Paul's quote, however, is quite clear. The quote calls the "sleeper" to awake and "arise from the dead." Remember that the context speaks about sin and deeds of darkness. The death

Ephesians 5

referred to here is a spiritual death. The call goes out to the sinner who is lost in his or her evil deeds and practices to awake from their spiritual slumber and rise from the dead. This is the call of Christ and the gospel.

Notice the promise to all who hear this call: *“Christ will shine on you.”* The light of Christ’s salvation will penetrate the darkness of sin and death and bring life.

The light of Christ exposes sin and evil, but it does more than that. It drives that darkness away and replaces it with light and life. Sin must be exposed not only for the good of the body of Christ, but also so that the light of Christ can shine into the dark corners and bring salvation and hope.

Verse 15

Paul has been reminding the Ephesians that the shameful deeds of the flesh would be exposed, and Christ would shine His light on humankind to reveal their deeds. The apostle speaks here about the practical application of this truth. If the shameful deeds of darkness will be exposed to the light of Christ’s holiness, then Paul’s advice to the Ephesians was to *“look carefully then how you walk.”*

The King James Version translates as *“see then that you walk circumspectly.”* The word used here is ἀκριβῶς (*akribōs*) which speaks of something that is exact, or accurate. In other words, the Ephesians were to do their utmost to walk exactly as God required. They were not to divert from the path he had laid out for them. That path was to be a path of holiness.

Notice also here that Paul told the Ephesians that they were to walk *“not as unwise but as wise.”* There are all kinds of ideas about what is wise. For the believer, however, the source of true wisdom is God Himself. Writing to the Romans the apostle Paul describes God as the *“only wise God.”*

*27 to the only wise God be glory forevermore
through Jesus Christ! Amen. – Ro 16:27*

Light To My Path Bible Notes

He told the Corinthians that the wisdom of this world was “*folly with God.*”

*19 For the wisdom of this world is folly with God.
For it is written, “He catches the wise in their
craftiness,” – 1Co 3:19*

He walks in wisdom who walks in God’s purpose. The fool strays from the path of God to do things his own way.

Verse 16

We have here another practical application of the truth that God will bring the shameful deeds of the flesh to light. Paul tells the Ephesians that they were to make “*the best use of the time.*” The word used here is ἐξαγοράζω (exagorázō) and literally means to buy out or to buy up. What Paul seems to be saying is that the Ephesians were to buy up every moment of time and use it wisely. The idea that one buys up time gives is value. Each moment we have on this earth has value. We can waste our time, or we can use it for the sake of the kingdom. Paul encourages us to use all the time we can to invest in the building up of God’s kingdom.

Notice the reason why Paul tells us to make the best use of our time: “*because the days are evil.*” We can understand this in several ways. Let me suggest three possibilities.

First, we need to make the best use of our time because, in these evil days, there will be persecution, struggle and death. We will be opposed, and many will have to lay down their lives for the cause of Christ. Paul was one example of this. We must use our time wisely because we only have a limited amount to use at best, and that might be cut short because of the evil and sinful days in which we live, whether by persecution, sickness or tragedy of some kind.

Second, we need to make the best use of our time because, many believers have never matured in their faith and service. Even in the church there are those who have been caught up in the evil of the day. The time is racing toward the Day of Judgement when all will stand before our Judge to give an accounting.

Ephesians 5

Finally, the context of the chapter reminds us that we are living in evil days among a people who practice shameful deeds of darkness. Paul challenges the Ephesians to discern what was pleasing to God (verse 10), have no part in the deeds of darkness (verse 11), and watch how they walked (verse 15). It is in this context that Paul tells the church in Ephesus that they were to make the most of their time. In other words, they were to abstain from the temptations of this evil world and live each moment for the Lord. They were to make every moment count for the sake of the kingdom of God by walking in holiness and obedient service.

Verse 17

The apostle has been challenging the Ephesians to be careful in how they walk and use their time. He ties these both thoughts together here by telling them: *“do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is.”*

Notice the contrast between foolishness and understanding the will of the Lord. To walk wisely is to walk in the will of the Lord. To be foolish is to ignore that will and do things one's own way.

It is important also to note that Paul tells the Ephesians that they were to understand the will of the Lord. To understand the will of the Lord requires searching and praying. They were to seek out the purpose of God in all they did. They were to pray for a clearer revelation of His purpose for their lives. This will was not just in how they were to live but also in the use of their time. It required a willingness to surrender themselves fully each moment to God. All too often we live our lives doing the best we know how but not actively seeking to understand the purpose of God. How much energy and time has been wasted because we have not been discerning about God's will?

Verse 18

Remember here that Paul is speaking to the believers in the church of Ephesus and surrounding regions. He speaks now about getting drunk with wine.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Paul had no problem with wine in general. In fact, he suggested to Timothy, who was suffering from “*frequent ailments*,” that he should use “*a little wine*” for his stomach.

23 (No longer drink only water but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) – 1Ti 5:23

Notice the words, “*a little wine*.” I saying this Paul is cautioning Timothy about the use of excessive wine and the potential for drunkenness as a result.

Paul speaks of drunkenness as “*debauchery*.” This word speaks of an uncontrolled excess and lawless behaviour. This is especially true when the individual has no longer any control over their thoughts and actions resulting from an excess of alcohol. The result is that the sinful flesh is given control over their body and thoughts.

Instead of allowing wine and strong drink to control their thoughts and actions, Paul encouraged the Ephesians to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is true that the Holy Spirit lives and works in each believer. This is the clear teaching of Paul when he wrote to the Romans:

9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. – Ro 8:9

The words, “*anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him*,” make it clear that the evidence that an individual belongs to God is in the presence of this Spirit of God in them.

Having said this, the apostle also tells us that it is possible to grieve the Holy Spirit by our actions, and attitudes:

30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and

Ephesians 5

anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. – Ep 4:30-31

Being filled with the Holy Spirit implies that we surrender to His sanctifying and empowering work in our lives. It implies that there is no part of our life over which we have not given Him willing access and in which we are not seeking to submit to His reign.

Verse 19

This verse is a continuation of Paul's words in verse 18 about being filled with the Holy Spirit. In fact, verses 18-21 are part of a single sentence and thought. The apostle seems to be telling the Ephesians what the result of being filled with the Spirit would be. In verses 19-21

the apostle shares three characteristics of those who are filled with the Holy Spirit. The first quality is found here in verse 19.

Paul tells the Ephesians to *“be filled with the Holy Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.”* This tells us something important about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. It is His role to enable you to worship and praise *“the Lord with your heart.”* God's Spirit within us will move us to elevate and worship the name of the Lord Jesus. In particular, Paul speaks about corporate worship in singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. While it is possible for anyone to sing hymns and spiritual songs, the role of the Spirit of God is to enable us to sing these hymns and songs from our *heart*. In other words, to sing with a genuine heart of praise to the Lord Jesus for His work. Those who are filled with the Spirit of God are empowered to worship the Lord Jesus.

Verse 20

The second demonstration of the filling of the Spirit is thankfulness. Addressing the Ephesians, the apostle Paul says: *“Be filled with the Spirit, ...giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Light To My Path Bible Notes

The role of the Holy Spirit is to give us a heart of thanksgiving. Notice three details here in these words of Paul about thanksgiving.

First Paul told the Ephesians that they were to give “*thanks always and for everything*.” It is easy to give thanks when everything is going well but how do we give thanks “*always and for everything?*” When tragedy strikes, how can we be thankful. Humanly speaking, this is not possible. This is the work of God’s Spirit in us. He enables us to have a heart of thanksgiving even in the most difficult circumstances. He shows us the presence of God in our trials. He reminds us of the power and blessing of God when everything seems to be going wrong. He lifts our hearts to Jesus, and they are filled with gratefulness, despite the tragedies around us.

Second, our thankfulness is directed to God. It is true that we have been blessed by fellow believers, but we recognize the work of God in bringing these people to us. We recognize that God is behind everything that takes place. We see His sovereign hand directing circumstances and people to accomplish His purpose for our lives. The role of the Holy Spirit is to open our eyes to see this reality and lead us to thankfulness and gratitude to God.

Finally, note that this thankfulness is in the “*name of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” The name of Jesus here represents His work and character. It is because of Christ that all this is possible.

Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. He opened the door for the Spirit of God to dwell in our hearts. The Holy Spirit, sent by Christ gives us this heart of thanksgiving.

Verse 21

The final demonstration of the filling of God’s Spirit here in this section relates to “*submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ*.”

The work of God’s Spirit is evident in the relationships that exist in the church. Where there is division, His presence has been grieved. The work of the Spirit of God is to bring unity in the church under the Lordship of Christ. The Spirit of God does this by transforming

Ephesians 5

our character. He removes pride, jealousy, bitterness, anger and all other works of the flesh and replaces this with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and all the other fruit of the Spirit. This creates unity in the church. More than this, however, the Spirit of God leads us into submission to God and to one another. We seek the will and purpose of the Father even if it means sacrificing our ambitions and desires for a brother or sister. We do this with a joyful heart.

Verse 22

Paul begins a section here on the relationship between husbands and wives. As we examine this section of Paul's letter, I am aware of the various opinions of our day about the roles of men and women. Realize, however, that while the world may have its views, Paul presents to us here what He knew to be the will of God for Christian marriage.

The apostle begins with a word to Christian wives: *"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord."* There are several details we need to see here.

First, notice that Paul specifically addresses wives in this passage. Listen to what God told Eve after she and her husband fell into sin:

16 To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you." – Genesis 3:16

Notice two details here. First, Eve and every woman after her would bear children *"in pain."* Second, her desire would be *"contrary"* to her husband. She would resist him and his *"rule"* over her.

Now just as Eve's desire would be affected by the fall, so would Adam's *"rule."* He would rule from a sinful heart with selfish ambitions and desires. Christian marriages from that point onward would be affected by a corrupted desire, and a sinful rule. Paul wants to address this matter in this section. He begins by speaking to wives.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Second, Paul tells wives that they were to submit to their “*own husbands*.” The implication here is that this submission is not to someone else’s husband. Her devotion and submission were to this one man.

Thirdly, Paul tells Christian women to “*submit*” to their husbands. The word “*submit*” in Greek is ὑποτάσσω (hupotássō). The word is derived from two root words. The first is *hupó*, meaning, under, or beneath. The second word is *tássō*, meaning, to place, to set or to arrange. Together they carry the sense of arranging oneself under another person. In this case Christian wives were to arrange themselves under the authority of their own husband. The implication is that they supported and stood behind him in the role God had given him as a leader and head of the family unit.

Finally, wives were to submit to their own husbands “*as to the Lord*.” Some people interpret the words “*as to the Lord*” to mean, submit to your husband in the same way you would submit to the Lord. The problem with this interpretation is that it gives the husband too much authority. No man should have this kind of authority. As a mere man, I make mistakes and sometimes lead from a sinful heart. Submitting to me as a husband, father or pastor is not the same as submitting to the Lord.

It is better to understand the words, “*as to the Lord*” to say: Submit to your husband, because this is what God is asking you to do. Do this for the Lord. The Lord is your authority, and He is asking you to arrange yourself under the headship that He has established. Respect this headship as being established by God and submit.

There is another dimension we need to examine here. The words “*as to the Lord*” also imply that her ultimate submission is to the Lord. In other words, she is to submit for Him and His purpose. Should her husband demand she do something contrary to the purpose of God, the wife is to recognize her priority is to do everything “*as to the Lord*.” If she cannot do what is required for the Lord, she is obligated to the Lord alone as His higher authority.

Ephesians 5

Verse 23

Paul tells the Christian wife that her husband had been determined by God to be her head:

“For the husband is the head of the wife.”

According to Paul, God has established an order in Christian marriage. This order is not unique to marriage. God also required an order in the church by the creation of the offices of pastors, elders and deacons. These leaders were given the task of leading the people of God. In the same way, God has determined that the Christian family have an established order with a head.

The apostle goes on to describe this headship in marriage by comparing it to Christ who *“is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.”* Notice several details in this phrase.

First, consider the words, *“even as Christ is the head of the church.”* The husband is to be head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. In other words, He is to take Christ’s headship as an example. In every decision, the husband should ask, “How did Christ demonstrate His headship?” The Christian husband only exercises true headship when his decisions and actions are in conformity and submission to Christ and according to His will and example.

Second, note the word, *“his body.”* Paul tells the Ephesians that Christ, as head of the church, considers her to be His body. What do you do when your body is in pain? You do whatever you can to ease that pain. What do you do when you are hungry? You feed your body. If Christ considered the church to be His body, then husbands who follow His example, will also consider their wives as their body. With the responsibility of headship comes the joining of two bodies into one. This means that God has given the husband responsibility for his wife’s needs, hurts and struggles. He is to see those needs as his own and will be accountable to God for meeting them. When his wife hurts, he must learn to hurt. When she is in need, he must also feel that need and respond in compassion. If

Light To My Path Bible Notes

the husband is to be the head God requires him to be, He must consider his wife's needs as his own and care for them as he would care for his own.

Finally, Paul tells us that Jesus, as head of the church is also “*its Savior*.” As Saviour, the Lord Jesus was willing to lay down His life for the church. This is the example of headship the husband must follow. He must be willing to take this responsibility so seriously that he would make any sacrifice for his wife. He must be willing to lay down his life for her. If the headship being exercised by the Christian husband is all about his needs and wants alone, then he is not the head that God requires. True headship is a responsibility for the care and wellbeing of one's wife. The true head will sacrifice for his wife. This is the obligation of every Christian husband.

Verse 24

In verse 23 we examined the headship of Christ and His willingness to care for and even die for His bride. He forgave us when we were at our worst. We have the promise of forgiveness in 1 John:

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. – 1Jn 1:9

I have met believers who have taken all these blessings for granted. They live their lives with no particular concern for holiness. They flirt with the world and do not seem to be overly concerned about their poor relationship with God. They are lukewarm believers whose testimony has been severely tarnished.

What would you say to these believers? Would you not tell them that they were not living in a right relationship with Christ. Would you not encourage them to surrender their worldly lusts and passions to Him? Wouldn't you encourage them to turn from the world and submit to God?

The church is comprised of those who have committed themselves to walking in submission to Christ and His purpose. In fact, any

Ephesians 5

individual in the church who refuses to do this, is to be disciplined and in some cases removed from the church until such time as they repent and submit to God and His will for their lives.

Paul told the Ephesian husbands that they were to be the head of the family. As such they were to follow Jesus Christ and His example of forgiveness, compassion, sacrifice and mercy.

Imagine, however, a wife who determines that because her husband is bound to forgive and care for her, she can live as she pleases. She chooses to spend her time with other men and disrespects her husband. She belittles him and shows him no respect. She speaks badly of him and constantly clashes with him in their day-to-day routine. She lives only for herself and has no thought of him. What would you say to such a wife?

How does the church submit to Christ? She does so by respecting Him and His wishes. She does so by her faithfulness to Him. She is willing to die to herself and gives sacrificially to her Lord.

This, according to Paul is how a Christian wife should respond to her husband. She should demonstrate her submission to God by loving her husband, respecting him, giving sacrificially and by being faithful to him alone.

Verse 25

Speaking now to husbands, the apostle challenges them to love their wives. If Christ is the example of headship, He is also the example for this love. Husbands were to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Paul explains what he means by this when he adds the phrase *“and gave himself up for her.”*

The demonstration of Christ’s love for the church was found in His willingness to lay His life down to die for her. This was a sacrificial love that willingly went to the cross and died on her behalf. This is the kind of love the husband needs to have for his wife.

This love demands sacrifice of time, effort and resources. It is not a love that can focus on its own interests alone but must willingly die

Light To My Path Bible Notes

to those interests to provide and care for his wife. Paul tells the Corinthians that the married man must be interested in worldly things because he has an obligation toward his wife and his interests are, by necessity, divided:

33 But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. – 1Co 7:33-

34

A married man needs to be concerned about how to please his wife. This requires time and effort on his part. The love spoken of here is not just a feeling but a commitment with feet and hands and very real sacrifice for his wife.

Verse 26

Paul continues his statement about the example of Christ's love for His bride, the church. Jesus laid down His life for her on the cross. She did not deserve His love, but He chose to die, pay her penalty, and "*sanctify her.*" The word used here for sanctify is the Greek word ἁγιάζω (hagiázō) which means to make holy. The fact that Christ must make her holy show us that she was not so at first. In fact, she was a sinner, undeserving of the blessing and mercy.

Despite her uncleanness, the Lord Jesus cleansed her. Paul tells us that He did so by the "*washing of water with the word.*" In other words, He gave her His word and instructed her in the path of righteousness. He applied the truth of that word to her heart and transformed her into a new person. Under His tender care, His bride, the church, flourished and became a beautiful and holy woman.

Ephesians 5

Verse 27

The Lord Jesus took a sinful and rebellious people and transformed them into a beautiful bride. Notice how Paul describes the church, as the bride of Christ.

First, Christ *presented the church to himself*. He transformed the life of dirty sinner into a radiant bride. The picture is of this bride being presented to Christ as a delighted husband who is proud to call her His own.

Second, she is presented to Christ in splendour. The word used here is ἐνδοξος (éndoxos) meaning, glorious, honoured or noble. The work of God's Spirit in the church has transformed her into a noble and honourable person. She stands before Him dressed in her royal robes. He clothed her with these robes. He cleansed her. She is a long way from what she used to be. She stands forgiven, sanctified and beautiful before her husband.

Third, the bride stands before Christ without "*spot or wrinkle or any such thing*." All sin has been forgiven. Her past with all its failures is forgotten. In His eyes, she is "*holy and blameless*." No sin will be held to her charge.

Paul describes this loving work of God for the church to show husbands how they were to love their wives. They were to care for them, forgive them and cherish them even as Christ did the church.

Verse 28

Paul tells husbands that they are to love their wives as their own bodies. There are those who interpret this to mean that the husband should treat his wife as he would like to be treated. There is an element of truth to this statement, but Paul seems to have a deeper meaning than this.

When Paul tells the Ephesian husbands to "*love their wives as their own bodies*," he is not telling them to do for their wives what they would want them to do to them. Though the principle is a good one, it is not what Paul is communicating here. He is telling husbands

Light To My Path Bible Notes

that they were to consider their wives body as theirs and love it as such.

He confirms this by the words. *“He who loves his wife loves himself.”* Paul believed that the married couple were one and not two separate individuals. This is the teaching of Jesus in Mark 10 when He says:

7 ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, 8 and the two shall become one flesh.’ So, they are no longer two but one flesh. – Mk 10:7-8

The prophet Malichi says a very similar thing when he wrote:

15 Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. – Mal 2:15

According to Paul, there is a union between husband and wife. They become *“no longer two but one flesh.”* The husband was to strive to see his wife as part of himself. Just as he could not pull off his legs and go to work, so his wife was to be taken into consideration in all that he did.

Verse 29

Paul continues with the illustration from the last verse of the husband and wife being one body.

He tells the Ephesians that no one ever hated his own flesh. It is true that many people commit suicide and harm themselves. Realize, however, that even these individuals are looking out for themselves. They want release from the pain and sorrow they feel in their body and mind.

It is a natural thing for us to care for our bodies. If you see an object heading in your direction you get out of the way. If you are hungry,

Ephesians 5

you look for something to eat. If you are sick, you naturally do what it takes to get better.

Paul reminds the Ephesians that the Lord Jesus cares for, nourishes and cherishes the church as His body. He comforts us in our sorrow. He provides for us in our need. Husbands were to see their wives as their own body. Her pain is his pain. Her needs are his needs.

Verse 30

Paul tells us that Christ nourishes and cherishes the church *“because we are members of his body.”* We are one with Him and He with us. You cannot separate Christ from me nor me from Christ. My passion is to be one with Him in mind, heart, soul and body. I want His life in me. I want to be like Him. I want every decision I make to be in line with Him. I want every thought I have to be His thought as well. I do not want a corner of my life for myself. I want Him in every part of my life. I want to so identify with Him that I am lost in Him. According to Paul, marriage and the oneness of a couple in marriage, is a symbol of this type of relationship and intimacy between Christ and the church.

Verse 31

To underscore what he has been saying about the husband and wife being one flesh, Paul quotes from Genesis 2:24. Genesis 2:24 tells us that it was the intention of the Lord that a man should leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife. The word used here for *“hold fast”* is προσκολλάω (proskollāō). The word means to glue one thing to another. The idea is that two things are bound together for life. In fact, the passage tells us that they are glued together in such a way that they are no longer two but one – *“and the two shall become one flesh.”* They function as one. They support and strengthen each other in the work God has given them to do.

Verse 32

Notice how Paul begins the verse with the words, *“this mystery.”* To what mystery does Paul refer? He has been speaking about the relationship between a husband and wife and how it symbolizes the

Light To My Path Bible Notes

relationship between Christ and the church. He makes this clear in the words, *“it refers to Christ and the church.”*

As the apostle reflects on the way in which Christ has chosen the church to be His bride, his mind is overwhelmed. As he considers how Jesus willingly laid down his life on the cross to win this bride to Himself, he finds himself at a loss to explain it. It was a mystery that God would love sinners to this extent.

God has chosen to reveal this great mystery of the passion and desire of Christ for His church through the union of a husband and wife. As married couples this ought to be central in our thoughts as we live out our lives. To what extent does our marriages reflect this incredible mystery?

Verse 33

The apostle concludes the chapter with a final two-fold exhortation.

The first challenge is to the husband. He tells husbands to love their wives as themselves. That is to say, they were to care for, honour and cherish them as they would their own body.

The second challenge is to the wife. He tells wives to respect their husbands. The word respect in the Greek language is φοβέω (phobéō). It literally means to fear, to be frightened, or terrified. We are so accustomed to seeing fear in a negative sense. Fear, however, is not always a negative thing. Expressed in a more positive way, to fear is to reverence and respect. To fear God is to reverence Him as God and live our lives in submission and loving devotion. This is the sense that Paul is trying to convey. For the wife whose husband loves her as he would love himself, there is no fear of harm or abuse. Her fear of her husband is one of respect, honour and submission.

Ephesians 6

Verse 1

Having spoken to husbands and wives in the last chapter, the apostle moves now to the children in these families.

Paul commanded children to obey their parents. The word used here is ὑπακούω (hupakouō) which means to hear and surrender to a superior authority, whether that be willingly or unwillingly. In telling children to obey, Paul is placing them under the authority of their parents.

Notice that the apostle tells these children to obey their parents, “in the Lord.” The implication is that these children were to obey their parents as they would obey the Lord.

We can imagine some of these children would have come to the Lord from unbelieving families who worshipped idols. Imagine this family requiring their child to sacrifice to their family’s pagan deities. Should parents require something that would dishonour the Lord God of Israel, these children were to recognize their higher obligation to the Lord God and refrain from doing what would disrespect Him.

The apostle concludes the verse with the words, “*for this is right.*” It is God’s purpose that children align themselves under the authority of their parents.

Verse 2

Paul’s first challenge to children is to obey their father and mother (Ephesians 6:1). Here in this verse, he speaks about children honouring their parents.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

The word honour, in the original language is τιμάω (timáō) which means to reverence, esteem or value. When we honour someone, we are careful about how we use our words when speaking to them or about them. Our actions demonstrate the value we place on those we esteem. Children who wish to honour their parents will not shame their parents by how they live. They will respectfully listen to their instructions and walk faithfully before them.

Paul reminds the Ephesians that this commandment is “*the first commandment with a promise.*” Paul speaks here about the promise made in Exodus 20:12:

*12 “Honor your father and your mother, that your
days may be long in the land that the LORD
your God is giving you. – Ex 20:12*

The land that God gave to His people was a blessing from Him. There was a time, however, when the Lord took that land from them because they rebelled against Him and disobeyed His law.

What God told the young generation is that if they dishonoured their parents, His hand of judgement would fall on them, and He would strip them from their land. If, however, they honoured their parents, they would know His ongoing blessing in their land.

Consider this for a moment. When children begin to turn from their parents and disrespect those who brought them into this world, this is just the beginning of the downfall of a society. Where parents are disrespected, teachers, government, law officials, religious authorities are not spared. I would dare say that Scripture itself will not be respected or obeyed. When this happens, the blessing of God is often removed from the land.

Verse 3

Paul reminds the Ephesians about the promise attached to honouring father and mother. According to Paul there are two aspects to this promise.

Ephesians 6

First, it would go well with them. In other words, the blessing of God would be on the society that honoured parents. When children learned to respect parents, they would also respect other authorities in the land. When they valued their parents, they would also value other members of their community. Supportive and respectful communities such as this were a blessing.

Paul tells the Ephesians, secondly, that when parents are honoured in a society, those who live in that society live long. Long life was a sign of God's blessing. Sin and rebellion against God brought the curse of sin and death to this world. Sickness, plagues, crime and violence of all kinds ravaged the earth when sin entered.

When a society loses this respect and honour, it quickly deteriorates into sin and rebellion. Where the values taught by parents are ignored the society plunges into chaos. Anxiety, worry, crime, sickness, disease of all kinds are the natural result, shortening life and deteriorating its quality.

According to Paul, society and everyone in it, benefits greatly when children are taught to respect and honour their parents from an early age. The values they learn through this, will have a rippling effect on the quality of our life.

Verse 4

Paul has two words of counsel to fathers in this verse.

First, fathers were not to "*provoke their children to anger.*" The phrase "provoke to anger," in the Greek is παροργίζω (parorgízō). It is comprised of two root words, *pará*, meaning, at the point of, and *orgízō* meaning, anger. Together these words imply bringing someone to the point of anger.

There are many ways fathers can provoke their children to anger. They can do so by breaking their spirit. They can disrespect their children and belittle them. They can be controlling and domineering. None of these things come from God and can create resentment, and rebelliousness in the end.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Second, fathers were to bring their children up in “*the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*”

The word for discipline here is παιδεία (paideía) which refers to correction. It is not so much punishment for improper behaviour as it is correction for the purpose of training and teaching a child what is right.

The word, instruction, in the Greek is νουθεσία (nouthesía) and speaks of an admonition, warning or encouragement that directs a child to the right path and proper behaviour.

Notice here that fathers were to bring their children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. In other words, they were to correct and encourage their children to walk in the ways of the Lord. They were not to be harsh and overbearing in this, lest they anger their children to the point where they wanted nothing to do with their faith.

Verse 5

Slavery was a common practice in those days. Some of these slaves were coming to know the Lord and were part of the church. While Paul does not encourage slavery here, he recognized it as a reality in the culture of the day and addresses these Christian slaves as part of households in Ephesus.

The apostle challenged bondservants to obey their “*earthly master with fear and trembling.*” The fear spoken of here is not so much a terror of their masters, but rather a reverence and respect. In other words, they were to honour their masters by diligent work and faithful service.

Bondservants were also to obey with “*trembling.*” Some see here the idea that because their masters had the legal right to punish disobedience, slaves were to be fearful of this discipline and do all they could to serve faithfully and obediently. The combination of the words “fear and trembling” in Scripture, however, seems to refer to a deep seriousness and respect.

Ephesians 6

Consider for example how the Corinthians received Titus:

15 And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling – 2Co 7:15

The phrase, “fear and trembling” here does not mean that the Corinthians were afraid of Titus, but rather that they treated him with deep reverence and respect.

Paul challenges the Philippians to work out their salvation with fear and trembling:

12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, – Phl 2:12

Paul is not telling the Philippians to worry and fret with no assurance of salvation here. What he is saying is that they were to take this matter of living out their Christian life very seriously.

What Paul seems to be telling slaves is that they were to respect their masters and serve them faithfully. They were to take this seriously and demonstrate their faith in Christ by how they served their earthly masters.

The apostle goes on in the verse to explain how these slaves were to obey their earthly masters with fear and trembling.

First, they were to obey from a sincere heart. This shows us that the fear and trembling Paul speaks about is not so much about terror and being afraid of their masters, as it is about respect. Paul is not telling slaves to be afraid of their masters from a sincere heart. He is telling them rather to respect them from a sincere heart. They were to submit willingly to their masters. Until the Lord freed them from their bondage, they were to respectfully serve these earthly masters from a sincere and genuine heart of submission and devotion.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Secondly, they were to serve their masters as they would serve Christ. How did they serve Christ? They did so by submitting to Him and His purpose. They did so faithfully and obediently with sacrificial heart. This is how they were to serve their masters.

Verse 6

In verse 5, Paul told slaves to serve their masters as they would serve Christ. He explains this more fully here. He has three things to say about how slaves were to serve their masters:

First, they were not to serve by the way of “*eye-service*.” Eye service is service rendered only when someone is watching. When those eyes are no longer present, they no longer work. Paul encouraged slaves to be faithful even when the master was not watching them. They were to serve with integrity, doing their best for the master.

Second, they were not to serve as people-pleasers. A people-pleaser is one who seeks to gain favour and recognition from people. While slaves were certainly to do their utmost to please their masters, this was not to be their primary goal.

Third, the primary goal of the Christian slave was to do the will of God from the heart. It was to honour God and bring pleasure to Him. If that meant sacrificing their freedom as a slave to serve even a cruel earthly master, they would do all they could to bring honour to their God in it.

Verse 7

Not only were slaves to serve their masters from the heart, but they were to render their service “*with a good will*.” Having a good will refers to a cheerful and willing spirit. In other words, they were not to offer their service with a bitter and angry spirit. Paul goes on to explain how they could do this.

Slaves were to render their services for their master to the Lord. They were to serve the Lord by serving their masters. Their allegiance was to be first and foremost to God. They were to harvest the master’s fields for the Lord. They were to clean the master’s

Ephesians 6

floors for the Lord. They were to do these things as if they were doing them for the King of kings. Even the most tedious of tasks has deep significance when done for the Lord.

Verse 8

Paul reminded Ephesian slaves that whatever good they did would be rewarded. As slaves the good they did would not always be easy. They would sometimes suffer greatly to be faithful to their earthly masters. What these slaves needed to understand is that God was not blind to the things they suffered. God saw their pain and struggle and would reward them in His time. No good done for God would go unrewarded.

Notice the phrase “*whether he is a bondservant or is free.*” It would be possible for slaves to feel that because they belonged to their masters they were obligated to obey. A free man could choose to do good and would be rewarded for this choice. The slave, on the other hand, did not have a choice. He had to obey or be beaten. Paul reminds these slaves, however, that by serving their masters with a willing and cheerful heart, they would also be rewarded.

Verse 9

Where there were slaves, there were also masters. This was the case even in the church in Ephesus. Paul concludes his exhortation to slaves with a word to Christian masters. Consider here Paul’s exhortation to Christian slave owners.

First, Paul tells Christian slave masters to “*do the same to them.*” This takes us back to Paul’s challenge to the slaves. They were to serve their masters from the heart, with a good will toward them, as they would serve the Lord. This same challenge went out to Christian slave masters. They were to treat their slaves with fear and trembling, knowing that by disrespecting them they would answer to God. They were to demonstrate their Christian faith by how they treated their slaves.

Second, slave masters were to stop “*threatening.*” Many masters, in order to get work done by their slaves, would threaten to beat or

Light To My Path Bible Notes

harshly discipline them. The threat of beating, whipping or deprivation was the motivation used to encourage slaves to work harder. Paul challenges this mentality by forcing Christian slave masters to ask whether this was how God would have them treat their servants. Was it the will of God that Christian masters ruled over their slaves by fear and beating?

Admittedly, there are many people who live their lives in fear of God's wrath. The question, however, is whether this is the kind of relationship God wants with us. Does God want us to live in terror of Him beating or punishing us for every failure? Paul has just told the Christian slaves that they were to serve their masters from their heart with good will. This is the attitude God expects from us as well. He wants us to willingly submit from a joyful heart. If this is the case, then Christian slave masters were to follow this example. They were to do all they could to encourage their slaves to serve from a willing and joyful heart and not a heart constantly fearful of beating.

Christian slave masters were to be aware that they too had a Master in heaven. Their heavenly Master showed no partiality. In other words, He loved the slave as much as the master. He would demand an accounting for any mistreatment of His children whether they be slave or free. If the earthly masters were to honour their heavenly Master, they would treat their servants with respect and dignity, accepting that before God they were equals.

Verse 10

Paul begins a new section on the armour God. As he opens the section, he challenges the Ephesians to *"be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might."*

The apostle uses three words here: strong, strength and might. Each of these words is attributed to God. Paul tells the Ephesians to be strong *"in the Lord,"* and in the strength of *"his"* might. Clearly the strength and might Paul speaks about here is not human but divine. He is telling the Ephesians that God's strength is available to them. More than this, however, he tells them they are to make use of this strength in the battle that is before them.

Ephesians 6

The word used here for “*be strong*” is ἐνδυναμόω (endunamóō). It means to be strengthened or to be equipped with power. Paul uses this same Greek word in Philippians 4:13 when he says:

*13 I can do all things through him who
strengthens me. – Phl 4:13*

He speaks here about a strength that came from Jesus Christ that equipped him to do His will and purpose.

The second word translated “*strength*” is κράτος (krátos). This word denotes might, power and dominion. It is often used in the New Testament to speak of the dominion of God. Consider it’s use in Jude 25 and Revelation 1:6. In both cases it is translated by the English word “dominion.”

*25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus
Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and
authority, before all time and now and forever.
Amen. – Jude 22,25*

*5... To him who loves us and has freed us from
our sins by his blood 6 and made us a
kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him
be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.
– Rev 1:5-6*

Paul is reminding the Ephesians that the God who strengthens them is the God who has dominion over all His creation.

The final word translated “*might*” is the Greek word ἰσχύς (ischús). It conveys the idea of physical or moral strength. Those who have this might are powerful, healthy and able. All of this is a gift from the Lord.

Verse 11

Paul encourages the Ephesians to put on the “*armor of God*.” Over the course of the next few verses, he will explain more about this armour. Notice two details here.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

First, the apostle tells the Ephesians that they were to put on the “*whole*” armour of God. The word “*whole*” is important. Imagine a soldier going into battle with everything but his sword. Imagine that this soldier left his shield at home. When even one piece of the soldier’s armour is missing, that soldier is at a serious disadvantage and risks falling to the enemy’s arrows. It is of utmost importance then that the soldier put on every piece.

The second point Paul makes here is that this armour is designed to help the believer “*to stand against the schemes of the devil.*” The apostle Peter describes the devil as a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour:

8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. – 1Pe 5:8

We need to be protected from his trickery and deceit. The armour that Paul is about to describe is not ordinary armour, but specially conceived to help us to stand up against the devil’s attacks. The opposite of standing up against the devil’s schemes is falling to these schemes. If we want to be victorious over him, we need to put on every piece of this armour.

Verse 12

The apostle tells the Thessalonians here about the nature of the battle that is before them and why they need this special armour from God.

Consider first that the battle we must fight is not against flesh and blood. It is important that we consider this.

When Paul tells us that we *do not wrestle against flesh and blood*, he was aware of his own history. The apostle, persecuted, in flesh and blood, those who belonged to the Lord Jesus. After becoming a believer in Jesus, this very same man was stoned, mocked, beaten, and imprisoned by flesh and blood human beings for the gospel he preached.

Ephesians 6

Paul's life and ministry was certainly made difficult by flesh and blood human beings who opposed him. He was aware, however, that behind all this flesh and blood was an even greater battle raging. This was a spiritual battle for the souls of man and women around the world. There was a cancer that ravaged this earth that was far more important to address than the symptoms revealed in individual hearts and lives. That cancer was sin, spurred on by the demonic forces of hell. The true battle we wrestle against is not people but the power of sin and Satan.

Paul goes into greater detail about the nature of the enemy we must address as believers here. He tells us first that we wrestle against "*rulers*" The Greek word Paul uses here is ἀρχή (arché), which literally means, beginning. It can refer to time but also to the origin of something or the ruler and authority over a dominion or cause. The word takes us back in time to a self-made authority that opposed the kingdom of God and set itself up in opposition to its Lord.

The second enemy Paul lists here is described simply as "*authorities*." The Greek word ἐξουσία (exousía) conveys the idea of right, power and ability. Those who have authority have power over people. This power and authority are not necessarily for their good. They can have the power and ability to abuse humanity for its own end.

The third description of the enemy before us is, "*cosmic powers over this present darkness*." The Greek word, κοσμοκράτωρ (kosmokrátōr) comes from *kósmos*, meaning, world, and *kratéoō*, meaning to hold. These are forces that hold the world in its grip. Satan is one of those cosmic powers over this dark world filled with sin.

Finally, in this verse Paul told the Ephesians that they were wrestling against "*spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*." Notice that these forces are forces of evil. Evil spirits, for example would be spiritual forces of evil. These are spiritual in nature. That it to say, they do not have a physical body like we do. They dwell in heavenly places. In other words, they live in the air.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Paul is reminding the Ephesians here of the nature of the forces allied against them. Flesh and blood were nothing compared to these powerful and evil forces. In fact, the power of these enemies was such that no human being would ever be able to stand against them were it not for the armour that the Lord God has provided to protect those who belong to Him.

Verse 13

Paul begins this verse with the word, “*therefore*.” This connects it with what he has been telling them about the nature of the enemy in verse 12. Notice Paul’s challenge to the Ephesians here in light of the enemy that surrounded them: “*take up the whole armor of God.*”

Paul is quite particular here. He uses the Greek word *πανοπλία* (*panoplia*) which is derived from *pás*, meaning all or every, and *hóplon* meaning weapon. It was quite important that the soldier put on every piece of armour. This armour was designed to work as a whole. No individual piece protected the whole person. Every piece was to be worn if it was to be effective against the enemy.

The purpose of this armour of God was to enable them to “*withstand in the evil day.*” Paul reminds the Ephesians that the day was evil. That is to say, the powers that they were fighting against were allied with Satan and stood firmly against the kingdom of God. All who belonged to God’s kingdom would be subject to their attacks. If they were going to resist and stand firm against these evil forces, they needed to put on every piece of the armour of God.

Notice finally Paul’s words, “*and having done all, to stand firm.*” The idea here seems to be that after having successfully battled and conquered their foes, protected by the armour of God, they would stand firm in the faith handed down to them to the honour of their Lord.

Verse 14

Paul begins his description of the armour of God by first telling the Ephesians to “*stand.*” The idea of standing has a military meaning.

Ephesians 6

To stand in this sense is to take a stance against the enemy, to dig in, and to hold one's position. This kind of standing would not be possible were it not for the armour that Paul is about to describe. Let me mention two details about this armour before examining each piece.

First, the pieces of armour Paul speaks about here are not mentioned in order of importance. Paul has already told the Ephesians that they were to put on the whole armour. Every individual piece was important. The enemy would penetrate wherever there was no protection.

Second, while there may be some significance to where each piece of armour is placed on the body, it is also possible to go beyond what is necessary in the interpretation of this passage. For our purposes, I do not want to put too much focus on why Paul calls the different pieces of armour what he does. What is of importance for us here is that we understand the nature of our defense against Satan, the world and the flesh and be sure that we demonstrate these qualities in our lives.

The first piece of armour the apostle mentions is the belt of truth – *“having fastened on the belt of truth.”*

Paul tells the Ephesians that this belt was to be *“fastened”* on. The word he uses here is περιζώννυμι (perizōnnumi). *Perizōnnumi* is made up of two roots. The first is, *perí*, meaning, about or around. The second word *zōnnumi*, refers to the act of wrapping something around oneself. In some cases, the long garments worn in the day were gathered up and knotted so that they did not hinder walking or running.

The belt Paul refers to here is the belt of truth. Truth in this sense, refers to the reality or stated purpose of a matter. In other words, God created this world for a purpose. Anything that does not line up with that purpose is error and falsehood. Jesus declared Himself to be the truth in John 14:

Light To My Path Bible Notes

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. – Jn 14:6

What does not conform to Jesus, is falsehood and error. He is the standard and measure of all truth.

We need to see from this that if we are to overcome the enemy, we must do so in truth and in conformity to the will and purpose of God. We cannot live in error and falsehood, outside of the will and purpose of God, and expect to win the battle against evil. We cannot turn our backs on the source of all truth and defeat the enemy. Our eyes and hearts must be devoted to the truth as found in the person of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit if we are going to overcome.

The battle that rages around us is a battle against the truth of God. Jesus described Satan as a *"liar and the father of lies"* (John 8:44). He and his angels stand against the purposes of God. He promotes a lifestyle and worldview that denies the will of God for our lives. We battle against the falsehoods and exaggerations of the enemy. Our great need is to put on the belt of truth to protect us from his deceitful schemes and cunning philosophies.

The second piece of armour mentioned by Paul in this verse is the breastplate of righteousness. Understand here that the breastplate of righteousness cannot be separated from the belt of truth. The righteousness Paul speaks about here is conformity to the will and purpose of God. You cannot experience the reality of righteousness without walking in truth. I say this to show that both pieces of armour work together to protect the believer.

The word used for breastplate here is θώραξ (thōrax). This piece of armour was comprised of a front and back section covering from the neck to the top of the thighs. It protected a soldier in front and behind.

The breastplate, according to Paul, was a breastplate of righteousness. The word δικαιοσύνη (dikaiosúnē) is derived from the word *dikaíos*, meaning, just. To be righteous is to be in a right

Ephesians 6

standing with God. The New Testament speaks often about this righteousness. Paul wrote about it in Philippians 3:9 when he said:

*9 and be found in him, not having a
righteousness of my own that comes from the
law, but that which comes through faith in Christ,
the righteousness from God that depends on
faith — — Phl 3:9*

Paul tells us that true righteousness is not found in our own efforts but in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The righteousness Paul speaks about here comes by faith in Jesus Christ:

*22 the righteousness of God through faith in
Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no
distinction: — Ro 3:22*

Consider this for a moment. Not one of us could ever measure up to God's perfect standard. All of us have fallen short and sinned. How could we ever be made right with God? The only way for that to become a reality is through the forgiveness of our sin. Sin kept us from being right with God. Jesus died for our sin, paid the penalty and now all who receive this pardon can be restored to a right relationship and standing once again. This is not because they merit this status, but because Jesus provided it to them as a gift received by faith in what He did for them on the cross.

How does the breastplate of righteousness protect us from the attack of the enemy? The enemy will do anything he can to keep us from God. He surrounds us with sin and temptation and blinds us to our need of a right standing with God. He tells us that we are good enough

to go to heaven on our own. He causes us to question why a loving God would ever allow anyone to go to hell. He tells us that all roads will lead to heaven. He tells us that we have not done enough to merit the salvation of God. These attacks bombard the hearts and minds of men and women around the world. What is our assurance in these times? What will repel the attacks of the enemy at this level —only the breastplate of righteousness. A right standing with God

Light To My Path Bible Notes

through the work of Jesus Christ. Knowing our forgiveness through the righteousness of Jesus Christ on our behalf is our assurance. If my right standing with God depended on me, I could never do enough. When my right standing is a gift from Christ, I can be sure that it will never fail. Satan will bombard me with his arrows of doubt, but I cling to what I have received from Christ – a breast plate of righteousness, given as a gift of grace that covers me from front to back. The enemy cannot penetrate this breastplate for it gives me a right standing with God for all eternity.

Verse 15

The next piece of armour is, according to Paul, *“shoes for your feet.”* Paul equates these shoes with the *“readiness given by the gospel of peace.”*

The word translated, *“readiness”* is ἑτοιμασία (hetoimasía). While it has been translated as *“readiness,”* here in this verse, the word also refers to solid base, a foundation or firm footing. In essence this is what a shoe does. It provides us with a foundation upon which we can walk and assures us a secure footing. The soldier who had shoes on his feet, was ready to move out at a moment notice to face any territory his feet would be required to tread in the course of his day.

Paul equates this shoe with the readiness *“given by the gospel of peace.”* Many see this readiness as a preparedness to share the gospel with other people. The wording of Paul here, however, leads us to understand that this readiness is not something we give to others but rather something *“given by the gospel”* to believers.

What is the gospel and how does it protect us in the spiritual battle that rages around us. The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ come to this earth to die for the forgiveness of our sin. It is the promise that all who accept His offer of pardon procured by the cross of Calvary, can know eternal life. This is the foundation of our hope. Like a shoe, this is what we stand on and what supports us over the rough terrain of life.

Ephesians 6

If there is a truth the enemy does not want us to stand on, it would be the message of gospel of Jesus Christ. The cross is the power of salvation and victory over Satan. This gospel of Jesus Christ is a powerful weapon against the forces of hell. Satan's legal claim to sinners is broken at the cross. Our enemy flees at the mention of the cross for He knows that he has been defeated there by the Lord Jesus.

If we are going to face the battle before us, we must know it's power to forgive sin. Only then are we prepared to stand against the lies of the enemy. No matter how difficult the terrain before us, with our feet firmly buckled into these gospel shoes, we are ready to hold our ground or advance as God calls us.

The knowledge and experience of the power of the gospel in our lives is a powerful protection against the lies of Satan and his angels. It is in this truth and confidence that we can stand strong.

Verse 16

We move now to the shield. The word used here is θυρεός (thureós) which literally means door or gate. It would later be used to refer to the large shields used by the Romans. These leather-covered shields were about four feet (1.2 metres) high and in many ways, looked like a door, thus the use of this word to describe them.

Paul compares this shield to faith and encourages the Ephesians to always keep it with them. The word for faith here in the Greek language is πίστις (pístis). It is derived from the word *peíthō* meaning to persuade. In this case, it is a conviction about the truth of Christ and what He taught. It is more than a belief, however. It is also a full and willing surrender to that truth, and a commitment to walk in it no matter the cost.

Notice how Paul tells the Ephesians that this shield was to be used in all circumstances. Often faith is seen as something to be used in certain circumstances. This, however, is not what Paul teaches. The apostle tells us that there is never to be a time when our faith in Christ Jesus and His Word does not direct us. There is never to be a time or circumstance when we are not acting from the faith we

Light To My Path Bible Notes

profess. The nature of this faith is such that it governs and watches over every aspect of our lives. Everything we do is because of Christ or for Christ.

The apostle goes on to tell us that this faith can “*extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.*” In the ancient battles of Paul’s day, one of the tactics of the enemy was to shoot flaming arrows at these large wooden shields in the hope of setting them on fire. You can imagine how difficult it would be, in the heat of the battle, to take the time to pull out a flaming arrow from a wooden shield. To address this problem, the Romans covered their shields with leather which they dipped in water before going to battle. When the flaming arrow struck the wet leather, it was extinguished.

The faith Paul speaks about here is like wet leather to a flaming arrow. When Satan shoots his arrows at us, they are extinguished by our faith in Christ Jesus and our confidence in His word.

Verse 17

The helmet is the next piece of armour required for the Christian soldier. The Greek word used for helmet is περικεφαλαία (perikephalaía). The first part of the word, “*perí*” means, “about.” The second part (kephalḗ), means, “head.” The helmet in very simple terms then, is a piece of armour put around the head to protect it from harm.

Paul tells the Ephesians that the helmet represented salvation. Let me explain what Paul means by salvation here by four simple words.

First, for salvation to be possible there must first be a *situation*. The situation we are dealing with is sin. Sin has been ravaging our land and has separated us from God. Because of sin we are under the condemnation and judgement of God. The problem is that we cannot do anything about it. We are guilty and under the eternal wrath of God. Satan and sin have defeated us.

Second, if salvation is going to be possible there must also be a *Saviour*. Our situation was grim, and we were under the wrath of

Ephesians 6

God. In the midst of this horrible reality, Jesus Christ came to this earth as the Saviour. He chose to die in my place, paying the penalty for my sin and releasing me from its legal obligations.

Third, for this salvation of Christ to become a reality there must be a *surrender*. This surrender is to the work of the Lord Jesus on my behalf. This implies that I cease all my efforts to make myself right with God and recognize that everything depends on what Jesus has done.

Finally, the result of this work of Christ in my life is a *second birth*. He pardons my sin, seals the deal with the presence of his Holy Spirit, and gives me a new life. Those who experience this second birth, are transformed by the presence of Christ in them and guaranteed eternal life.

This salvation releases me from the legal hold of Satan and transfers me into the kingdom of God. It empowers me by the indwelling of God's Spirit and equips me to stand firm against the devil and his flaming arrows. Without this salvation, there is no hope of overcoming the enemy.

The "*sword of the Spirit*" is the next piece of armour available to the Christian soldier. There were two types of swords used by Roman soldiers. The first is described by the Greek word *ῥομφαία* (*rhomphaía*). This was a long broadsword carried over the shoulder. The second type of sword is described in the word *μάχαιρα* (*máchaira*). It was a short sword, more like a dagger. It is this shorter sword that Paul refers to here as the sword of the Spirit. This shorter sword was used in close encounters with the enemy. By using the illustration of the shorter sword, Paul is telling the Ephesians that they would battle in close proximity to the enemy.

The sword, according to Paul, represented the Word of God. The word here is contained in the inspired Scriptures handed down to us in written form. These Scriptures have been given to us to reveal the truth and expose error. They will show us how to live, encourage us in our struggle, and reveal God and His purpose to us. If we want

Light To My Path Bible Notes

to navigate around the temptations of the enemy, this word is essential. We must read it, and study it if we are to be protected from the delusions and deceptions of the enemy.

Verse 18

Paul concludes his reflection on the armour of God with a word about prayer. While he does not have a piece of armour, he uses to illustrate prayer, it is nonetheless a valuable tool in overcoming the assaults of the enemy. Paul has several things to say about prayer here in this passage.

First, Paul encourages the Ephesians to pray “at all times.” The word used here is *καιρός* (*kairós*) which describes seasons or special opportunities of time. It is different from the Greek word *chrónos* which describes time as a series of minutes or hours that continue without stopping. By using the word *kairós*, Paul is telling the Ephesians to take every opportunity to pray. They were to pray in times of joy, sorrow, confusion or trial. Prayer was to become a regular part of every event and circumstance of life.

Second, Paul tells the Ephesians that they were to pray “*in the Spirit*.” The word for “*Spirit*” is *πνεῦμα* (*pneúma*). It refers to breath or the movement of air. By extension it also refers to the human spirit or to the Holy Spirit.

The spirit is somewhat difficult to understand. It is not physical nor visible to the human eye. It is clear, however, that it is by means of our spirit that we can communicate with God.

Writing to the Romans, the apostle Paul says:

16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God – Ro 8:16

Note that the Spirit of God communicates to our spirit. Speaking to the Corinthians, the apostle tells them that when he prayed in a tongue his spirit prayed but his mind was inactive.

Ephesians 6

14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. 15 What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. – 1Co 14:14-15

While we do not have time to develop this further, in this context, what is clear from Scripture is that the Spirit of God communicates with our Spirit. Our spirit is also able to communicate with God.

Paul tells the Ephesians that they were to “*pray in the Spirit.*” Most translations spell the word spirit with a capital “S,” indicating that the Holy Spirit is being referenced here. If that is the case, then the idea is that we pray under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit and not by our own ideas and agendas. As we communicate from our spirit to God’s we must be careful not to create static and interference on the line, due to our own ideas. Prayer is not just about telling God what we want, but also about aligning our spirit with His so that His purpose is accomplished. To truly pray for God’s will to be done, we must be directed by God’s Spirit in how to pray in the purpose and will of God.

Paul goes on to challenge the Ephesians to pray *with all prayer and supplication*. The phrase “*all prayer*” may be a reference to all kinds of prayer or different types of prayer. Supplication refers to requests for blessings and benefits. Paul is telling the Ephesians that they were to pray prayers of thanksgiving, praise, petitions, prayers for guidance, prayers for justice, or prayers for mercy and forgiveness. The idea here is that they were to make prayer a regular part of their daily life and practice.

Paul calls the Ephesians to be alert in prayer. The word “alert” is ἀγρυπνέω (agrupnéō) which means to be without sleep, or to be watchful. The idea seems to be that the Ephesians were to be always watching out for the needs around them and committing them to the Lord God. They were to be faithful in committing all their needs to God.

The apostle concludes the verse by asking the Ephesians to make “*supplication for all the saints.*” They were to seek God’s blessing

Light To My Path Bible Notes

and benefits for His people. By their prayers they were to call down from heaven the wisdom, blessing and benefits of God for the saints around them. This prayer would certainly have an impact on the enemy forces allied against these saints.

Verse 19

Paul has asked that prayers be made for all the saints. If we are going to overcome the enemy and become all that God wants us to become, we need the blessings of God that can only come by asking.

It is true that God could give us all the blessings we need without us ever having to ask, but He has determined that many blessings will only be ours when we come to Him, recognize our need and ask Him to fulfil it.

Notice what Paul asks the Ephesians to pray on his behalf – *“that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel.”* There are really two requests here.

First that *words would be given...* *“to proclaim the mystery of the gospel.”* We can be sure that Paul knew the message of the gospel. This was a message he had often proclaimed. Yet, despite knowing the truth of the gospel, he still asked for words to be given him to proclaim its mystery

Paul’s request here is not so much about the words as it is about the empowering and leading of God in those words. Listen to how he expresses this when writing to the Corinthians.

*3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear
and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my
message were not in plausible words of wisdom,
but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5
so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of
men but in the power of God. – 1Co 2:3-5*

When Paul ministered to the Corinthians he did not depend on his *“plausible words of wisdom”* but in a *“demonstration of the Spirit*

Ephesians 6

and of power.” What Paul is asking the Ephesians to pray for was for utterance to be given him to speak the word of God in power. He knew that apart from that power, there would be no salvation or change of life in those who heard his words.

The second request of Paul here is that he would open his “*mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel.*”

The word translated boldly is παρρησία (parrēsia) refers to the ability to speak frankly, and with freedom. The question may legitimately be asked, when did the apostle never speak boldly? Why would he need people to pray for boldness in his speech? Paul understood that this boldness was from God and not in him naturally. What is the natural thing to do when you are beaten and left for dead because of what you preach? What is the natural response of the one who has been thrown in prison and facing a death sentence for the cause of preaching Christ? Paul was no superhuman. He had fears like anyone of us. He also had a calling on his life that he wanted to fulfill. That calling demanded that he face these fears to be obedient. Thus, Paul asks for prayer for boldness in his preaching the mysteries of the gospel.

Notice lastly, the phrase, “*the mystery of the gospel.*” What is the mystery of the gospel? Why is it a mystery? The gospel is a mystery for several reasons.

It was a mystery because, from the first hint of it in the book of Genesis until Jesus came, scholars of the Scriptures debated about this salvation and the Messiah who would come to bring it. They did not understand who this Messiah was or what His ministry would be like.

The gospel is a mystery not only because it was hidden in prophecies and pictures in the Old Testament, but because of its incredible message. The message of the gospel is that the Creator God send His Son to die for a rebellions people who wanted nothing to do with Him. The Son of God took on human flesh, died on the cross, taking a penalty that was not his and rose victoriously over death. All who believe in Him will receive new life and live with Him

Light To My Path Bible Notes

forever. If there is no mystery to you in that message, then you are not understanding what took place. We will never fully grasp why God did what He did for rebellious sinners. The message we preach is foolishness to many in this world and unless the Spirit of God opens their eyes, they will never be able to fully grasp what it is all about. We proclaim a mystery that is foolish to many, but to those who believe, it is the power of life and forgiveness.

Verse 20

In verse 20 Paul asked the Ephesians to pray that he would be given words to speak the mystery of the gospel boldly. Once again, in this verse he communicates his desire to be bold in his speech. The reason Paul asks the Ephesians to pray for this boldness is two-fold.

First, he was “*an ambassador*.” God had called him to represent him on this earth. Paul took that calling seriously and wanted to be faithful in this task. As an ambassador for Christ, he needed to be bold.

The second reason Paul asked the Ephesians to pray for boldness for him was because he was in chains. Paul’s preaching of the gospel had put him in prison. He did not know whether he was going to live or die. This likely stirred up within him a deep sense of urgency.

As I write this, my mind is reflecting on a sister in the Lord who is fighting inoperable cancer. She knows her time on this earth may be limited and this has driven her to speak even more boldly to those around her about the Lord. She knows that if she is going to share the message with her loved ones and acquaintances, this is the time to do so. Fear of what these individuals might think or say must be banished if she is going to share the Saviour with them before she passes. I believe that this is what Paul is feeling here. He knows his time might be limited and so he asks that he would be given boldness to risk everything before he stood before his Saviour.

Ephesians 6

Verse 21

Concerned that they be worried about him, Paul informs them that Tychicus would bring them up to date on what had been happening with him.

According to Acts 20:4, Tychicus travelled with Paul on one of his missionary journeys. Evidently, Paul had great confidence in him and sent him to Ephesus:

12 Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. – 2Ti 4:12

The apostle also considered sending Tychicus to Crete to visit Titus (Titus 3:12). According to Colossians 4:7 the apostle sent him to Colossae.

Tychicus is described here by Paul as a beloved brother and faithful minister. The apostle had full confidence in him and sent him to different locations to represent him.

Verse 22

Paul tells the Ephesians that he sent Tychicus to them for two reasons.

First to communicate with them about how Paul was doing. Paul knew the concern and love this church had for him and so he wanted to update them on how he was doing.

Second, *“that he may encourage your hearts.”* The Ephesians would be encouraged in part, to hear of how the apostle was doing. It may be, however, that as a servant of God and fellow missionary with Paul, Tychicus would have been an encouragement and blessing to the church of Ephesus in other ways as well.

What is important for us to note is that Paul wanted to bless the Ephesians. He did not focus on his own suffering and limitations but used every opportunity to encourage and bless his brothers and sisters in Christ.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 23

Paul concludes his epistle with a blessing for the Ephesian church. The blessing is two-fold.

First the apostle prays for peace *to* the brothers. The word used here for brothers is ἀδελφός (adelphós) which comes from the word *delphús*, meaning, “womb.” Brothers, in this sense, are individuals who have shared the same womb. The meaning of the word expanded from this, however, to refer to individuals of either sex who had a shared origin or fellowship. In this case, Paul speaks of the fellowship of believers in Ephesus.

His desire for these individuals is that they would experience peace among themselves. The word εἰρήνη (eirēnē) refers to harmony among brothers and sisters, but also included prosperity and good health and general contentment in life. Of course, in the case of the Ephesian church, the peace Paul refers to here is also a peace with God through the work of His son Jesus Christ.

The second part of Paul’s blessing relates to “*love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*” While Paul wished the Ephesians harmony and peace among themselves, his desire is that they also experience love “with” faith from God. His prayer is that God would pour out His love upon them and give them faith to see Him and trust His purpose in their lives.

Verse 24

The apostle ends his letter with the blessing: “*Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.*” Grace is the unmerited favour of God. Notice to whom this unmerited favour is extended: “*to those who love the Lord Jesus Christ with sincerity.*” You would think that these individuals were the ones who deserved this favour of God but was not the case in the mind of Paul. No one deserved grace. Even the sincerest believer was undeserving. The nature of grace, however, is such that it extends itself despite our unworthiness. Paul was confident that the Lord God would reach out His hand to the Ephesians and bless.

Ephesians 6

Finally, observe two comments about this epistle in the closing words.

First, it was written from Rome. This is where Paul was in prison at the time.

Second, the epistle was written by Tychicus to the Ephesians. Tychicus was a co-worker with Paul. This comment needs to be understood in light of Ephesians 1:1 which identifies Paul as the author:

*1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of
God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are
faithful in Christ Jesus – Ep 1:1*

While Tychicus wrote down the words, Paul was the author of this epistle. It appears that Paul often dictated his letters. There is evidence that his eyesight may not have been very good so it may have been for this reason he had others write his letters for him.

Introduction to Philippians

Paul's letter to the Philippians is quite personal in nature. This church had a special place in his heart because they had stood behind him and supported him with their gifts. Paul writes to thank the church for this partnership (1:5; 4:10-20).

He knew that the church was very concerned for him in his imprisonment and so he updates them on his condition (1:12-14). The church in Philippi had also heard of the illness of Epaphroditus who was with Paul at the time, so the apostle wanted to inform them of his condition as well (2:25). Paul tells the church that he was planning to send Epaphroditus and Timothy to them to ease their concerns (2:19).

Aware of false teachers in Philippi who were promoting circumcision as a requirement for believers (3:1ff), Paul writes to remind them of the sufficiency of Christ alone for salvation. He encourages the church to strive for unity (2:1-11), and to abound more and more in the faith of Jesus Christ (1:9-11; 2:12-17).

Philippians 1

Verse 1

Paul mentions elders and deacons. The work is not done by one person alone. The early church recognized the importance of shared leadership to accomplish the task which was never intended to be done by one person.

Paul connects with these leaders remotely. Some of them he never met personally but entered a partnership with them for the expansion of the kingdom.

Verse 2

Paul's desire for these co-workers is that they experience grace and peace.

Grace implies a knowledge of forgiveness and mercy through Jesus Christ.

Peace implies that they continue to walk in good standing with God and their fellow man.

In other words, it was the sincere desire of Paul, and ultimately his requirement, that those who worked with him be born-again believers who had experienced the grace of God and were living in ongoing peace with their Creator and other believers.

Verse 3

Paul thanks God when he remembers the Philippians.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

The Apostle had not met many of these believers. They were not on a regular prayer list but the thought of their effort for the cause of the gospel brought Paul to his knees on their behalf.

Verses 4-5

Paul was joyful because of the partnership he had with the Philippians in the Gospel.

Though they each had their unique gifts and personalities he recognized that they were on the same team. The body of Christ is unified not so much by how it performs its duty but in the person of Jesus Christ and a sincere burden to elevate His name.

Paul rejoices in his partnership with anyone who sincerely lived and served his Christ.

Verse 6

Paul knew that all who had experienced the grace of Christ, were at peace with Him (vs. 1) and sincerely served Him, would know God's sanctifying presence in their lives. The God who drew them by grace into His kingdom and service, would continue the work He began in them.

Notice when this work will be completed — "in the day of Christ Jesus". Until He returns, we can be sure that God will continue working on us. Not until we are separated from this sinful flesh and earthly mind will we know full and total victory over the constant shortcomings and failure of this life.

We should not expect perfection in fellow workers, only a desire to grow in maturity and a humble submission to the work of the Spirit in their inner being.

Verse 7

Paul tells the Philippians that it was right for him to "feel this way about you all"

Philippians 1

He has already made what he feels about them clear in the previous verses by the following:

1. His desire for more of God's grace and peace in their lives
2. His joy in their partnership in the Gospel
3. His desire to pray for them whenever he remembered them
4. His conviction that God would complete His work in them

Paul held the Philippians especially dear because they stood with him in his imprisonment and defense of the gospel.

Evidence of their support is seen in Philippians 4:14-15 where Paul speaks of them as a contributing church who supported his ministry financially.

Both Paul and the Philippians made sacrifices for each other in the work of the kingdom. The Philippians showed their appreciation of Paul's ministry by their sacrifices for him. This formed a deeper bond between them as co-workers.

Verse 8

Paul expresses his deep "yearning" and "affection" here for those who had stood so faithfully by his side.

Notice that his affection for them is not fleshly in nature but "the affections of Christ"

The implication is that Paul feels what Christ feels toward the Philippians. The love and gratitude of Christ to the Philippians expressed itself through Paul. By ministering and supporting Paul these believers were pleasing Christ and advancing His kingdom.

Verse 9

Paul now tells us the subject of his prayer for the elders and deacons of Philippi.

"That your love may abound more and more"

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Paul speaks about “the affections of Christ” that had been demonstrated through the Philippians in practical support for his ministry (Philippians 1: 7-8).

The love Paul wants to abound has already been in evidence in the Philippians, but the Apostle does not want them to become complacent. Instead, he wants them to excel in the gifts God has given more and more.

“With knowledge and discernment “

Not all loving acts are wise and discerning. We may act out of love in our heart but only harm the one we love. We must be wise and discerning in our generosity and expressions of love, least we burn ourselves out or ultimately harm those we love. Love offered without knowledge and discernment of God’s purpose may do more harm than good.

Verses 10, 11

Paul specifies here the reason he prayed that the love of the Philippians would abound in wisdom and discernment.

First, *“that you may approve what is excellent.”* The word “approve” has the sense of confirming the value. In other words, by abounding more and more in the love of God, the Philippians would demonstrate the excellencies of God’s kingdom of love in a world of darkness and despair.

Second, *“so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.”*

17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. – Jas 4:17

Not abounding and demonstrating kingdom love is to fall short of God’s purpose. It is God’s intention that we be “filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. An unfruitful tree does not please the Master.

Philippians 1

8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. – Jn 15:8

God's intention is that each believer produce much fruit for His glory and praise. The purpose of abounding more and more in love is to bring glory to God. To be content with less is to dishonor Him.

The love in which the Apostle encouraged the Philippians to abound was the *"fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ"*. This kind of love was only possible because of their relationship with Christ and the work of His Holy Spirit in them.

Verse 12

Paul moves now to some comments regarding his imprisonment in Rome.

The Apostle begins by telling the Philippians that what had happened to him had *"served to advance the gospel."* The context is clear that this is a reference to his imprisonment in Rome (see verses 13-14). Paul was seeing evidence of how God was using his imprisonment in the lives of the imperial guard and the average believer who heard of his condition. It was Paul's conviction that even what appears traffic in our eyes may be a powerful tool in the hand of God for good.

Verse 13

Paul testifies to what God has been doing through his imprisonment. Of note is the fact that the imperial guard and those around him come to see that Paul was innocent of any crime. His imprisonment was because he believed in Jesus Christ and preached in His name.

It does not appear that Paul's concern here is that people know his innocence as much as what he stood for. God was using this experience to reveal the name of His Son Jesus Christ to those who interacted with Paul. His suffering.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 14

Paul came to see how his imprisonment emboldened believers in their witness. They had, in the Apostle Paul, an example of one who was willing to suffer for the cause of Christ. He would not compromise or water down his message but stood firm in the faith and was willing to suffer and even die for the Lord Jesus. This faithful example challenged believers who heard of his imprisonment to consider their own commitment and follow his example. As a result, they began to “speak the Word without fear” and the name of Jesus was elevated and proclaimed more boldly.

The Apostle was very much aware of the fact that God was working through his suffering to lift up the name of Christ, build His kingdom and strengthen believers. No trial is in vain when good is in it.

Verse 15

Paul recognized in verse 14 that his imprisonment brought greater boldness to believers, inspired by his example. The motivation behind that boldness differed, however. While some preached Christ with genuine and sincere motives, others did so in a spirit of “envy” and “rivalry.”

In other words, these believers entered a competition with each other. They were jealous when a brother gathered a larger following or appeared to have greater success in his preaching. Their preaching became more about themselves than about Christ.

Verse 16

Paul tells his readers that those who preached Christ from good will (verse 15), “do it out of love.”

This was Paul’s prayer in verse 9:

*9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound
more and more, with knowledge and all
discernment, – Phl 1:9*

Philippians 1

Unlike those who peached Christ out of envy and rivalry, whose love was for them themselves, these believers demonstrated a love for God in how they preached. Their hearts were in tune with His purpose. Their desire was to elevate His name. It was their great joy to humble themselves so that Christ received the glory.

The love these sincere believers demonstrated was not only directed to the Lord Jesus but also toward Paul in his imprisonment. Consider the phrase:

“Knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.”

Remember that those who peached Christ out of envy and rivalry competed not only against each other for followers and attention but also against Paul. With Paul at a disadvantage now this gave these preachers the opportunity to gain a following at Paul's expense. They may even have become bolder in preaching a watered-down Gospel.

This was not the case for those who preached Christ out of love. Their love for God, Paul and the truth he preached remained firm. They knew that Paul was in prison for the truth of the gospel and committed themselves being faithful to the that truth.

Verse 17

Paul says three things here about those who preached Christ from envy and rivalry.

First, they *“proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition.”* While these individuals “proclaimed Christ,” they did so with themselves in mind. They sought personal glory, recognition and applause. They used the name of Christ to elevate themselves in the eyes of the community.

Second, *“not sincerely.”* While they wanted people to look up to them as spiritual leaders, they were motivated by sinful intentions of pride. They used the name of Jesus to elevate their own position.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Third, “*thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.*” Paul was aware of an evil intent in the heart of these preachers to “afflict” him. He does not explain this any further. The Apostle was not always popular. It may be that these individuals used his imprisonment to damage his reputation or call his teaching into question.

Notice the phrase “*thinking to afflict me.*” The Apostle was not overly concerned about what these preachers were doing to him. They thought they could afflict Paul, but his reliance was on God. Paul understood that with God as his defence, he had nothing to fear from the evil intentions of these shallow and hypocritical preachers.

Verse 18

Paul understood that God was able to use even weak and fleshly preachers with questionable motives to proclaim the name of His Son Jesus.

*“In every way, whether in pretense or in truth,
Christ is proclaimed,”*

Paul is not approving of the envy and rivalry certain preachers displayed, but rather rejoicing in the fact that what they meant for evil, God intended for good (see Genesis 50:20). The Apostle rejoiced in a sovereign God who advanced His kingdom despite human sinfulness and failures.

Paul reminds us here that we can proclaim Christ either in pretense or in truth. We can preach Christ from a sincere and genuine heart of love or hypocritically with self serving motives and intentions.

Verse 19

The Apostle reflects here on his imprisonment (see verse 17). Humanly speaking, there was cause for concern. The Jews had accused him of stirring up riots “among all the Jews throughout the world” (Acts 24:5). This was a serious charge, and if proven true, could lead to a sentence of death.

Philippians 1

Paul was confident that despite the many obstacles, God would hear the pleas of His people on his behalf, and with the help of the Spirit of Jesus, he would be delivered.

The Apostle makes no mention here of his own strength. His confidence is not in himself but in the purpose of God Almighty.

Notice also that Paul does not define what his deliverance would look like. It is not without significance that in the following verses he speaks about his death. His deliverance would come in God's way – whether by life or death. He feared neither.

Verse 20

Paul's expectation and hope was that he would not be ashamed. These words in the English language tend to convey a measure of uncertainty but this is not the case for Paul. The phrase "eager expectation" conveys certainty of outcome. It was Paul's confidence and assurance that the Lord would carry him through his trial in such a way that he would have nothing at all to be ashamed of.

The process of trying someone accused of a crime was harsh and cruel. Paul was confident, however, that his actions, past and present, were worthy of the name of Christ.

He trusted God for the courage, whether he lived or died by Roman sword, to do so in the future in a way that honored the Lord in his earthly body.

Verse 21

Paul continues to reflect on what lay ahead for him in his imprisonment. He did not know whether he would live or die but was prepared for either.

The Apostle declares that if he lived, his life would be devoted entirely to Christ. Death, on the other hand, would be great gain for Him, as it would mean the end of earthly struggle and toil and enjoying the presence of the Savior he loved.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 22

Paul knew that if the Lord kept him alive it was for a purpose, and the Apostle committed himself to walk fully in that purpose. He was assured that God would bless with fruitfulness any task He ordained for him to undertake. Remaining in the flesh, therefore, would mean fruitful service.

While the thought of fruitful service was appealing to Paul, being in the physical presence of Christ was even more attractive. Death had no fear for Paul. It was an invitation to intimate and blessed fellowship with Christ.

Verse 23

As Paul reflects on what his future holds, he finds himself “hard pressed” between his only two options – to die at the hands of Roman authorities or to live and continue serving the Lord.

The word translated “hard pressed” literally means to be held fast or constrained, as in the case of a prisoner confined to a prison cell. In other words, he was trapped between two options and could not determine which he should choose.

His greatest desire was to “depart” or die so that he could go to be with the Lord.

When we think of people who want to die, we usually think of individuals who are depressed or overcome with sorrow, grief or pain. This is not the case for Paul. In the verses that follow the Apostle declares his great willingness to remain, be productive and bless fellow believers.

Paul’s desire to “depart” and be with the Lord comes from a deep passion and love for his Saviour. To be with Him was for Paul his greatest desire. Paul’s faith is not just about theology and service. It is first and foremost about Jesus Christ and a deep personal relationship with Him.

Philippians 1

Verse 24

Paul's great desire was to be with the Lord. Notice, however, that he recognizes that "*remaining in the flesh*" was more necessary. Paul has a realistic view of himself and his ministry. His presence was "necessary" for the Philippians. This was not because Paul had anything himself to offer but rather that God had called, gifted and equipped him to minister to these believers. The Apostle expected that the God who called him would also use him in their midst.

See here the servant heart of the Apostle. He was willing to put off going to be with the Lord for the sake of the Philippians and their spiritual growth.

Verse 25

Paul expresses his conviction that God would allow him to live long enough to minister further to His people. The words "convinced" and "I know" reveal that God had given him this assurance.

Paul's ministry among the Philippians would have two focuses.

First, "your progress... in the faith." The Greek word use here simply refers to their advancement in the things of the faith. This may include a growth in their knowledge of God, His work and purpose for them as believers.

Second, "your... joy in the faith." Paul believed that the Christian life was much more than doctrine and lifestyle. Knowing Christ and walking in His purpose is satisfying and delightful to the human soul. As the Philippians progressed in their knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith, their hearts will be filled more and more with joy. The joyless practice of faith brings no honour to God.

7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. – 2Co 9:7

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 26

Paul was convinced that the Lord would spare his life so that he could continue to minister to the Philippians for their progress and joy in the faith.

Paul fully expected that God would use him to give the Philippians “*ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus.*” This expectation was not a result of Paul’s skill and missionary experience but rather in God’s call on his life and the work of His Spirit through him.

He states his missionary vision here – to give those to whom he was called ample reason to glory in Christ. This, of course, required that eyes not be on him. His great goal was that the Lord Jesus receive all the glory.

Verse 27

While Paul’s ministry would be a blessing to the Philippians, he did not want them to be dependent on him. It was his desire that whether he was with them or not their “manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

The phrase “manner of life” literally refers to citizenship. When people become citizens of a country, they commit themselves to live according to its rules and traditions. This is how it is when we become citizens of the kingdom of heaven. We commit ourselves to live according to the standards of that kingdom as determined by its Sovereign Lord. Paul is challenging the Philippians to make it their priority to live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

Paul makes three points about the manner of life he expected from the Philippians.

First, they were to stand “firm in one spirit.” The word used here is πνεῦμα (pnēuma) which refers to that part of us that continues to live when our body dies. It is also that part of us that communicates with God.

Philippians 1

14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. – 1 Corinthians 2:14

The general sense here is that the Philippians were to be united in their agreement to hear God and walk in his spiritual purpose for them as a community.

Second, they were to stand firm “with one mind.” The word is ψυχή psuché. This refers to the human soul, which is the seat of our emotions, understanding and will. To be of one mind or soul is to walk with a common understanding and devotion toward each other.

Finally, they were to strive “side by side.” The battle before us is long and hard. It is not one we should fight alone. Paul encouraged the Philippians to join hands and stand with each other against their common enemy. This implied putting aside any differences to defend, protect and support each other. The victory of one is a victory for all.

Verse 28

The Christian life is not an easy one. Paul was in prison for the proclamation of the gospel. This imprisonment changed a lot of things for the Apostle. He did not know if he was going to live or die. His freedom was taken from him.

Paul is not afraid, however, of what might happen to him. He was ready to live and continue serving. Though it was his service that put him in prison he was not afraid to continue doing so. Nor was he afraid of dying for that would mean being with Christ.

Paul refused to be afraid of what his opponents could do to him. He set his eyes on God and trusted His sovereign care. He challenged the Philippians to do likewise.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Standing firm in the faith, with one mind, and striving together in the faith without fear, was a sign of the genuineness of the Philippian's faith and salvation. It was also evidence of the condemnation of those who opposed them and the gospel they preached.

Verse 29

Paul reminds the Philippians God had granted them two privileges. The word used here is χαρίζομαι charízomai. The word literally means to show favour or to be kind to someone.

The first favour God granted the Philippians was that they should come to believe in the Lord Jesus and experienced His salvation and pardon.

The second favour of equal blessing was the privilege of suffering for His sake. I have spoken to soldiers who counted it a great honor to defend their country. So, it is with the cause of Christ. There could be no greater privilege than to stand up for the cause of Jesus Christ. These who stand firm and willingly suffer in service for His sake are indeed an honored people.

Verse 30

The word translated "conflict" was often used to speak of sporting events, and referred to the combat between two boxers, or a competitive race between runners. Paul used the word to speak of the intense effort required to live the Christian life and faithfully serve the Lord. This was a conflict in which he excelled.

We should not think of the Christian life as a life of ease. Those who serve the Lord faithfully, must be willing to engage in this conflict.

Philippians 2

Verse 1-2

Harmony in the body of Christ was of utmost importance to the Apostle Paul. It was unthinkable that the believer should receive encouragement, comfort, affection and sympathy from God and refuse to respond in kind to fellow believers. By demonstrating these qualities to one another, the Philippians would reveal the character of God to the world.

The Apostle reveals five things the believer receives from God in verse 1.

First, the believer receives *encouragement in Christ*. The word Paul uses here is the word παράκλησις paráklēsis which comes from the word παρακαλέω parakalēō meaning to “call to one’s side.” Imagine someone struggling with a heavy burden, calling someone to come to their side to bear some of this weight for them. When we were overcome and burdened under the weight of sin Jesus came to our side and made the supreme sacrifice of His life.

Second, believers receive “*comfort from love*.” The word παραμύθιον paramúthion refers to speech that uplifts and consoles. Notice that it is love that speaks here. In our despair this love of God from eternity past speaks words of tender kindness and support. Those words come through the prophets. The cry out to us through the pages of Scripture revealing the purpose of God for our salvation and fellowship with Him.

Third, the believer experiences a “*participation in the Spirit*.” The word κοινωνία koinōnía expresses fellowship and sharing. Fellowship in this sense is not so much verbal as it is practical in

Light To My Path Bible Notes

nature. Early believers fellowshiped with each other by sharing food and supporting each other in trials and affliction. The believer's fellowship here is with the Holy Spirit. In other words, He comes to our side and supplies all we need to live and walk in fellowship with God.

Faith the believer receives *affection*. Paul uses the word σπλάγχνον *splágchnon* here. It is literally translated "bowels." In the understanding of the day, the bowels were the seat of emotion. We speak of the heart in this way today. The sense here is that the heart of God is moved toward His children. The believer experiences the heart of God in tenderness and compassion.

Finally, the believer experiences *sympathy*. The word οἰκτιρμός *oiktirmós* speaks of the compassion and tenderness of God demonstrated in action toward those who are in need. God's heart not only feels tenderness toward His children, but it is also moved to practical action to relieve their suffering and confusion.

Having revealed these five benefits, Paul then challenges the Philippians to make his joy in them complete by responding in the ways.

First, they were to be *of the same mind*. In other words, they were to determine and make it their commitment to treat each other as God treated them.

Second, they were to have ἀγάπη *agápē* love toward each other. The word ἀγάπη *agápē* refers to God's unconditional love. It is the love that brought Christ to this earth to die for rebellious sinners. It loved those who nailed Him to the cross. It loved the unworthy and even those who offend Him.

Third, the Philippians were to be "*in full accord and of one mind*." The word translated "*full accord*" is σύμψυχος *súmpsuchos* which is a combination of two words literally meaning together in soul. The soul is the place of passion and emotion. In other words, the Philippians believers were to be one in their passion and devotion to each other.

Philippians 2

What was true of their soul was to be true of their mind. They were to have the same mindset. Of course, this mindset was that of Christ and His word. They were to be guided by His purpose and plan for their lives as revealed by His Word and Spirit.

Verse 3

Paul challenges the Philippians to live lives free of selfish ambition. The word ἐριθεία *eritheía* carries with it the sense of striving to accomplish one's purpose with no concern for or attention to the needs or interests of someone else. The word can be used in a stronger sense than this and describes a willingness to crush someone else in the pursuit one's own desire.

The Apostle also warns the Philippians about conceit in their relationships. The word Paul uses here is κενοδοξία *kenodoxía*. The word is derived from two words. The first is κενός *kenós* which means, empty, hollow or meaningless. The second is δόξα *dóxa* which means glory. When you put these two words together you get the sense of empty or meaningless glory. It is what happens when someone thinks more of themselves than they ought. It also describes the individual who thinks they deserve more than they do.

The Apostle encouraged the Philippians instead to humbly “count others more significant than yourselves.” We should not see here that one person is more important than another but rather that we should be always willing servants ready to put aside our own interests for a brother or sister.

Verse 4

Notice that Paul is not opposed to believers having their own interests. The words, “let each of you look not only to his own interests” implies that believers will have interests that will require their time, energy and resources.

Paul reminds the Philippians, however, that they were also to be aware of the needs of those around them. They were to reject a self-centered attitude that was only concerned for themselves and

Light To My Path Bible Notes

be willing to use their time energy and resources to meet the needs of those around them. Paul expected the Philippians to open their eyes to see the needs before them and their hearts to respond in compassion.

Verse 5

Paul encouraged the Philippians to have “this mind among yourselves.” To what mind is Paul referring? He has been speaking about this in the past few verses:

- Verse 2 – “having the same love”
- Verse 2 – “being in full accord”
- Verse 2 – “one mind”
- Verse 3 – “do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit”
- Verse 3 – “in humility count others more significant than yourselves”
- Verse 4 – “look also to the needs of others”

This was the mind Paul expected the Philippians to have in their interactions among themselves.

The Apostle reminds the Philippians that the Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated these very qualities while He was on this earth. They were to strive to follow His example.

Verse 6

Paul takes time here to consider the example of the Lord Jesus set while He was on this earth, as the example for the Philippians to follow in their relationship with each other

He begins by reminding them that *“though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.”*

Notice that the Apostle tells us that Jesus *“was in the form of God.”* The word “form” could possibly be misleading. It might be easy to

Philippians 2

assume that a form was not the same as the reality. Something may look have the shape and form of the real thing but not be so. This, however, is *not* the idea here.

When Paul speaks of Jesus being in the form of God, he is saying that Jesus had all the qualities and characteristics of God. Anyone who had all of God's qualities and characteristics was God in every way.

Notice that though He was God, Jesus "*did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.*" While He in God's form, and equal in every way, Jesus made a conscious determination. He chose to lay aside His privileges as God and humbled Himself to live in subjection to the Father.

Paul is telling the Philippians that they were to follow this example. Though they were equal in every way with their fellow human beings, they were, like Christ, to humble themselves to serve the needs of their brother and sister.

Verse 7

Paul tells the Philippians here that the Lord Jesus *emptied himself*.

The Greek word translated "emptied himself" is ταπεινῶ tapeinōō. It means to humble or to make low. The idea here is that while Jesus was in the form of God, He chose not to demand, require, exercise or even experience the privileges of His position. Paul goes on to how He did this.

First, He took *the form of a servant*. The one whose position and dignity elevated Him above all His creation, choose instead to serve those He created.

Second, He chose to be "*born in the likeness of men.*" While we do not have a choice in this matter of our birth this was not the case for Jesus. As the eternal God, this was His conscious and willing choice. As an omnipresent (everywhere present) God He chose to limit His presence to a frail human body. As an almighty and all-

Light To My Path Bible Notes

powerful God, He dwelt in a weak and mortal body experiencing the pain and suffering to which that body was subject.

Verse 8

Jesus willingly chose to lay aside His privileges as the Son of God and took on *human form*. The word used here is different from that used in verse 6 describing Jesus as being in the “form of God.” In verse 6 Paul describes Jesus as having the very essence or form of God. Here the word translated “form” implies that Jesus had the appearance of a human being. In other words, when you looked at Him, he had all the attributes of a human being. He took on Himself every human quality and weakness and was indistinguishable from any human being around Him.

As a human being, Jesus humbled Himself to become “*obedient to the point of death*.” There are two vital points we need to see in this phrase.

First, the death of Jesus was a death of obedience. To whom was Jesus obedient? He was obedient to the purpose of God, His Father from eternity past of which the prophets spoke.

That is, that the Messiah would die for the forgiveness of sin.

Second, this death of Christ, who was the very essence (form) of God tells us something about His humanity. The eternal God cannot die. For Jesus to die, He could not just look like man, He had to lay aside His divine privileges to become man.

Paul concludes the verse with the words “*even death on a cross*.” These words tell us the nature of Christ’s death. It was the cruellest and humiliating of all deaths. All of this was for you and me.

Verse 9

God did two things for Christ because of His willingness to humble Himself and die for His people.

First, He “*highly exalted Him*.” God bestowed on Jesus the greatest honour and lifted Him up above all beings. What is important for us

Philippians 2

to now here is that Jesus was and is God. How can anyone with such credentials be lifted higher than this? Remember, however, that Jesus put aside His divine privileges to die for us. The Father lifts Christ from this humility and calls all of creation to again recognize His worth. He gives Him the seat of honor not only because, as God, He was worthy of praise, but also now because of His obedience He proved that worth by what He did.

Second, God “*bestowed on Him the name that is above every name.*” The name Paul refers to here is the name of Jesus (see verse 10). Paul tells us that this name *was “bestowed”* on Jesus. In other words, it was given to Him as a title of honour. It was an angel who told Mary to give her son the name Jesus because He would save His people from their sin (see Matthew 1:21). The name Jesus literally means, “Savior.” He is the one upon whom ask of creation depends.

Understand here that Christ’s exaltation and great name were the results of His work on our behalf. God gave Him this honour because of what He did for us. This reveals the value the Lord God places on His children.

Verse 10

God gave the Lord Jesus a name above every name for a purpose. That purpose is stated in verses 10 and 11.

The first purpose is found in the words – “*so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,*” The bowed knee is a sign of reference and respect. It is also a posture of worship. It was the purpose of God that every knee recognize the worth of His Son Jesus and bow in submission, reverence, and respect.

Notice here that the knees God expected to bow were on *earth* and includes every created being, human, plant, animal or anything else that exists on this earth. All created things must submit to His Lordship for he has been determined by the Father to be Lord over all creation.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

The establishing of Christ as a Lord extended also to all heavenly beings. All angels and heavenly persons were to recognize the Son of God as their absolute Lord and bow the knee to Him in worship and submission.

Notice finally, that it was the purpose of God that all things under the earth were also to confess submission to His lordship. This may include those who had died and been buried in the earth. It may also include demonic beings and the eternally lost in the bottomless pit of hell. They too, were under the lordship of the Son Jesus Christ and would one day now to confess Him to be the one true Lord.

Verse 11

The second great purpose of God in giving Christ a name above every other name was so that He Himself would be glorified. There are several reasons why the Father is glorified when His Son is glorified.

First, because the Father and the Son are one, to honor one is to honour the other.

Second, the Father gave the Son to be an atonement for our sin. As the giver of the gift, the Father receives great honour.

Third, the work of the Son restored His children to the Father. Those who belong to the Father through the work of His Son live for His glory in their lives.

Verse 12

Paul recognizes the devotion of the Philippians to his spiritual leadership as an apostle when he says: "you have always obeyed."

These words come after Paul's statement about the absolute lordship of Christ over all. It may seem strange, therefore, that he now speaks of the faithfulness of the Philippians in obeying him. The reality, however, is that, as an apostle, Paul represented the Lord Jesus, and so, by obeying Paul, the Philippians also obeyed Christ.

Philippians 2

Paul goes on to tell the Philippians about the importance of working out their salvation with fear and trembling. The word translated “work out” is κατεργάζομαι *katergázomai*. It conveys the idea of carrying out a task until it is accomplished. In other words, the Philippians were to live out their salvation and fulfill the purpose of God for their lives until they were taken home to be Him. They were not to be slack in their spiritual walk and duties. Paul told them that it was even more important that they did this in his absence. Paul’s absence was due to his imprisonment. These evil days were not to discourage the Philippians but rather to challenge them to be greater bold in the purpose of God for their lives.

The apostle encouraged the Philippians to live out their salvation in fear and trembling. The fear Paul speaks about here is not a terror of their enemies, but rather the fear of God. The word φόβος *phóbos*, speaks of reference, respect and honour. In other words, the believers in Philippi were called to live or their salvation from a deep reverence and respect for God.

The Apostle also speaks here about trembling. The Greek word τρόμος *trómos*, can refer either to trembling with fear and terror, but also of humble timidity and deep respect our reference. It is this second definition we should focus on. While the Philippians were not called to fear and terror of their enemies, the were called to humble reference and respect for God. They were to work out the purposes of God in their salvation with a profound respect for God and His purpose. That respect for God was to be greater than any fear of what the enemy might do to them.

Verse 13

Paul gives the Philippians the reason why they were to work out the purpose of God in their salvation – “for it is God who works in you” Those who have experienced the salvation of God know His presence in their lives. God is very much at work in His children, refining, enabling and leading them into His purpose. Paul tells the Philippians here that they were to embrace this work of God in them. As believers, they were to surrender, embrace, and demonstrate the reality of what God was doing in them. The Christian life is not about a human effort to please God in the flesh,

Light To My Path Bible Notes

but rather a demonstration of the inner working of God Spirit who lives and works in us. Paul tells the Philippians that the inner work of God in the believer is “both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

The sinful flesh does not desire the things of God and so the Lord God must change our will and make it His. He does this by breaking or selfishness, and pride. He creates in us a desire for His purpose.

It is one thing to have our will surrendered to God and His purpose and another to have the power to carry out that purpose. Good not only transforms or will to be and do His purpose but also empowers us to fulfill that purpose.

Notice that transforming our will and empowering is in service is for God’s own good pleasure. In other words, God will bring our will in line with His and empower is to do what He has for us to do. It is our responsibility simply to submit to this great inner work of God and commit ourselves to fulfilling His purpose.

Verse 14

Consider what Paul had been telling the Philippians in this chapter.

1. Christ, as Almighty God, humbled himself and took on the form of a servant. (Philippians2:7)
2. As a servant, Jesus died a cruel death on the cross for the salvation of His people (Philippians 2:8).
3. He underwent such hostility in such a way that God was pleased to bestow on Him a name above every other name.

With this background, the Apostle Paul now tells the Philippians to *do all things without grumbling or disputing.*

The word translated “grumbling” here is the Greek word γογγυσμός goggusmós. It conveys the sense of expressing discontent about one’s situation or circumstances.

Philippians 2

There are many reasons why the Christian should avoid grumbling. Let me share just two here in this context.

First, because of what Christ has done for us. Knowing that Christ has laid down His life for us, what right do we have to grumble about what He requires of us? If the divine Saviour had to suffer, we have no cause to grumble when we must follow His example.

Second, because of God's sovereignty. The God who allows us to suffer hardship will use this hardship to refine us. Paul has reminded the Philippians that God was at work in them. He often uses trials of various kinds to shape us into His image. The Apostle goes on to tell the Philippians that the very thing we grumble about, may be the tool good uses to mature us and draw us closer to Himself.

Paul goes on to tell the Philippians that they were also to do all things *without disputing*. The idea here is that the Philippians were not to do things in such a way that they stirred up controversy, arguments or division among true believers.

Instead, the Philippians were to follow the teaching of Paul, and the resample of Christ and consider others as being more important than themselves (Philippians 2:3).

Verse 15

By doing all things without grumbling and disputing, the Philippians would be "*blameless and innocent, children without blemish.*"

Many sins are the result of a grumbling and disputing spirit. This spirit resists the call of God and divides the body of Christ. When we accept God's purpose with humility and consider the interests of others as more important than our own, we walk in blameless and innocence.

This path of blameless is a powerful testimony to a *crooked and twisted generation*. Paul reminded the Philippians that they were lights to their generation. By walking in innocence and blamelessness they revealed the light of righteousness to a world

Light To My Path Bible Notes

lost on darkness. Our attitude, lifestyle and example will speak more powerfully than our words.

Verse 16

Paul encourages the Philippians to hold fast to the word of life. The word translated “holding fast” is ἐπέχω epéchō, literally means to “hold upon.” The idea here is to hold onto something so that it is not lost.

In this case, the Philippians were to hold fast to the word of life. This word is the message of the gospel that gives life. It is the message and person of Christ Jesus, His salvation and purpose as passed down from Genesis to Revelation.

The Apostle John speaks of this word of life as the person of Jesus Christ in 1 John 1:1-3

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. – 1Jn 1:1-3

In his Gospel, John describes Jesus as the Word in whom was life:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. – Jn 1:1-4

Philippians 2

Paul exhorts the Philippians here to hold fast to the person, work and message of the Lord Jesus Christ. To hold fast to Christ and His message the Philippians would need to place their confidence and trust in Him without wavering. Paul's desire was that when Christ returned, he would be proud to present the faithful Philippians to Him. The pride Paul experiences here is not in himself but in the perseverance of the Philippians to whom he had presented the word of life.

Verse 17-18

Paul reflects here on the possibility of his death at the hands of Roman officials. He compares his potential death to a drink offering poured out on an animal sacrifice. The law of Moses states:

*5 and you shall offer with the burnt offering, or
for the sacrifice, a quarter of a hin of wine for the
drink offering for each lamb. – Nu 15:5*

In this illustration, Paul compares the sacrificial animal to the faith of the Philippians. Like this animal, the Philippians had given themselves completely as a sacrificial offering to God. This, in part, was a result of Paul's ministry among them.

The Apostle compares his life and ministry to the drink offering poured out for that sacrifice. Paul was "glad" and "rejoiced" at the privilege of pouring out his life for the faith of the Philippians.

He encouraged the Philippians to be "glad" and "rejoice" with him for the sacrifice that made their faith in Jesus Christ possible.

*18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice
with me.*

If Paul's sacrifice and death brought faith for the Philippians, then this was cause for great joy and rejoicing.

Verse 19

While Paul was confined in prison, notice his desire to know how the Philippians were doing. He expresses his "hope in the Lord

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Jesus to send Timothy” so he could be cheered by news of his brothers and sisters in Philippi.

While Paul could have focused on his own troubles, his heart is for the Philippians. Even a possible death sentence did not distract him from his concern for his brothers and sisters in Philippi.

Paul wanted to send Timothy to Philippi. Notice, however, that he committed this matter to the Lord – “*I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy.*” Paul does not take matters into his own hands, but instead trusts in the Lord’s purpose.

Paul was a strong, and highly motivated leader, but he does not allow his personal goals and agendas to overstep the purpose of God. He looked to the Lord and his purpose in all things.

Notice the phrase, “*so that I too may be cheered by news of you.*” The implication here is that by sending Timothy, the Philippians would be encouraged and when he returned with news from them Paul also would be encouraged. Paul’s purpose in sending Timothy was not just to encourage himself but to minister to the Philippians. Even in his prison cell Paul is seeking the Lord about how to minister to the church. When traditional methods were closed to him, Paul wrote letters or sent other people on his behalf.

Verse 20

Notice why Paul wanted to send Timothy to the Philippians – “*For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.*”

The words, “*for I have no one like him*” show us that Timothy was the best Paul had. He sent his trip man died the job. This is a demonstration of Paul’s love for the Philippians.

Notice the quality that Timothy had that made him the best man for the job – “*who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.*” Timothy was the best man for this role because of his genuine concern for the well-being of the believers in Philippi. Paul did not want to send anyone who did not have a deep and genuine passion

Philippians 2

for these believers. As a prisoner in Rome, Paul's great passion is to minister to the Philippians. He could not go himself, so he sent the best person he had to care for them.

Verse 21

Paul states in this verse a second reason why he wanted to send Timothy to Philippi. He compares him here to other spiritual leaders of the day. Describing other spiritual leaders Paul says: *"For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ."*

This was a sharp rebuke to the state of spiritual leadership in the church of Paul's day. Even the early church struggled with pride and worldliness. Its leadership sought their own interests more than that of Jesus Christ.

Verse 22

Unlike other Christian leaders of the day, Timothy proved his worth by dying to his own interests to seek the will and purpose of God. Paul describes how Timothy *"served as a son with a father"* in the cause of the Gospel.

The word translated "served" is the Greek word δουλεύω *douleúō*, which described one who is in the position of a servant. If you were to describe Timothy as a leader, the word *"servant"* would be at the top of the list. He ministered to others at his own expense. Notice also that Paul tells the Philippians that Timothy served with him as *"a son with a father."* While this describes the close connection between Paul's and Timothy, it also tells us something more about Timothy.

Timothy, as a son, respected Paul as a spiritual father. Paul was not always the easiest person to work with, but Timothy honoured him like a father.

Timothy, respected Paul's leadership and was content to work under him. He had no interest in elevating himself above Paul but served Him faithfully through many difficult times. In these matters Timothy proved his humility and passion for Christ and His purpose.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 23-24

Paul wanted to send Timothy to Philippi when he found out what would happen to him. This is likely a reference to his upcoming trial. That trial would determine whether the Apostle lived or died. It is certain that the Philippians would want to know the outcome of this judgement. Paul's intention was to send this news through Timothy. In the meantime, he would send this letter to instruct, comfort and encourage them until his judgement was announced.

Notice from verse 24 that it was Paul's hope that the outcome of the trial be in his favour. Should it be so his desire was to visit the Philippians personally.

The facts that Paul wanted to personally visit the Philippians showed us that they were quite special to him.

Verse 25

Paul speaks here about a man named Epaphroditus. From Philippians 4:18 we understand that he had come to Rome with a gift for Paul from the Philippians:

18 I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from

Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. – Phl 4:18

It may be that this letter of Philippians was delivered to them by Epaphroditus as neither Paul nor Timothy were able to leave at the time.

Notice what Paul says about Epaphroditus. First, he was a “*brother*.” At a very basic level the implication is that he was a fellow believer. More than this, however, he appears to be a brother in good standing with the Lord Jesus.

Second, Epaphroditus was a “*fellow worker*.” He did his part for the service of the kingdom of God. Paul recognized his service.

Philippians 2

Third, Paul describes Epaphroditus as a “*fellow soldier*.” He stood firm for the truth of the Gospel and the principles of righteousness. He defended those principles and doctrines and walked faithfully in them.

Fourth, Epaphroditus was a “*messenger*” from the Philippians. That is to say, he came with a word and a gift from the Philippians for Paul (Philippians 4:18).

Finally, he was a “*minister*” to Paul’s need. This ministry may have come in the form of the gift he brought, some other service, or perhaps because he was bringing back Paul’s letter to the Philippians.

Verse 26

Paul continues to speak about Epaphroditus. He tells the Philippians that this servant had a “longing” for them. The Greek word used for “longing” here is ἐπιποθέω *epithēō* which carries the sense of earnestly desiring, or to be lovingly inclined toward. Paul saw in Epaphroditus a deep love for the Philippians that translated into a desire to be with them.

Paul went on to say that Epaphroditus was also “distressed.” The word Paul uses here is ἀδemonέω *adēmonēō*, which indicates that he was depressed and emotionally overwhelmed. Notice the reason Epaphroditus was distressed in this way - “because you heard that he was ill.”

It was not his illness that distressed him but the thought that the news of this illness would cause the Philippians distress. He didn’t want them to be worried on his account. The thought of his illness causing grief for someone else was more than he could bear. There is here a powerful example of selflessness.

Verse 27

Verse 26 indicates that Epaphroditus was distressed because the Philippians had heard that he was sick. He did not want to cause them worry or concern. Notice, however, the extent of his sickness.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

According to Paul, “he was ill, near to death.” He almost died because of his sickness but his concern was more for the Philippians than himself.

Paul attributes his getting well here to the mercy of God. The Apostle understand that Epaphroditus’ life was in the hands of his Creator. In a world cursed by sin, sickness and suffering are commonplace. It is the mercy and grace of God that rescues and spares us.

Notice, however, that Paul believed that God also had mercy on him for should this dear brother have died as a result of his illness, Paul would have experienced sorrow upon sorrow. Paul’s profound love for Epaphroditus is quite evident here.

Verse 28

Paul understood the concern of the Philippian church for the health of Epaphroditus. They were anxious to hear of his condition. Epaphroditus was longing to get back to Philippi to set their hearts at ease. It was for this reason that Paul felt compelled to send Epaphroditus to Philippi. He knows how happy the church would be to see him and how happy he would be to be among themselves again.

It appears that knowing the worry these two parties had for each other was causing Paul a certain amount of anxiety. Knowing that they were together and comforted, would ease his burden for them both. This concern is an example of Paul’s pastoral heart.

Verse 29

Paul encouraged the Philippians to receive Epaphroditus “in the Lord with all joy,” and to “honour such men.”

These phrases indicates that Epaphroditus deserved special honour as an ambassador for the Lord. He had diligently represented the cause of the Lord and was to be honored as His faithful representative. Notice that Paul does not hesitate to

Philippians 2

recognize those who served the Lord with diligence. In fact, he encouraged the church to do so.

Verse 30

Paul tells the church of Philippi to honour men like Epaphroditus. He makes special mention of how Epaphroditus nearly died in Christ's service and that he risked his life "*to complete what was lacking*" in the Philippians service to him.

We understand from Philippians 4:18 that Epaphroditus brought a gift to Paul from Philippi. While we do not know the details, it appears that Epaphroditus took certain risks to get these supplies to the Apostle. In this valiant act of service, Epaphroditus nearly died. He, successfully, filled a need for someone who would make this journey to supply Paul's lack.

Paul was grateful for men like Epaphroditus who would risk their lives to faithfully perform such unnoticed but vital roles for the sake of the kingdom. Men like this deserved special honour

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Philippians 3

Verse 1

Notice how Paul begins the verse with the word “finally.” The Greek word λοιπόν *loipón* literally means “remaining”, or “as to the rest” and seems to form a break in his letter. In using this word, the Apostle seems to point the Philippians to the remaining content of his letter.

Paul speaks here to brothers. We should not see this as a reference to men only. The word ἀδελφός *adelphós* speaks more of a fellowship of people than a particular sex. In this case he speaks to the community of believers in Philippi.

Paul’s challenge to the Philippians here is to “rejoice in the Lord.” Notice that the rejoicing is in the Lord. It is in Him and His work that they were to find great joy and delight. Paul expected that believers rejoice and be joyous. The Christian life is a life of great joy and satisfaction. There is no greater delight than what is found in the Lord Jesus and a relationship with Him. He gives meaning and purpose to life and to know Him is to know life to the full.

The phrase, “*To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you,*” can be difficult to understand. It is likely best seen in the context of what comes in the following verses.

When Paul tells the Philippians that he was going to write the same thing to them, he is telling them something he had already taught them. He tells the Philippians that the reason he is repeating himself for their safety.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

In the verses that follow, Paul addresses false teacher who peached circumcision for the Christian. There was a significant risk that some in the Philippian church would hear this teaching and fall prey trip is falsehood. While Paul has already spoken to the church about this, he repeats it here to protect them from falling into this heresy.

Verse 2

Paul warns the Philippians against “*dogs*,” “*evildoers*,” and “*those who mutilate the flesh*.”

Obviously, these individuals were a danger to the church and its progress in the Gospel.

The dog was seen is in impure creature in this cultural background. In calling these individuals, “dogs,” the Apostle is using an insulting word.

The individuals of which the Apostle speaks, were evil on his eyes. They were enemies to the Gospels and everything Christ taught.

Finally, these individuals “mutilated the flesh.” As we look at the context of these verses, Paul speaks of individuals who demanded circumcision for Christians. In fact, the King James Version translates “those who mutilate the flesh,” by the word “concision,” referring to those who required circumcision.

According to the Apostle Paul, these individuals were enemies who taught false doctrine and threatened to harm the church of Jesus Christ. The Philippians were to watch out for them.

Verse 3

Paul speaks here about “*the circumcision*.” In the Jewish mindset, the circumcision, referred to the Jewish nation who practiced circumcision of all males. In their mind they were the true people of God and bore a sign on their body that they were His children.

Philippians 3

Paul turns this illustration around and tells the Philippians that the true “circumcision” or the true people of God were not those who bore the mark of circumcision on their body, but rather those who worshipped by the Spirit of God, glory in Christ, and put no confidence in their flesh.

Those who belong to God “*worship by the Spirit of God.*” Their worship of God is the result of the work of God’s Spirit in their lives. Their worship did not consist merely of man-made rules, traditions, and rituals, but come from a heart that was being transformed and moved by the presence of the Spirit of God who lived in them.

Second, the true believer, glories in Christ. Jesus Christ is their hope and confidence. They trust in Him and His work alone. They exalt Him and worship Him as Lord and Saviour.

Finally, the true believer puts no confidence in the flesh. They do not rely on their own efforts to merit favour with God. They do not trust their religion, good life or sacrifices to gain a place in heaven. The false teachers Paul condemns here were declaring that circumcision guaranteed an individual status as a child of God. Paul condemns this teaching.

Verse 4

Paul has warned the Philippians about false teachers who emphasized circumcision and human effort to obtain salvation. He goes on here to tell them that if there was ever a person who could have confidence in the flesh it was him. In fact, he had more reasons to be confident in his human effort than any other person.

While Paul meets every qualification of these false teachers who taught salvation by works of the flesh, he placed absolutely no value in these efforts. He taught instead that salvation was solely based on the work of Christ on his behalf, and not on anything he did for Christ.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 5

Paul begins his list of religious qualities. He does not do this out of boasting or pride but rather to show that if salvation were based on works, he met every qualification the false teachers required. Paul, however, will go on to say that none of these qualities meant anything as far as his standing with God was concerned.

The Apostle begins by telling his readers that he was circumcised on the eighth day according to the law of Moses.

Second, Paul reminded the Philippians that he was of the people of Israel. He was not converted to Judaism but was born into it. In the eyes of many in those days, a person converted to Judaism was somewhat less than one born into the faith. Paul was the purest of Jews.

Third, Paul was born into the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin was born to Rachel, the favored wife of Jacob. He would become Jacob's favorite and most protected son.

Fourth, Paul describes himself as a Hebrew of Hebrews. This phrase may indicate that Paul had no Gentile blood on him, nor did he live according to Gentile traditions, customs or language. He strictly maintained the Jewish culture and language.

Fifth, regarding the practice of the Jewish law, Paul was a Pharisee. This religious group was known for its strict observation of the Law of Moses.

Verse 6

Paul continues his list of religious qualifications.

Sixth, continuing from verse 5 Paul reminds the Philippians of his zeal for the Jewish faith. In his zeal to promote Judaism, Paul became the leading persecutor of Christianity. Acts 8:3 describes those days on the life of Paul, known as Saul:

Philippians 3

But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. – Acts 8:3

This verse shows us just how committed Paul (Saul) was to his Jewish faith in those days.

Finally, Paul describes himself as *blameless* in the observation of the Law of Moses. There was none who observed the requirements of the law of Moses as faithfully as Paul.

All this is to show that Paul would meet every requirement of these false teachers for salvation. Those who knew Paul, however, knew that he did not trust any one of these qualities to get to heaven.

Verse 7

Paul comments now on his spiritual qualification listed in verses five and six. He begins with the words, “but whatever gain I had.”

Paul speaks here as someone under the law. Those who believed that salvation was a result of human effort would have seen the qualities listed in verses 5,6 as a spiritual benefit. Notice, however, what Paul thought about all these spiritual efforts and qualities – “I counted as loss.”

The word translated “loss” is ζημία *zēmía*. It literally means “damage, loss, or detriment.” Consider this for a moment. All the spiritual qualities Paul demonstrated in his life were a detriment to his salvation. These qualities kept his focus on himself and his personal efforts to merit salvation by his own efforts. Until he saw all these qualities as damaged goods, unacceptable to God, he could never experience the salvation offered by Jesus Christ. Paul came to see all his efforts as a loss and of no spiritual profit as far as his salvation was concerned.

Paul concludes his thought here with the words, “for the sake of Christ.” In other words, when confronted with a choice between trusting in his spiritual qualities and efforts, or the work of Jesus

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Christ, Paul put no value in his efforts but trusted completely in what Jesus had done to procure his salvation.

Verse 8

In verse 7 Paul told the Philippians that he counted all his spiritual qualifications a loss for the sake of Christ. He goes even further here to say that he counted “everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus.” In other words, there was nothing in this world that compared to knowing the Lord Jesus.

Paul describes Jesus as “my Lord.” Paul was an important Jewish leader. Notice, however, that all that meant nothing to him now. Jesus Christ was his Lord, and he would bow the knee to no other.

For Jesus his Lord, Paul had suffered the loss of all things. His position as a leading Jewish leader and all that brought was stripped from him. He chose not to marry and have a family so he could devote his life exclusively to the service of Christ. He suffered beatings, trouble and imprisonment. He was cast out of cities for his proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus. He now stood trial for his faith in Christ, not knowing if he would live or die.

Notice Paul’s attitude toward these losses. He told the Philippians that he counted them as “rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.” All these worldly blessings and privileges meant nothing to him compared to “gaining Christ.” To have Christ in his life and to fellowship with him.

Verse 9

The Apostle Paul was willing to lose everything to be found in Christ. The concept of being in Christ can be difficult to understand. Being in Christ implies a connection to Him. The Apostle John uses the illustration of a vine and its branches in John 15. Just as the branches are grafted onto the vine, so the believer is grafted to Christ. This connection to Christ brings new life (2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Corinthians 15:22), forgiveness of sin (Ephesians 2:13) and frees us from condemnation (Romans 8:1). By means of this connection

Philippians 3

we are sanctified (1 Corinthians 1:2) and guaranteed a dwelling with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6).

Notice carefully the words of Paul here – “and be found in him.” Paul has gone to great lengths to tell the Philippians that all his religious efforts amounted to nothing. The words, “be found in him” remove all human effort. One day the Apostle miraculously found his life changed. The Lord he persecuted was now his Lord. He was a new creature. God took a rebellious and undeserving sinner, forgave him and grafted him into Himself. That changed everything for Paul. This was not something the apostle did for himself. It was a gracious work of Christ in his life, giving him new life, forgiveness, and a right standing with God.

The Apostle put no confidence in his own efforts to be right with God. Instead, He put his faith entirely in the miraculous and gracious work of Jesus Christ.

Verse 10

The Apostle Paul continues his reflection on the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. He makes four statements of passion here in this verse.

First, “that I may know him.” It was the great passion of the Apostle Paul to know Jesus. Now Paul preached about Jesus and pointed others to Him but there was a deep desire to grow in that knowledge, love and intimacy with Him.

Second, Paul wanted to know the “power of his resurrection.” The power of Christ’s resurrection was the power that conquered sin and death. It was by this power that Paul would conquer every impulse of sin and evil in his flesh. It was this power that would release him from this earthly body and give him a new and incorruptible one. It was this power that would bring him into the presence of Jesus and everlasting fellowship with Him.

Third, Paul wanted to “share his sufferings.” The word used for share here is the word κοινωνία koinōnía which means to share, fellowship or participate in. There may be two ways to understand

Light To My Path Bible Notes

what Paul is saying here. Paul may be referring to enjoying the benefits he received from the sufferings of Christ on the cross. He may also be referring to his desire to willingly suffer for Christ to glorify His name in the expansion of His kingdom. In the final analysis both were true for Paul.

Fourth, Paul wanted to become “like him in his death.” It was the passion of Paul to be faithful to Christ to the end. He wanted to end his life serving the purpose of the Father. He wanted to end well. He was not ashamed to die for Jesus.

Verse 11

Paul’s words in this verse can be confusing. The phrase “*by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead,*” could be seen by some to imply that Paul had some doubt about his salvation and was doing everything he could to assure that he would be resurrected from the dead and obtain a place in heaven with Christ. The problem with this interpretation is that it is contrary to everything Paul has been teaching the Philippians in this chapter.

Paul is *not* questioning his salvation or the fact that he would be raised from the dead to be with Christ. Nor did Paul believe that he had to do everything possible to merit his place with Christ when he died.

Likely the best way to understand what Paul is saying here is to see it in the context of the previous verses. Paul has willingly lost everything for the sake of Christ. The phrase “*by any means*” may be best understood in the sense of “whatever the cost.” Paul was willing to face anything or lose everything for the sake of Jesus Christ who would raise him from the dead to live with Him forever.

Paul does not seek to obtain the resurrection by his religious zeal. The assurance of the resurrection, however, motivated him to give everything he had for the cause of his Lord, for he had nothing to lose, for even death was great gain for him.

Philippians 3

Verse 12

Paul has been speaking to the Philippians about knowing Christ, sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death and experiencing the power of His resurrection.

Notice here how the Apostle was humble enough to admit that he had still not matured fully in these areas of his life. He taught these principles and qualities but still needed to learn them more fully himself – “not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect.”

It is important that we realize that not one of us can preach or teach from a standpoint of perfection. We all fall short of God’s standard. Nor should we expect perfection from our leaders for even the Apostle Paul fell short of this goal. We must learn to work with those who fall short of God’s standard of perfection and bear with each other in our failures and shortcomings.

While Paul fell short of perfection notice his attitude here – “but I press on to make it my own.” No, Paul was not perfect, but he strove toward that goal. It was his ambition to know Christ more, and to become like Him in his death. He would willingly suffer and lose all things to gain Christ and be found in Him. Perfection will never be obtained in this life, nor should we expect it of fellow believers. What we should expect, however, is a humble Spirit and ever-growing desire to grow in maturity.

Notice the motivation for Paul’s passion to grow in his knowledge of Christ and experience of His power – “because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” There could be no greater motivation than this. As unworthy as we were, Christ loved us, died for us and made us His children. He set us free from the condemnation of sin and is now preparing a place in heaven for us. If that does not motivate us to seek Him more, than nothing will.

Verse 13

Paul repeats his thought from verse 12. He confesses that he had not yet “made it.” In other words, he still had much to learn. He had

Light To My Path Bible Notes

not yet reached full maturity. He had not yet completed the course God had set out for him. He fell short of God's standard. Paul tells the Philippians, however, that he devoted himself to pressing on toward the goal (see verse 14).

For him to achieve that purpose Paul committed himself to doing two things.

The first commitment of Paul is expressed in the words "forgetting what lies behind." Forgetting what is behind, may refer to Paul's past with all its sin, and spiritual pride. It may be that Paul speaks here about his life without Christ under Judaism. He recognized that Christ died to save him from these things and so he moves forward and does not look back.

Forgetting what is behind may also refer to the sacrifices Paul made in life. He refused a wife and family. He refused a life of ease and comfort. When Jesus called His disciples in Matthew 4:19-22, they left their nets, their boats and their family behind to follow Jesus. Paul did not look back at those things he left behind to follow Jesus. If we are going to press on toward the goal, we cannot be weighed down with these burdens. There are sacrifices to make and we cannot be looking behind with longing eye. Our focus must be fixed and our determination solid if we are to reach our goal.

The second commitment of Paul was to "strain forward to what lies ahead." The word Paul uses here is ἐπεκτείνω *epekteinō* which literally means to reach toward something. There is here a sense of stretching to reach the goal. None of us like to be stretched but this is the requirement of faith. Paul was willing to undergo some discomfort. He was willing to be pushed beyond his comfort zone. If we are going to press on toward the goal, we must be willing to strain and be stretched. Reaching the goal will require discipline and hard work.

Verse 14

By forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, Paul told the Philippians, "I press on toward goal."

Philippians 3

The word translated “goal” is σκοπός *skopós* which refers to the mark at the end of a race or the finish line. It was Paul’s desire to win this race and so he gave it every bit of energy he had. While the Christian life is a life of free grace, those who understand the nature of Christ’s salvation, willingly give their all to honour Him for his gift.

As any athlete would, Paul competes for the prize. Remember that all this hard work and effort is not to merit salvation. That salvation, Paul had already experienced and his place with Christ was assured. The effort Paul makes here is out of a desire to know and please the one who had saved him. His sacrificial service was a response of thanksgiving.

The prize Paul sought was “the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” The upward call refers to Paul’s destination. His goal is heaven and the presence of his Saviour. Ultimately, the call is to be where Christ is, and where Paul can enjoy Him forever.

Verse 15

Over the last number of verses, the Apostle Paul has been sharing his understanding of the Christian walk. He considered everything loss compared to knowing Christ (Philippians 3:8). He wanted to know the righteous that comes by faith in Jesus (Philippians 3:9). He sought to know Christ, and the power of His resurrection (Philippians 3:10). Paul had no pretensions of having achieved these goals in life (Philippians 3:12-13), but he consistently pressed on toward that objective. He tells the Philippians that every mature Christian should have this same understanding, attitude and focus.

Notice how Paul addresses here those who “*think otherwise*.” Remember that Paul has been addressing false teachers who taught that salvation was only through circumcision and the observation of the Law of Moses.

To those who taught salvation apart from Jesus Christ Paul says, “*God will reveal that also to you.*” In other words, the time is coming

Light To My Path Bible Notes

when the truth would be revealed. For many, however, that time would be to late.

Verse 16

One of the great challenges for us as believers is not to lose the ground we have conquered. All too many lessons must be relearned. Temptations, and slackness in our spiritual walk causes us lose territory we once possessed. Paul encourages the Philippians to hold true to what they had attained. In the case of the Philippians, it was quite possible that some could fall prey to the false teaching of these who insisted on the practice of circumcision and the Law of Moses. Paul encourages these believers to hold true to what he had taught them and resist the teaching of the circumcision party.

Verse 17

Paul was so confident of his priorities and goals in the Christian life that he encouraged the Philippians to imitate him. Paul's life was an example for all to follow. This is not to say that he was perfect, but he was assured he was on the right path and lived with a clear conscience before God in all things.

Notice how the Apostle goes on to challenge the Philippians keep their eyes on those who walked according to the example they had in Paul and his co-workers. By so doing they would encourage each other in their spiritual walk. We are influenced by those with whom we fellowship and spend time. When we walk with those whose passion is for Christ and His glory we are motivated by their devotion. This shows us the importance of learning from each other.

The challenge of this verse is to ask ourselves whether or spiritual life is one we would want others to imitate.

Verse 18

Paul tells the Philippians that there are many people who walk as enemies of the cross of Jesus.

Philippians 3

The cross was not something anyone would desire. It was a cruel form of death. In one sense we are all enemies to the cross as a form of death. Paul is speaking here, however, not just about any cross but the “*cross of Jesus*.” The cross of Jesus was different from any other cross, not in its cruelty and suffering but in what it accomplished – the forgiveness and salvation of God people. It is in this result and the love that made it possible that we as believers rejoice.

Those who walked as enemies of the cross of Jesus, rejected it as the means of salvation and payments for their sin. In Paul’s day these individuals rejected the cross in favour of the Law of Moses and their personal efforts.

Notice that there were *many* who walked as enemies. Whole multitudes rejected the cross of Jesus as the means of salvation. This grieved the heart of Paul who saw the cross as humanity’s only hope of forgiveness and salvation.

Verse 19

Paul has four things to say about the enemies of the cross of Jesus.

First, “their end is destruction.” Those who reject the cross of Jesus, reject the only hope they have. Eternal destruction awaits all who reject this work of Jesus Christ.

Second, “their god is their belly.” We should not see this as only referring to food but a whole lifestyle of self-seeking and pleasure seeking. In other words, these individuals lived for themselves and whatever pleased them.

Third, “they glory in their shame.” Because they were not guided by Christian principles, they boasted in practices and lifestyles that were contrary to the purpose of God. This may be related to a lifestyle that Scripture does not condone. It may be sin they joke about with friends. It may be in how they treat each other. In the case of the false teachers of Paul’s day, they boasted in their observance of the law of Moses while rejecting the Son of God. All these things would be shameful to a true follower of Jesus.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Finally, the enemies to the cross of Jesus did not fix their eyes on Him but on the things of this earth. That is what motivated their lives and in what they found their greatest pleasure.

Verse 20

While the enemies to the cross set their hearts on the things of this world, Paul told the Philippians that this was not the case for those who belonged to Jesus Christ. "*Our citizenship is in heaven*," he told them.

The loyalty of believers is to heaven. They are under its laws and governed by its principles. They enjoy the privileges and rights of heavenly citizens. Though they respect the rules of this earth in which they temporarily dwell, their heart and allegiance belongs to another country.

Paul reminded the Philippians here that though they lived on this earth, they awaited a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He would return and take them home to be with Him forever. This is the great longing of every true believer. The riches and attractions of this world fade when compared to this wonderful reality.

Verse 21

The Saviour we await will not only take us home to be with Himself but also *transform our lowly body*. The word translated "lowly" here is ταπεινῶσις tapeinōsis which speaks of something that is humble or abased.

This earthly body is a marvel of creation. When God created it, He determined that it was good. With the entrance of sin, however, these bodies were abased. Sickness corruption and death reigned over them.

Our Saviour Jesus Christ died to conquer sin and death. The day is coming when we will shed this old mortal body and take on a new and glorious one.

Philippians 3

Notice that our new body will be like that of our Saviour's. From this we may understand that the Lord Jesus has a body in heaven. When on this earth, after His death, Jesus revealed His earthly resurrected body to many. We have no reason to assume that He gave up that glorified body when He returned to the Father.

Paul ends the verse with a word about the power that enables Jesus to transform our lowly bodies. This power is the power that "*enables him even to subject all things to himself.*" In other words, it is the power that conquered sin and death. It is the power that makes Him the undisputed Lord over every nation, tribe and language. It is that power that transforms our lowly bodies into glorious new ones for His glory. For Paul this was a wonderful hope.

Introduction to Colossians

Paul writes to the Colossian church to express his joy and gratitude to God for their faith in Jesus Christ (1:3-4), and to inform them of his prayers for their growth in that faith (1:9-11).

Knowing that there were false teachers among them (2:4, 8), Paul takes the time to teach them the truth about Jesus and His work (1:15-20), showing them that His work alone was sufficient for their salvation (2:9-15).

In light of what the Lord Jesus had done for them, the apostle encouraged the Colossians not to get caught up in a religion of works (2:20-21), but to die to the old nature (3:5) and live in the new life they had received from Christ (3:1-3; 12-17).

Paul also has some words to say in this letter about managing a Christian household (3:18-4:1).

Colossians 1

Verse 1

Paul introduces himself as the author of this letter. Notice that mention is made of Timothy. We should not see from this that Timothy had anything to do with authoring the letter. He is mentioned here most likely because he was a co-worker with Paul at this time and was likely well known by the Colossians. Paul declares himself to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. This establishes his authority as Christ's representative and spokesman. Notice, that this position was not one he took himself. He was chosen by "the will of God" for this responsibility.

Verse 2

The letter is addressed to "the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae."

The phrase "*saints and faithful brothers*" implies two things. First, Paul writes to believers in Colossae ("saints"). Second, these believers were walking with the Lord ("faithful brothers in Christ").

Paul's prayer for these saints and faithful brothers was for grace and peace from God the Father.

Grace is the unmerited and undeserved favour of God. Peace comes from a right relationship with God.

The question we must ask here is why Paul would pray for grace and peace for those who were already at peace with God and had experienced His grace through the salvation of Jesus Christ. The answer lies in the fact that living the Christian life requires the same grace that saved us for we can no more live the Christian life without

Light To My Path Bible Notes

it than save ourselves by our own efforts. Those who want to live the Christian life soon find that there are many obstacles that threaten our peace with God and each other. Both grace and peace are necessary ingredients in our ongoing spiritual walk.

Verse 3

Paul uses the word “we” here. In verse 1, he mentions Timothy. It is likely that the word “we” speaks of both Paul and Timothy.

Paul told the Colossians that they always thanked “God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” when they prayed for the Colossians.

It was the sacrifice of the Father that made the faith of the Colossians possible. He offered His only Son as a sacrifice for their sin. When Paul saw the faith of the Colossians, his heart exploded in praise and thanksgiving for the great sacrifice the Father made for this to be a reality.

Verse 4

Paul states the reason why he thanked the Lord for the Colossians here. There are two reasons for his thankfulness.

The first cause of Paul’s thankfulness comes in the words, “since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus.” The apostle was grateful to God for the faith of the Colossians.

The word Paul uses for faith is πιστικός (pistikós) which has the sense of faithfulness, genuineness and truth. In other words, the Colossians were faithful to the truth of the gospel and to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The second cause of Paul’s thankfulness is found in the words, “*the love that you have for all the saints.*” A clear demonstration of the genuineness of their faith was found in how they loved their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Notice how Paul uses the phrase, “*all the saints.*” There was no distinction between the rich or the poor. There was no difference

Colossians 1

between the Jew or the Gentle. They loved and ministered to all who belonged to Christ.

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Verse 6

The Gospel came to the Colossians and transformed their lives. Just as it had borne fruit in Colossae, it was moving across the "*whole world bearing fruit and increasing.*" The Gospel Paul speaks about here is not mere words but powerful for the changing of lives.

According to Paul, this message was *bearing fruit*. The Gospel has this power. It is a lifegiving message for all *who "hear and understand."* In a day when we feel the need to soften or water down the message, we would do well to understand its life-giving power and the fruit it has produced in countless lives.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Not only did the message produce fruit, but it also *increased*. The idea here is not that the message was changing in any way but rather that its impact was increasing in the lives of the Colossians – “*it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth*”

The power of the message of the gospel of God’s grace and truth does not stop at salvation but continues to grow in us and change us more and more into the image of Jesus Christ. Like a seed planted in the lives of the Colossians, that Gospel kept growing, maturing and producing the fruit of faith and love.

Notice one final detail found in the words, “*since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.*” The Gospel goes out to many but its life-transforming impact is not experienced by all. There will be many who reject its message.

Paul tells us here that the difference in the lives of the Colossians was that they *heard and understood the grace of God in truth*. Many hear but fewer understand the grace of God in truth. The word translated, truth, is the word ἀλήθεια (*alétheia*), which carries the meaning of truth and reality. The idea here is that there was a time when the message of the Gospel became a reality in the life of the Colossians. Their eyes were opened to see the truth of God and the Gospel took root in their lives. This was a supernatural event and evidence of the power of the gospel in the hands of the Spirit to apply its truth to individual lives.

Verse 7

Paul tells us that the gospel was brought to Colossae by a man named Epaphras. We know nothing about of this man apart from what Paul tells us in this verse. Paul has three things to say about him here.

First, he was a “dear fellow servant”. The word “dear” shows us that he was loved and valued. The word “fellow” indicates that he was a believer and partner in the truth. The word “servant” reveals that he served the Lord as a minister of the Gospel.

Colossians 1

Second, Paul declares Epaphras to be “a faithful minister of Christ.” The implication here is that he served the Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth.

Third, Paul associates with Epaphras by telling the Colossians that he ministered “on our behalf.” He represented the truth the apostles proclaimed and did so with their approval.

Verse 8

Epaphras was in communication with the Apostle Paul about the Colossians. We discover that he had brought news to Paul of their “*love in the Spirit*.”

Notice that the love Epaphras speaks of is “*in the Spirit*” or had its source in the Spirit of God. It was evidence of the work of God’s Spirit among them. The fact that Epaphras communicates this specifically with Paul may indicate that this love was for Paul.

Verse 9

When Paul heard about the work God was doing among the Colossians, he was moved to pray for them on a regular basis. Notice what the apostle prayed for them.

Paul asked that the Colossians be “*filled with the knowledge of his will*.” Remember here that the New Testament, as we know it, was not yet completed. Knowing God’s will was not a simple matter of pulling the Bible off the shelf and reading it. False teachers were circulating in Colossae. Men such as Epaphras, who had brought the Gospel to them played a vital role in teaching the truth. Epistles such as this one written by Paul were important for these believers, as they taught them the truth. Paul’s prayer was that God would reveal His will for the lives of the Colossians.

Paul prays also that the Colossians would have spiritual wisdom to apply the knowledge they received to their lives. It is one thing to have knowledge, and another to know how to use it. This requires wisdom. Paul’s prayer is that the Colossians be led by the Spirit of God as the source of spiritual wisdom in the application of the knowledge they had received about God’s will and purpose.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Paul's third request was that the Colossians have true understanding of the knowledge that was imparted to them. The implication here is that it was not the purpose of God that the Colossians mindlessly follow a set of traditions, beliefs and practices, but that they do so with a full awareness of what they were doing and be able to defend their knowledge and practices.

Verse 10

Paul's prayer in verse 9 was that the Colossians be filled with the knowledge of God's will with wisdom and understanding. He explains now why this was important.

The apostle gives four reasons why it is important to know, understand and exercise the will of God with wisdom.

First, *"so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord."* If we want to walk in a manner that honours the Lord and brings Him the glory due His name, we need to walk in His will. To do that we need to know and understand His will for our lives and commit ourselves to walk in it.

Second, it is important to know, understand and walk in the will of God in order to *"fully please him."* It is the ambition and desire of every child of God to please their heavenly Father. We please Him best by walking in His will and becoming everything He had called us to be.

Third, we must know, understand and walk in the will of God with wisdom, because it is only by doing so that we can truly *"bear fruit in every good work."* The good works referred to here are not just any works but the work that God has given us to do. God blesses His will and the good work He has given so that good fruit is the result. To bear good fruit we must know, understand and walk in the will of God.

Fourth, God blesses those who walk in his will with an "increasing knowledge" of Himself.

Colossians 1

God reveals Himself to those who seek after Him and His will. Those who seek Him will find Him. As we step out in His purpose, we grow in our relationship with Him and into deeper maturity.

Verse 11

Paul tells the Colossians that as they walked in God's will, He would strengthen them. Notice what the apostle says about this strength.

First, they would be strengthened with "*all power*." The word "power" in the Greek is δύναμις (dýnamis) and carries the sense of capability or ability. The power Paul speaks of here is the God-given ability to accomplish His purpose. The Colossians would have all they needed to do what God had asked them to do. God would not call them to do anything He would not give them the ability to do.

Notice, second the source of that strength – "*his glorious might*." The strength available to the Colossians was the glorious might of God Himself. The ability to do the will of God did not come from themselves, but from the glorious might of an all-powerful God.

Paul tells the Colossians next the result of God strength in them.

The first result is found in the words, "*for all endurance*." The word translated "endurance" is ὑπομονή (hupomoné). I have often illustrated the meaning of this word using the example of an individual carrying a heavy load. He carries that weight to its destination without letting it down. Endurance is the ability to remain under a heavy load until we reach our destination. The will and purpose of God is not accomplished by those who give up. To accomplish His purpose requires endurance. The strength of God will give us this ability to carry on to the end.

The second result of God strength is "*patience*." The word μακροθυμία (makrothumía) used here differs from endurance in that it refers to the ability to control one's attitudes and actions under intense situations. It is possible to endure a difficult circumstance but be miserable to live with. We can become bitter and angry under the weight God has called us to bear. Patience, however, changes

Light To My Path Bible Notes

this. Patient people bear their burden with grace. They refuse to allow their struggle to impact how they treat other people or how they view God. The strength of God gives us, not only enables us to endure, but also gives us the ability to do so with a godly spirit.

Finally, Paul reminds the Colossians that the strength God gave would enable them to endure *“with joy.”* The burden would sometimes be hard to bear. The apostle reminded the Colossians that when the burden was heavy and difficult to bear the Lord would also strengthen them with joy. God does not give us hard burdens to make us miserable. Some paths we must walk will be difficult. Be assured, however, that when the path is dark, God’s joy will be greater than the darkness. We will, in His strength, be able to lift our head above the waters to raise a shout of joy.

Verse 12

Paul speaks in this section about knowing and understanding the will of God and walking in the strength He supplies. He moves on now to encourage the Colossians to be thankful to the Father who qualified them *“to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”*

Notice that the Colossians were to be thankful to the Father for three things:

First, because he qualified them – *“the Father, who has qualified you.”* They were not worthy in themselves, but the heavenly Father sent His Son to pay for their sin and His Spirit to empower and equip them to live holy lives.

Second, the Colossians were to be thankful because through the qualification of the Father they now shared an inheritance with the saints. That inheritance is eternal life in His presence with those who have love Him.

Finally, the insurance of the Colossians was an inheritance *“in light.”* The light spoken of here is not just the absence of dark. Light is Scripture speaks of righteousness and holiness. The believers in Colossae were going to live in the presence of the holy and eternal

Colossians 1

light of God where no sin would molest, or sorrow plague their soul. This was great cause for thankfulness.

Verse 13

Paul contrasts the kingdom of light the Colossians were to inherit (verse 12) with the kingdom of darkness and sin from which they were delivered.

The word “*delivered*” is the Greek word *ῥύομαι* (*rhúomai*) which refers to something that has been rescued from danger. In other words, the Colossians were in serious trouble, but God came to their rescue and set them free. He delivered them from their enemy.

The enemy Paul speaks about here is *the “domain of darkness.”* The word “domain” is translated as “power” in the King James Version. The Greek word is *ἐξουσία* (*exousía*) and can be translated by authority, strength, or power. In other words, the Father has delivered us from the power and authority of darkness. This darkness had us under its control and we were powerless to do anything about it. God in His mercy, however, broke sin’s shackles and set is free from its grip.

Notice what God did after rescuing us from sin’s hold. He transferred us to the “*kingdom of his beloved Son.*” The idea here seems to be that He rescued us from one kingdom and gave us citizenship in another. As citizens of the kingdom of His Son we now enjoy the privileges and protection of that kingdom. The domain of darkness has no more authority or right over us.

Verse 14

The apostle has just told the Colossians that the Father had transferred them into the kingdom of His Son. Jesus reigned as King over this kingdom. Paul reminds the Colossians that all those who belonged to the kingdom of Jesus had redemption and forgiveness of sin through Him.

Redemption requires that a price be paid for release. There was a cost to releasing us from the dominion of darkness. That cost was

Light To My Path Bible Notes

the life of Jesus Christ for ours. He paid the supreme price so that we could be freed.

The death of Christ secured our pardon and forgiveness. My penalty was paid once for all time. With my penalty paid, I was released from sin's grip. More than this, however, through the forgiveness of sin, I was transferred to a new kingdom. I have a new master and King. It is my privilege to bow now to Him and walk in obedience to His lordship in my life.

Verse 15

The apostle continues from the last verse to speak of the person of the Lord Jesus. He tells us two things about the Lord Jesus here.

First, *"He is the image of the invisible God."* Notice that Jesus is the *"image"* of the invisible God. The word translated, image, is εἰκών (eikón). What is particularly interesting about this word is that it not only speaks about resemblance but also origin. Two people may look the same but not be of the same blood. The Greek word εἰκών (eikón), however, implies that Jesus not only resembles the Father but originates from the Father and is of the same character and essence as the Father.

Paul goes on to tell the Colossians that Jesus is the image of the *"invisible God."* God does not have a physical body as we do. Nor is He visible in some shape or form. Jesus, however, took on the form of a man and perfectly revealed the invisible qualities of His Father to us.

Second, Jesus Christ is *"the firstborn of all creation."* There may be two ways to understand what Paul is telling the Colossians here. Consider the words of Psalm 89:27 which reads:

*27 And I will make him the firstborn, the highest
of the kings of the earth. – Ps 89:27*

Notice how the palmist defines the firstborn – *"the highest of the Kings of the earth."* The firstborn was given a special place in the family and considered to be the family head. Jesus was the firstborn

Colossians 1

because He was “the highest of the Kings of the earth.” He is King of kings and the head of all creation.

Second, consider also the words of Revelation 1:5:

5 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood – Rev 1:5

John describes Jesus as the “firstborn of the dead.” In other words, Jesus was the first to conquer sin and death, rise from the dead, and ascend to take His place at the right hand of the Father.

Verse 16

Paul goes on to say that Jesus is the Creator of all things – “*For by him all things were created.*” In describing Jesus as the Creator of all things, Paul is making a very important statement.

First, the apostle is telling us that Jesus existed before creation. The implication is that he is eternal.

Second, consider the words of Genesis 1:1:

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. – Ge 1:1

It was understood that the heavens and the earth were created by God. This implies that Paul saw Jesus as God from before creation.

Jesus, one with the Father and the Spirit, created this world as we know it. Paul tells us that not only did Jesus created the earth with all its marvels, but He also created all things in heaven. Just as the Lord Jesus created the earth and all that is in it, so He created heaven and all that is in it. This includes human beings as well as angelic. All have been created by Christ. He, along with the Father and the Spirit were uncreated and the source of all things.

Notice how Paul tells us that Jesus did not just create those things we can see with our eyes but also many things we cannot see but

Light To My Path Bible Notes

depend on for life. This may also be a reference to the spiritual world and its beings.

The apostle tells the Colossians that the Lord Jesus also put in place “*thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities.*” The Lord Jesus governs the course of this world. He allows rulers and authorities their time and place in the course of history. None of these authorities take Him by surprise. He is sovereign over all dominions, gives them power, and strips that power from them. He is Lord over all rulers, powers, and authorities.

According to Paul, the Lord Jesus created all things for His own purpose and glory- “*all things were created through him and for him.*”

Verse 17

Paul makes two further statements here about Jesus.

First, “*he is before all things,*” The word “before” in the Greek language is πρὸ (pró) which can refer to either place or time. In this case, it is most likely that Paul is saying that Jesus Christ existed in time before anything was created. As Creator of all things, He had to exist before His creation came into being.

Second, “*in him all things hold together.*” The word translated “hold together” is συνίστημι (sunístēmi) and literally means to cause to stand with each other. The Lord Jesus holds all the pieces of this earth together and causes them to work together in harmony for the overall good.

Verse 18

Paul tells us here that the Lord Jesus “*is the head of the body, the church.*”

The church is compared to a body. The illustration is important for what it tells us about the nature of the church. Just as the various members of the body have different roles, so it is with the church.

Colossians 1

Each member serves a different function. But all work for the good of the whole.

Notice that the head of the church is Jesus Christ. The use of the word head here speaks of his role as Lord and King. The church exists for Him and for His purpose. The purpose of the body is to submit to the head, walk in His purpose, and glorify Him as its head.

Paul says three things about Jesus the head of the church. Notice first the Paul tells us that Jesus is the “*beginning*.”

Paul has already mentioned that Jesus existed before creation in verses 16,17. Verse 18, however, speaks of the church. The church consists of all who have been forgiven and brought into the kingdom of God through the work of Jesus Christ whether they lived in Old Testament or New Testament times. Jesus made that possible. His sacrificial death on the cross brought His people into the congregation of saints which would become known as the universal church.

The word Paul uses here for “beginning” is ἀρχή (arché). The word does not just refer to time but also to cause or origin. In other words, Jesus is the beginning of the church because He is the origin and cause of it becoming a reality. Without His work the church would not exist.

Paul tells the Colossians second that Jesus is also the “*firstborn from the dead*.” This is not to say that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead, for Jesus Himself had given the dead life in His ministry. Paul speaks here about the resurrection of Jesus from the death. His resurrection conquered the power of death. He rose never to die again. Sin has no more power over Him. While Jesus was the firstborn from the dead others will follow Him. In fact, His victory over this great enemy gives all who belong to him that same victory.

Notice finally, that Paul told the Colossians that in all things Jesus would be “*preeminent*.” The Greek word for preeminent is πρωτεύω (prōteúō) which simply means to be first, of highest significance and

Light To My Path Bible Notes

rank. As the origin and source of both the physical creation and the new creation, Jesus is the central focus, and the head to which not only the church but all creation must bow.

Verse 19

There is no question in this verse about what Paul believed about the deity of Jesus Christ. Paul tells the Colossians that the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in Jesus Christ. Notice three points here.

First, the fullness of God dwelt “in him,” that is the person of Jesus Christ. To know Him was to know God for all that Good was, Jesus demonstrated in His person.

Second, notice the phrase “*all the fullness of God.*” How much God’s fullness dwelt in Jesus? Paul is quite clear – “*all of the fullness of God.*” The full character and power of God is in the person of Jesus. All that God was, Jesus was also. He is God.

Finally, observe the words “*was pleased to dwell.*” The word translated pleased is the Greek word εὐδοκέω (eudokéō). It is derived from two words. The first is εὖ meaning well or good and the second is dokéō meaning to think. The meaning of εὐδοκέω (eudokéō), therefore, is to think good. The idea here is that this was the right and proper thing for all the fullness of God to dwell in Christ.

Verse 20

The task of reconciliation was given to Jesus, in whom the fullness of God dwelt. Verse 20

continues the thought of verse 19 and is part of the same sentence. The only one who could take on the task of reconciling the world was God. No one else was capable or worthy. The apostle John describes a scene in heaven where this very issue was discussed:

1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and

Colossians 1

on the back, sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" 3 And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, 4 and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. 5 And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."— Rev 5:1-5

Only Jesus was found worthy to open the seal and unfold the purpose of God for the reconciliation of all things.

Paul speaks to the Ephesians about this reconciliation when he says:

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. — Ep 2:13-16

Reconciliation, according to Paul in this verse, involves taking two people who were "far off" and "bringing them near" but means of the "blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13). It involves breaking down a dividing "wall of hostility" by establishing peace between the individuals involved (Ephesians 2:14). By "killing the hostility" (Ephesians 2:16) both parties are joined together as "one body."

This task was given to Jesus, who alone was worthy and capable of its fulfillment.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Paul goes on to tell the Colossians that Jesus would reconcile “*to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven.*” This statement has caused some trouble for many. How does Jesus reconcile “*all things to himself?*” We know that not everyone will come to Jesus and be made right with God.

When Paul speaks of restoring all things here, he does not mean that every person will come to Christ and accept His offer of salvation. He is saying, however, that all hostility will be broken and addressed. Paul tells the Colossians that Jesus would make “*peace by the blood of his cross.*” The cross of Jesus accomplished two important objectives. First, for all who received it, it brought forgiveness and reconciliation. Second, it broke the power of sin and sealed the judgement of all who rejected it. Hell, and eternal judgement separated from God, is the fate of all who reject the reconciling work of Jesus Christ. The eternal wrath of God will bring an end to all enemies of the cross and his kingdom of truth and holiness will reign uncontested.

Verse 21

Paul makes this matter of reconciliation from the preceding verses more personal to the Colossians by reminding them of their condition outside of Christ. He has three things to say here.

First, they were “*alienated.*” An alien is a noncitizen of a country. As such does not enjoy the privileges or protection of the country. In this case the Colossians were separated from God and under his wrath.

Second, they were “*hostile in mind.*” The word hostile is *ἐχθρός* (*echthros*), which refers to something that is at enmity with God or is hostile to Him. What Paul is saying here is that the thoughts, attitudes and desires of their minds were contrary to God’s purpose and repulsive to Him.

Third, they were “*doing evil deeds.*” it was not just the thoughts, attitudes and desires of the mind that were enemies to God and His purpose, but the Colossians were also acting on those evil desires. They lived an evil lifestyle.

Colossians 1

It should be noted here that the definition of evil often changes in our cultures. What one generation considers evil is acceptable to another. The standard of evil is not based on our culture's definition, however, but on the purpose and character of God that never changes.

Verse 22

Paul describes what Christ did for the Colossians here.

Observe that He reconciled them *“in his body of flesh by his death.”*

Reconciliation is the process whereby the relationship between God and His creation is restored. Paul tells the Colossians that this reconciliation with God was made possible by the death of Christ's body of flesh.

The result of the Christ's death on their behalf was that they were presented *“holy and blameless and above reproach”* to God.

First, the Colossians were presented as *“holy”* to the Father. The word *“holy”* ἅγιος (hágios) refers to something that has been set apart for God in person, thought and deed.

Second, the Colossians were *“blameless.”* The word ἄμωμος, (ámōmos) literally means, *“without spot or blemish.”* This blamelessness is not because the Colossians never sinned, but rather because the Lord Jesus took all their guilt to the cross. His blood covered all their blame.

Finally, the Colossians were *“above reproach.”* The term used here by the apostle is a legal one. The word ἀνέγκλητος (anégklētos) speaks of someone who is without accusation in court. They are free of any legal charge.

The death of Christ's body set us apart for God by removing all guilt and blame so that we are declared innocent of all charges before God. This is not something we deserved or earned but the result of the death of Christ on our behalf.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 23

Verse 22 and verse 23 are part of the same sentence and must be understood together. Paul speaks about the Colossians being reconciled to God through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

The apostle told the Colossians that it was also the desire of Christ to present them holy, blameless, and beyond reproach before God.

Paul speaks of reconciliation and presentation here. Reconciliation is a completed work of Christ that brings us into the family of God. Our presentation before the Father, however, seems to refer to the time when we stand before God on the final day to give an accounting of our lives.

Paul speaks of this in 2 Corinthians when he writes:

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. – 2Co 5:10

Notice that the judgement here is based on the “*what he had done on the body.*” We know from the rest of Scripture that we are not saved by the works of our flesh so this presentation before the judgement seat is not about salvation but rather about what that individual has done with the salvation given them.

Verse 23 continues the thought of Christ presenting those he reconciled, as holy, blameless and beyond reproach, before the Father. Notice how the apostle begins with the words, “*if indeed you continue in the faith.*” In other words, the Colossians would only be presented blameless, holy and above reproach if they continued in faith.

The word “*if*” is important. It introduces a condition and the possibility that even the believer can be guilty of sin and failure for which they must be accountable before God. This seems to be the teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians where’s he writes:

Colossians 1

14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. – 1Co 3:14-15

It is possible for a believer to waste his or her life, fall into sin, and not walk in God's purpose for their lives. Paul tells the Corinthians that if that was the case, they would be saved but only through the fire of God's judgement.

The Lord Jesus has done everything for our salvation. The cross has secured this for all who believe. He has also provided us all we need to live a godly life, but even true believers fall short of God's standard.

Paul tells the Colossians here that if they are to stand before God, holy blameless, and beyond reproach they must be *"stable and steadfast not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard."*

The word *"stable"* is θεμελιόω (themelióō) and speaks of laying a foundation. In other words, the Colossians were to establish Jesus Christ as the foundation upon which their lives were to be built.

Secondly, Paul tells the Colossians that they were also to be *"steadfast."* The word ἑδραῖος (hedraíos), comes from a word meaning "seat" or "chair." The idea is to be settled on Christ in mind and heart. The unsettled person is distracted by many things. Those who are steadfast have made up their mind and are committed to Christ and his purpose.

Third, the Colossians were not to *"shift"* from the hope of the gospel they heard. They were to keep their focus on the hope of there Gospel and the work of Jesus Christ. The message of salvation through Jesus Christ alone would keep them from false teaching and wandering of the path.

This Gospel was proclaimed in all of creation as it testifies to His grace and mercy through the natural elements. The Gospel was

Light To My Path Bible Notes

also proclaimed in words through the prophets and apostles called as ministers of God.

Paul reminds the Colossians here that while Christ has reconciled them with the Father, they were to learn to walk and grow in that salvation so they could be presented without shame before the Father.

Verse 24

Living the Christian life in a sinful world will not be easy. Paul begins this verse by telling the Colossians, however, that he rejoiced in his suffering for their sake. It should be noted here that Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter to the Colossians. This is evident from the words of Colossians 4:10 where he speaks of Aristarchus as his “fellow prisoner.” In part, the sufferings Paul is speaking about may be this imprisonment for the Gospel.

Paul rejoicing in his suffering does not mean that he found it enjoyable or pleasant. His suffering was very real. Paul had no secret delight in his affliction, but he was willing to face it for the sake of Christ and the expansion of His kingdom. It brought joy to his heart to know that what he did was for the advancement of the kingdom of God in the lives of the Colossians.

Notice also that Paul believed he was “*filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body.*”

At first glance it might appear that Paul is saying that there was something lacking in Christ’s afflictions that he was trying to make up for. Clearly, this is not what the apostle meant for he would be the first to say that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was complete and nothing more could possibly be added. It would be contrary to everything Paul taught to interpret this verse to mean that he had to add anything more to what the Lord Jesus had done.

This means that there must be another meaning to Paul’s words here. Likely the best way to understand what the apostle is telling the Colossians is to begin by the phrase “*Christ’s afflictions.*”

Colossians 1

Consider what the apostle says to the Corinthians:

5 For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. 6 If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. – 2Co 1:5-6

Paul speaks here about the Corinthians sharing in Christ's sufferings and afflictions. He refers here to how the Corinthians suffered for Christ and stood faithfully in His purpose. The suffering of the Corinthians for Christ is referred to here as Christ's suffering.

It is likely that Paul is saying the same thing to the Colossians. The kingdom of Christ must be advanced through the sacrifices of His people. If the church is to grow, blood and sweat must be spilt. The need is great for those who will lay down their lives for the sake of Christ. Paul saw that need and it was his great privilege to bear his weight of affliction and sacrifice for the expansion of Christ's church.

Verse 25

Paul speaks here of his calling to become a minister of the church of Jesus Christ.

The word translated "minister" is δῆκονος (diákonos), from which we get the English word deacon. It literally means servant. Paul appears to be using the word for its general sense and not to speak of himself exercising the role of deacon in the church.

Paul goes on in the verse to tell the Colossians that this role of minister was given to him as a "stewardship from God" for the Colossians.

A stewardship οἰκονομία (oikonomía) is a position entrusted to someone to manage. Paul was given a specific responsibility by God for the good of the church.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Notice what Paul's stewardship from God was – *“to make the word of God fully known.”*

God had called Paul as a servant of the church with a role of teaching the Word of God so that it was “fully known” in the church.

The word translated “fully known” here is πληρώω (plerōō), which speaks of filling something. In other words, Paul was to fill the church with the knowledge of God's Word. As a minister of the Word, the Apostle did this by teaching, preaching, writing, and living it out by his example.

Verse 26

Paul continues his sentence from verse 25 here. He had been called *“to make the word of God fully known.”* He goes on to describe this word as *“the mystery hidden for ages and generations.”* The law and the prophets spoke in mysteries and pictures. The sacrifices and offerings all looked forward to the coming of the perfect Messiah. The prophets spoke in pictures and riddles, but the reality had not yet appeared.

Paul reminded the Colossians, however, that since the coming of the Lord Jesus, the mystery hidden in the Law and the Prophets had been revealed to the saints. It was found in Jesus Christ and His salvation.

Verse 27

The mystery revealed to the saints was how God chose to reveal His glory to the whole world (the Gentiles) through His Son Jesus Christ.

Notice how Paul expresses the wonder of this revealed mystery – *“how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery.”* This revelation of God's glory to the nations was *“great among the Gentiles.”* In Paul's day we cannot underestimate the impact the Gospel was having on the Gentile world, nor the joy this brought to nations once seen as unworthy of the gospel. In the days

Colossians 1

of Paul, the Spirit of God was moving powerfully among the nations revealing to them the *“riches of His glory.”*

The great mystery revealed to the saints, can be summarized by the words: *“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”* What is our hope of eternal glory? – the presence of Christ in us. The very life of Christ implanted in us, giving us life and hope. This is my assurance of eternal life. Could there be a richer, more glorious or greater reality than this?

Verse 28

Paul proclaimed Jesus Christ, the hope of glory. The word Paul uses here, translated “proclaim” is καταγγέλλω (kataggéllō) not only carries with it the sense of proclaiming but declaring, announcing, celebrating or preaching. There is a certain passion in the proclaiming. We celebrate Him as the hope of a world in darkness and sin. We do this in our worship as we declare Him to be Lord over sin and death.

Not only does Paul encourage us to “*proclaim*” Jesus, but notice secondly the challenge, “*warning everyone.*” By introducing the word, “warning,” Paul reveals a danger. That danger is sin and death. The solution is found in the person of Jesus Christ without whom we have no victory. This is a call to take this message to the lost. It is a call to evangelism.

Finally, Paul calls us as believers to “*teaching everyone with all wisdom.*” This is a call to discipleship. It challenges us to train those who receive our warning in their knowledge of Christ and His ways. The goal of this proclaiming, warning, and teaching is to present everyone mature in Christ.

Verse 29

Paul declares his great ministry passion – “*to present everyone mature in Christ*” (verse 28). Paul tells the Colossians that to accomplish this goal he toiled and struggled.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

The word “toil” is the Greek word, κοπιᾶω (kopiāō) which has the sense of being worn out or fatigued with hard labour.

“*Struggling*” is translated from the word ἀγωνίζομαι agōnízomai which means to fight or wrestle. It involves overcoming many obstacles, hurdles.

Presenting everyone mature in Christ is hard and strenuous work. It is a work that takes more than we can physically, and emotionally give. Paul understood this and did not depend on his human resources to make this happen. Notice the source of Paul’s power here – *“I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.”*

It was God’s energy and power that strengthened and enabled the apostle to proclaim, warn and teach. It was the power of God working in him that enabled Paul to celebrate and proclaim Christ from his prison cell. That same power working in him gave new life to the sinner and caused the believer to grow to maturity. The ability to endure and accomplish this task was God-given. Paul was successful in this task because he did not depend on his own resources to accomplish it.

Colossians 2

Verse 1

The apostle begins chapter 2 with a personal word to the Colossians. He tells them that he had a great struggle for them.

The word struggle is ἀγών (*agón*). It was used to speak of boxing and wrestling in the Greek games. The idea here is that there was an opponent that needed to be overcome. The context of the verse shows us that Paul's concern is that believers in Colossae love one another (verse 2), and that they resist the false teachers among them (verse 5). Part of Paul's response to this inner struggle and burden for these believers is to write this letter.

Notice that Paul's concern was also for the Laodiceans. Laodicea was located near the city of Corinth. We have a record of a letter written to the church in Laodicea in Revelation 3 showing us that Paul had reason to be concerned for them:

15 "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. – Rev 3:15-18

Clearly, the church in Laodicea had become lukewarm and complacent in their walk with the Lord Jesus.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 2

Paul told the Colossians that he had a struggle on his heart for them and the believers in Laodicea. He explains the nature of that struggle here in verse 2.

First, he was burdened that their hearts be encouraged. The word translated, encouraged is παρακαλέω (parakaléo). There are two parts to this word. The word “pará” means to the side of, and “kaléo” means to call. Imagine being in trouble and calling someone to your aid. This individual brings support and comfort in your time of need – they encourage you. Paul wanted the hearts of the Colossians and Laodiceans to experience this kind of encouragement.

Second, notice the source of this encouragement – *“being knit together in love.”* It was Paul’s burden that the Colossians and Laodiceans be one in love for each other. There is great strength in the body of Christ when it is joined together in Christian love.

Paul reveals the goal of this encouragement and brotherly love – *“to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ.”* In simple terms, Paul wanted the believers to reach a greater understanding and knowledge of Christ.

Notice how he speaks of the riches of full assurance, understanding and knowledge of Christ. Knowing Christ and being assured of a relationship with Him is one of the greatest treasures we could ever have in this life and the life to come. Understanding who Jesus is and what He had done for our salvation ought to thrill out heart and secure our commitment to Him.

Paul speaks of Jesus as the mystery of God. This refers back to Colossians 1:26 where he introduced the message of the gospel as a mystery hidden for ages, but revealed to the saints. The Law of Moses and the prophets spoke of Jesus in pictures and riddles, but He has now been revealed to us.

Colossians 2

Paul's burden is that believers would encourage one another to know this Christ and understand His purpose for their lives.

Verse 3

In Jesus Christ, according to Paul, are "*hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*"

Jesus Christ is an all-knowing God. As the Creator of all things, nothing is hidden from Him. He is the treasury of all knowledge.

Wisdom is the ability to use knowledge skillfully. If we want to know how we are to live, He is the source of all wisdom. He unfolds the purpose of the Father. He has a purpose for your life and mine. To know that purpose in full, you must know Jesus, for in and through Him alone the fullness of God plan is revealed.

Verse 4

Another cause of Paul's struggle for the Colossians and the Laodiceans (see Colossians 2:1) had to do with false teachers.

The apostle was afraid that these false teachers might delude them with "plausible arguments." The word used here is *πιθανολογία* (*pithanología*) which refers to speaking persuasively and with believable and logical arguments.

Notice also the word "delude" here. The Greek word translated "delude" is *παραλογίζομαι* (*paralogízomai*) which means to reason incorrectly.

What is important to note is that there are many believable and logical arguments that are false and misleading. On the other hand, some of Christianity's most essential truths do not make sense to our fleshly way of thinking.

Human logic is not the basis of all truth. Some things are beyond our ability to understand and must be accepted by faith in God's word.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Paul warns the Colossians here about well reasoned arguments that only lead to error.

Verse 5

Paul reminded the Colossians that while he could not be with them in body, he was with them in spirit. The implication here is that the apostle thought about them, was concerned for them, and prayed for them. Notice also that he rejoiced to see that they were standing firm in their faith in Christ.

Verse 6

Verse 6 begins with the word “therefore.” This relates it to what Paul has been saying in the previous verses. The apostle has just told the Colossians that he was concerned that false teachers might deceived them with “plausible arguments.” He was encouraged, however, that they had not given into these false teachers but stood firm in their faith.

Paul continues with this same thought here when he says: “*as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.*” How had the Colossians received Jesus? They had received him by faith. They had not seen Him in the flesh. They had not heard His audible words. But they believed in Him and trusted what He taught. When they received Jesus Christ, they entrusted their lives into His hands. They did this by faith in what He said. This same faith was required to continue in their spiritual walk. Just as they trusted Jesus for salvation, so they were to trust what He said for maturity. Faith is as essential for the Christian walk as it is for salvation. We are not only saved by faith in Jesus Christ, but we must also walk by faith and well. The Christian life begins and continues by faith.

In this context, Paul is reminding the Colossians that their faith in Christ and His word would protect them from the persuasive words of false teachers.

Verse 7

Paul shares some key principles with the Colossians here for growth in the Christian life.

Colossians 2

First, they were to be “*rooted*” in Christ. When something takes root, it fixes itself to the spot where it takes root. In this case the roots are in Christ. There is a commitment to remain faithful here.

When the roots go down in the soil, they draw life from that soil. Because their roots are on Christ, those who are rooted in Him draw life from Him. Being rooted in Christ is to be dependant on Him.

Second, the Colossians were to be *built up in Him*. The word Paul uses here is ἐποικοδομέω (epoikodoméō) which is derived from two Greek words. The first is ἐπί meaning “upon.” The second is “oikodoméō” meaning “to build.” The imagery here is that of building a house on a foundation. The Lord Jesus is the foundation, and the Colossians were to build their lives on Him and His teaching.

Third, the Colossians were to be *established in their faith*. The word “established” in the Greek is βεβαιόω (bebaióō) meaning to make something firm and sure, or to strengthen. What Paul seems to be saying here is that the Colossians were to keep their faith in Christ strong and sure.

Finally, the apostle encouraged the Colossians to *abound in thanksgiving*. Certainly, as the Colossians remembered the work of Christ and their hope in Him, they would have ample reason to be thankful. Thankfulness is an important part of spiritual growth. It lifts our heart to praise and inspires confidence in the Savior who’s had blessed us so richly.

Verse 8

Paul’s struggle for the Colossians is evident here. In Colossians 2:4 he challenged them not to be deceived by “plausible arguments.” He warns the believers of Colossae against the worldly philosophies, and traditions in their day.

He begins by telling the Colossians not to be taken captive. The word συλαγωγέω (sulagōgéō) speaks about kidnapping or leading someone off as prey. Those carrying off the prey have hostile intent.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

In this case, they lead God's people into false teaching and away from the truth of the gospel. They do this in two ways.

First, by philosophy. The Greek word for philosophy φιλοσοφία (philosophía), literally means "love of wisdom." While the love of wisdom is not wrong on itself, the wisdom we speak about here is not the wisdom of God but of man. There were many thinkers on those days with their ideas of the meaning and purpose of life. Many of those ideas were contrary to the teaching of the Scripture. True wisdom is founded on God and His Word. Worldly philosophies that do not submit to the truth of God Word may be very logical and convincing but the believer in Jesus Christ must not be captured by these arguments. Scripture, not worldly wisdom is where the believer finds truth.

Second, Paul tells the Colossians that they must beware of "*empty deceit*." The word "empty" is κενός (kenós) and refers to something that is meaningless. Deceit ἀπάτη (apátē) relates to something that appears to be one thing but, is something else. In this case, there is something sinful or sinister under the surface. There are many things that could be classified as empty deceit in our day. We are bombarded with advertisements that promote worldly pleasures and privileges that are meaningless and leave those who indulge empty and unsatisfied. More than this, however, they draw their victims away from Christ and His purpose for their lives.

Paul goes on to tell the Colossians where these philosophies and empty deceit come from – human tradition and the elemental spirits of the world.

First the apostle traces these ungodly philosophies and empty deceit to *human tradition*. When we think of tradition in our day we think of customs and ways of doing things passed down from one generation to another. The word Paul uses here, however, is παράδοσις (parádosis), which refers to teachings and doctrines that are handed down.

Notice here that Paul's is very specific. He speaks about "human traditions." In other words, the accumulated knowledge and

Colossians 2

teachings of worldly scholars and intellects passed down through the ages. This might be philosophical, cultural or religious in nature, but it does not originate in God but from human reason. Ungodly philosophies and empty deceit have been passed on from one generation to another. This becomes part of our culture and worldview, but it is not a godly worldview and must be broken in the heart and mind of the believer.

The second source of ungodly philosophies and empty deceit according to Paul are “*the elemental spirits of the world.*” The phrase “elemental spirits of the world” in the English Standard Version of the Bible is translated differently in other versions.

- “Rudiments of the world” – KJV
- “Basic principles of the world” NKJV, NIV
- “Evil powers of this world” – NLT

The Greek word used here is στοιχείον (stoicheíon) and refers to the basic elements of compounds that make up the world. Paul does not go into detail about these elemental spirits. What is clear, however, is that these spirits, elements, principles or compounds are not Christ nor are they lead to Christ. We can become so focused on mastering this earth, enjoying its pleasures and privileges and harnessing its power that we completely ignore the principles of heaven and the kingdom of God. God ways are not worldly ways. The principles of heaven differ from the principles of this earth. The best way to fail in the Christian life is to have a worldly mindset. If we want to walk with God, we must accept that His ways are not the ways of this earth.

We must learn to have the mind of Christ, to walk counter-culture and to resist the ways of the world if we are to mature and be all that God has called us to be.

Verse 9

Paul has been challenging the Colossians not to be distracted by human philosophies and empty deceit passed on through the ages. Instead, they were to set their hearts on Christ. He shares with them

Light To My Path Bible Notes

the reason why they were to set their heart on Christ here – “*For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.*” If there was anyone more reliable than human philosophies and wisdom it would be Him in whom the fullness of deity dwelt.

Notice a few details in what Paul teaches here. Consider first the phrase “*in him the whole fullness of deity*” The word “whole” (πᾶς *pás*) communicates the idea of “totality.” Some translations use the word “all.” In other words, the totality of God dwelt in Christ. All that God is, so is Jesus. In other words, He is God.

Observe second the word fullness. The whole fullness of God dwelt in Jesus. When Paul speaks here about whole fullness, he is telling us that Jesus was *not* like His Father in certain ways but in every way. All of God’s power, holiness, sovereignty, justice, love, etc. was in Jesus. God the Father had nothing that Jesus did not also have in full measure.

The fullness of God dwells in Jesus Christ. The word translated “dwell” is “κατοικέω (*katoikéō*).” It speaks of a fixed and permanent dwelling. In other words, the fullness of God lives forever in Christ. This will never change.

Notice one more detail here. This fullness of God dwelt in Christ “*bodily.*” Christ took on a human body, but this human body did not in any way hinder the fullness of God from dwelling in Him. He was fully God in a human body.

Verse 10

Paul tells the Colossians believers that they had been filled in Jesus Christ.

The philosophies and empty deceit offered by this world could not save their soul or deliver them from the power of sin. Nor could they give them a right relationship with their Creator. Paul tells them that only Jesus could fill that need.

The Greek word translated “in” describes the source or place where we find this filling – in Jesus Christ.

Colossians 2

Verses 11-15 make the purpose of this filling quite clear. The filling is required because of sin. Only Christ and His work count for our salvation and right standing with God. Imagine yourself as a vessel, emptied of yourself and every effort to please God in your flesh. It is into this vessel that the presence of Christ, His Spirit, His work, forgiveness and grace is poured. Nothing of myself, everything of Christ, filled to overflowing with Him. Dead to all my efforts to please God, made alive by the fullness of His gracious presence in me. This is my assurance and hope. I can be assured only because He does everything for my salvation.

Notice how Paul reminds the Colossians that the one who fills them is *“the head of all rule and authority.”* In other words, there is no authority or power greater than His. When he fills us with Himself and covers is by His work, what can stand against us?

Verse 11

Notice once again the phrase *“in him.”* Verse 10 tells us that we were filled *“in him.”* Verse 11 reminds us that to be filled we must first be emptied of ourselves.

Paul compares our salvation and Christian life to circumcision. Notice several details here.

First, this circumcision was *“in him.”* In other words, it took place as a result of coming to Christ and was a direct result of the work of Jesus in the life of the Colossians believers.

Second, this circumcision was *“made without hands.”* That is to say that the circumcision referred to here was not a physical circumcision as in what took place in the Jewish tradition.

Third, the circumcision Paul speaks about here is a *“putting off the body of the flesh.”* We have already seen that the circumcision spoken of here was made without hands so the flesh we speak of here is not the physical flesh. Paul uses the word *“flesh”* here to speak of the sinful nature. Consider how he uses this term in his letters to the Romans and the Galatians:

Light To My Path Bible Notes

*18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me,
that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do
what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. –*

Ro 7:18

*17 For the desires of the flesh are against the
Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against
the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to
keep you from doing the things you want to do. –*

Ga 5:17

What Paul is telling the Colossians here is that when they came to Christ, they underwent a circumcision or cutting off their sinful fleshly nature. They had to die to that fleshly nature and be filled instead with the presence of Christ. They died to their allegiance to the flesh and committed themselves instead to Christ.

While Jewish circumcision was a cutting of the physical flesh. “The circumcision of Christ,” related to the old nature of sin and rebellion. To be filled with Christ the Colossians needed to die to themselves and their fleshly ways.

Verse 12

Paul continues his illustration of what took place when the Colossians came to faith in Jesus Christ. In verse 11 he used the Old Testament illustration of circumcision to picture death to self. From death he moves now to burial and resurrection. To illustrate these concepts, Paul uses the example of baptism.

He begins here with the words, “*having been buried with him in baptism.*” I recently did a funeral service for a father and son. The cremated remains of the son were put on top of the father’s casket, and they were buried together in the same plot. Paul is using a similar illustration. He tells us that when the Lord Jesus was buried, he took the curse and penalty of our sin with Him – it was buried with him.

Paul uses baptism to illustrate this concept. The word used for baptism here is “*βάπτισμα (baptisma)*,” which literally means “to

Colossians 2

dip.” When an object is dipped in water, it is buried in the water – thus the illustration of burial.

Notice in this illustration of baptism that when an object is dipped *βάπτισμα* (*báptisma*), it generally does not remain in the water but is taken up again. Paul uses this to illustrate what took place in the life of the believer. The believer died to themselves and their sinful nature.

That sin and shame was buried with Christ. But that was not the end. The believer rose with Christ as well. We were given new life through the “*powerful working of God, who raised him (Christ) from the dead.*”

That new life according to Paul was “*through faith.*” The believer willingly lays his or her life before Christ trusting His forgiveness and grace to cleanse, forgive and plant His new life within.

Verse 13

The apostle Paul reminds the Colossians that at one time they were dead in their trespasses and uncircumcision.

First, the Colossians had been dead in their trespasses. Some versions use the word sin here. The idea here is that sin had separated the Colossians from God and a relationship with Him. They were spiritually dead, and the life of Christ was not in them.

Second, the Colossians were dead also in the uncircumcision of their flesh. The uncircumcised were those who were separated from God. The Colossians at one point in their lives were separated from God and His promises. They did not belong to Him and were destined for eternal separation from Him and His blessing.

Notice, however, what God did to those who were dead in sin and separated from Him – “*God made alive together with him.*”

God made us who were dead in sin alive. He gave us spiritual life in the person of His Son. Just as we died and were buried with

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Jesus, so we were raised with new life in Him. Those who have been forgiven know this miraculous new life.

Notice how this new life was given – “*having forgiven us all our trespasses.*” New life is given by means of the forgiveness of sin. Sin brings death. Forgiveness imparts new life. If you want to know this new life, you must be forgiven by Christ.

Verse 14

In verse 13 Paul reminded the Colossians that they had been forgiven through the work of Jesus Christ. He shows them here what took place legally for their salvation and forgiveness to become a reality.

Notice that Jesus cancelled “*the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.*” There are two details we need to observe here.

First, there was a “*record of debt that stood against us.*” Sin places us under an obligation. Justice demands payment for sin. An individual who breaks the law is fined or must pay for his or her crime with time spend in prison. The same is true in our relationship with God.

Justice imposes a penalty on sin that demands payment. We all have a record of debt before God for we have all fallen short of His standard by breaking His law.

Paul tells the Colossians that the Lord Jesus cancelled their record of debt. Their penalty for sin was paid and they were free from all debt to God.

Second, notice how this record of debt was paid – “*this he set aside, nailing it to the cross.*” Jesus took my record of debt and paid the entire price by dying in my place on the cross of Calvary. My debt being paid in full by Jesus, was, therefore, cancelled.

Colossians 2

Verse 15

Paul tells us that three things happened when Jesus cancelled my record of debt by nailing it to the cross.

First, “*He (Jesus) disarmed the rulers and authorities.*” The word disarm (ἀπεκδύομαι *apekdúomai*), means to strip of power and authority. When we owe a debt to someone, they have authority over us. A criminal, for example, is stripped of his or her freedom and placed in prison until their debt is paid in full. By paying our debt, Jesus took away all authority over us from those who held it under their grip.

The rulers and authorities who had authority over us here were Satan, sin, the world, the flesh, the law and death itself. None of these powers have any more authority over us who belong to Jesus Christ.

Notice second that Jesus “*put them to open shame.*” By stripping these powerful enemies of their authority over us, Jesus demonstrated an even greater power and authority. These proud enemies were humbled through the work of Jesus.

Finally, Jesus “*triumphed*” over these enemies. By triumphing over these enemies, the Lord stripped them off their power and authority over all who belong to Him. Sin has no more legal hold over those who have been forgiven. Death must now surrender to eternal life. Satan must release his hold and release those who belong to Jesus.

The once proud boasts of these great enemies have been silenced. They stand with head bowed in shame, for they have now been defeated.

Verse 16

In the previous verses, Paul reminded the Colossians about how Jesus Christ cancelled their debt by nailing it to the cross and

Light To My Path Bible Notes

disarming every authority that had any legal right over them because of their sin. He triumphed over all enemies and restored them to the Father.

Verse 16 begins with the word, “therefore.” This indicates that what he is about to say is a direct result what Jesus did on the cross.

As a result of what Jesus did on the cross, the Colossians were not to let anyone pass judgement on them *“in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.”*

Notice first that they were not to let anyone pass judgement on them. The word judge here is “κρίνω (krínō),” refers to the act of deciding between good and evil, right and wrong. In this case other people were determining whether the Colossians were in a right relationship with God.

Second, observe the criteria for this judgement about their relationship with God – *“questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.”*

The individuals making judgement on their relationship with God were basing their decision on whether the Colossians followed the Jewish food laws and observed the festivals and holy days prescribed by Moses. In other words, they believed that salvation and a right relationship with God was based on the law and how carefully an individual observed it.

Paul makes it very clear that the believer was to refuse to be judged on this criterion. Those who allow themselves to be judged on this basis, trusted their own efforts to merit the favour and salvation of God. The true believer trusts only in what the Lord Jesus has done. To allow oneself to be judged by our good works is to deny the grace of God as the only means of salvation and favour with God.

Verse 17

The Jewish food laws and holy days, according to Paul, were “*shadows*.” A shadow is a representation of the real thing. A

Colossians 2

shadow is not the real thing but gives us a general idea of what it looks like. The real thing, or the “*substance belongs to Christ*. “

What Paul is saying is that the law looked forward to Jesus. It represented, as a pale shadow, the work and person of Christ. It illustrated our need for a Saviour and instructed us in what He would do, but the shadow was not the substance, nor could it ever replace the substance. To elevate the shadow above Christ was a grave error. The shadow of the law can never make us right with God. Only the person of Jesus Christ can do that.

Verse 18

The death of Christ and the payment of our penalty changes how we relate to God. In verse 16 the Apostle told the Colossians not to let anyone judge their relationship with God based on the Law of Moses. He takes this a step further here.

Notice how the Apostle begins – “*Let no one disqualify you.*” The word translated “disqualify” is “καταβραβεύω (katabrabeúō).” It is a word used to speak of the Greek games. The idea here is that an umpire judges against someone so that that individual loses his or her trophy. Paul is telling the Colossians that it was possible to lose their reward as believers.

Understand here that he is not speaking about losing their salvation, but their reward for faithful service. The apostle goes on in this verse to speak of four ways the believer can be distracted and get off track in the Christian life.

First, through “asceticism.” The phrase used here is θέλων ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνῃ which means to will or choose lowliness or humility. While humility is a good thing in the Christian life, the phrase, to choose lowliness implies that the individual concerned is humbling themselves to gain favour with God. Asceticism is the act of inflicting oneself with discomfort or pain in order to get closer to God.

The history of the church recounts the stories of men and women who lived in poverty, beat themselves, or starved themselves with

Light To My Path Bible Notes

the goal of gaining God's favour and drawing closer to Him. Paul reminds the Colossians that this practice drew their attention away from the work of Christ whose work alone is able give us favour with the Father.

Second, Paul warned the Colossians about getting distracted through the "*worship of angels*." Some commentators see this as a reference to the teaching of the day that select people were able to worship with angels. These individuals entered a special space and experienced a deeper worship than the average person. If this is the case, then the idea here is that the individuals focused more on the experience of worship than the person of Jesus Christ. We can focus so much on our worship experience that we forget who we are worshipping. Paul told the Colossians that this was a distraction in their Christian life.

The third distraction in the Christian life, according to Paul, is "*going on in detail about visions*." It is my conviction that the Lord still speaks through visions and dreams as He did throughout the Scripture. I am also aware of just how much people can become so focused on these things that they no longer seek God in His Word. Paul himself had dreams and visions from God, but his feet were also solidly fixed in the truth of Scripture. Notice how the English Standard Version translates "going on in detail about visions." The word used here is ἐμβρατεύω (embateúō), which literally means to step into. It carries the sense of prying or intruding into things that are not necessary for us to know. God has given us His word as the source of inspired truth. We can easily be distracted by those who proclaim to hear from the Lord but whose words distract us from the truth of Scripture as our source and measure of all truth.

Finally, Paul tells the Colossians that the "*sensuous mind*" and the pride that comes with it can distract us in our Christian walk. The word sensuous here in the Greek is σάρξ (sárx), or fleshly. The fleshly mind is a mind focused on the pleasures, thoughts and philosophies of this world. It is not in tune with the Spirit of God and His ways. We will never be able to live the life God required if we allow our fleshly mind to direct us. God ways and thoughts are very different from those of the flesh.

Colossians 2

Verse 19

Paul spoke in the last verse about the distractions in the Christian life. Instead of being distracted by these things, the apostle encouraged the Colossians instead, to hold fast to the “Head.” The Head of the church is Jesus Christ.

*23 For the husband is the head of the wife even
as Christ is the head of the church, his body,
and is himself its Savior. – Ep 5:23*

Paul reprimands those in Colossae who were not holding fast to Christ and His work and were instead being distracted by false teachers promoting the Law of Moses and mystical spiritual experiences rather than the work of Jesus.

The apostle goes on to remind the Colossians that Jesus, the Head, is the source of spiritual life and growth. It is from Him that the body is *nourished*.

It is also from Jesus the Head that the body is “*knit together through its joints and ligaments*.” It is through Jesus that the whole body is unified in one effort and purpose. As the Head He directs and leads. As each part follows His purpose the whole body grows “with a growth that is from God.” In light of the many distractions around them, Paul challenges the Colossians to hold fast to Jesus the Head, look to Him, trust in Him, and allow Him to bring the growth necessary.

Verse 20

Paul speaks about the sufficiency of the work of the Lord Jesus for salvation and growth. The Colossians were being tempted by false teachers to stray from this reality.

The apostle speaks once again here of the elemental spirits of the world. The word *στοιχείον* (*stoicheíon*) refers to the basic building blocks and principles and that make up this world. These principles shape how we think and live or lives. Sometimes we speak of “getting back to nature.” Understand here that there are indeed some basic principles that exist in nature that we would do well to

Light To My Path Bible Notes

follow. Realize, however, that this world has been cursed by sin. Getting back to the fundamental principles of nature will never save a soul. Many religions and philosophies on our day, focus on what is natural to us. They seek to manipulate our inner spirit or energy in the hope of drawing us closer to God or to what they feel we were meant to be. In doing this they deny that God's purpose does not always line up with ours. They do what is best in their own eyes, but do not live in submission to God.

The believer, according to Paul rejects this notion and submits instead to the will and purpose of God, even when that is contrary to what they desire naturally. They also realize that the wisdom of this world is not the wisdom of God. God ways do not always make sense to us. If we only live according to the wisdom of the world, how are we any different from the unbeliever.

Having said this, understand that even believers can live according to the ways and thinking of the world. Paul calls the Colossians to examine their lives to see if they were being guided by the patterns of the world or by God.

Verse 21

It is all too easy for faith to deteriorate into works. Paul has been reminding the Colossians about the work of Jesus Christ alone which can save and keep us. There were those, however, who taught that to be in a right relationship with Christ one had to live a certain lifestyle and follow a certain set of rules. Paul gives some examples of this here in the phrase – “*Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.*” While the Apostle believed that believers should live for Christ and walk in obedience to His word, he rejects the idea that by following a set of rules we can be saved and gain favour with God. You can follow all these rules and be lost in sin. Following a set of spiritual rules will never save your soul – only Jesus can do that.

Verse 22

Paul has two things to say here about the regulations of verse 21.

Colossians 2

First, they refer to things that perish when used. Some of the regulations the false teachers in Colossae were promoting were Jewish food laws. Consider this for a moment. These foods when eaten are digested and passed through the body. Would you put your assurance of salvation on something like this? Other regulations pertained to not touching anything unclean. These unclean objects lived for a time, died and decayed in the ground. Will your assurance of a right relationship with God be based on your interaction with the decaying remains of that unclean object? Surely there must be something more worthwhile of our confidence.

The second thing Paul tells the Colossians about the regulations of Colossians 2:21 is that they are “*according to human precepts and teachings.*” If there is one thing sure, the Scripture teaches that no one could ever be saved by the observation of the law. If they could, Jesus would never have needed to come for our salvation.

*20 For by works of the law no human being will
be justified in his sight, since through the law
comes knowledge of sin. – Ro 3:20*

Nor could all the sacrifices of the Old Testament ever save a soul.

*4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and
goats to take away sins. – Heb 10:4*

Any teaching that says that the observation of a set of religious regulations will give an individual a right standing with God and assure their salvation is “*human precepts and teaching*” and not from God. All of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation point to Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Saviour through whom alone we can have assurance of forgiveness. There is assurance in no one or anything else.

Verse 23

The apostle has more to say here about the human precepts and teachings of verses 21-22.

First, these laws and regulations about what an individual can handle, taste, or touch has an “*appearance of wisdom.*” An

Light To My Path Bible Notes

appearance is not wisdom. It deceives people into thinking that what they are doing is right, while they are on the wrong path. When it comes to a matter of life and death there is a world of difference between an “appearance of wisdom” and “true wisdom.” In this matter, we cannot afford to be deceived. The idea that following a set of religious rules and regulations to be right with God makes sense to many, but according to Paul, is only an “appearance” of wisdom.

Notice second that Paul tells the Colossians that these regulations and rules promote “self-made religion.” The King James Version uses the phrase “will worship.” The idea is that these individuals create a god of their choice and determine how to worship it in a way that pleases them. The religion resulting from this is not the faith of Scripture but an invention of the human heart.

Paul goes on to describe the kind of religion being promoted in his day as “*asceticism and severity to the body*.” The word used here is *απεινοφροσύνη* (*tapeinophrosúnē*), which speaks of viewing oneself as small or lowly. While having a proper understanding of oneself is important, consider the context of this verse. What is the response of these who consider themselves lowly? They set up rules and regulations to make themselves more worthy with the hope that if they do well enough, they will be accepted by God. This is asceticism – an attempt to debase oneself in the hope that by doing so, special favour will be granted, and God will accept us. This is not biblically humility. Biblical humility accepts it cannot merit God’s salvation by any means and so it relies totally on Jesus Christ for everything.

Notice Paul’s final statement here about this man-made religion – it is “*of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh*.” Consider this for a moment. Imagine that you find yourself lusting with your eyes. You determine therefore that you will pluck out your eyes so this will never happen again. With your eyes plucked out, however, you soon discover that your mind continues down that same path. You can cut off one hand to stop yourself from doing something evil but what prevents the other hand from doing the same? In fact, you will soon discover that you can cut off all your body parts and still sin.

Colossians 2

Sin is part of your nature to such and extent that the only way you can stop it is to die. You cannot change the human nature and its impulse to sin. No man-made rules or regulations will take away your sin. You need forgiveness and that is why Jesus came.

Colossians 3

Verse 1

In the last part of chapter 2 Paul spoke to the Colossians about man-made religion with its attempts to merit the favour of God through human effort. He moves on now to faith in Jesus Christ as the only legitimate alternative.

Paul begins with the word “*if*.” The word is important and tells us that when certain circumstances are in place there ought to be an accompanying response.

In this case, the Colossians had been raised with Christ. In other words, while they were dead in their sin, God made them alive in Jesus Christ through the forgiveness of their sin:

*13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses
and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made
alive together with him, having forgiven us all
our trespasses – Col 2:13*

Because of what the Lord Jesus did, Paul expected a certain response on the part of the Colossians. They were to “*seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*”

First, Paul expected that the Colossians “*seek*.” The word “*seek*” is a command and requires diligent effort and discipline.

Second, the Colossians were to seek “*the things that are above.*” In other words, they were to make it their objective to strive after the heavenly purpose of God. That purpose included God, His ways

Light To My Path Bible Notes

and His blessings. This was to become their focus in life. All too many believers still live for this world and what it offers. Paul challenges the Colossians to get their eyes off this world and seek after God and His purpose.

Notice finally, that Paul had two things to say about the “*things that are above*.”

The “things that are above” is where Christ is. In other words, these blessings and privileges can only be obtained from Christ. He is the source of these “things above.” He is our forgiveness. He is our hope. He is our peace. He is our life. To seek the things above is to seek Christ, for without Him none of this would be possible.

Notice also that Christ, as the source of all things above, is “*seated at the right hand of God*.” The right hand is the place of honour. Not only is Christ the source of “the things above,” but He also has all authority. When you seek to walk in His purpose you have full authority behind you. We stand supported by the power and authority of God Himself.

Shall we be content with earthly trivialities, when the storehouse of heaven is open to us?

Verse 2

In verse 1 Paul told the Colossians to “seek the things that are above.” He takes this a step further here when he tells the Colossians to “*set your minds on things that are above*.”

To set one’s mind has to do with fixing one’s thoughts, will, and desire on something. In this case, the object of this will, thought and passion are the “things above” – the person, purpose, and presence of Christ Himself. Paul challenges the Colossians here to lock their passion and thought onto Christ and “*not on things that are on earth*.”

The fact that the apostle must mention this, reveals that this is a temptation for believers. All too many Christians find themselves absorbed in this world, its ways and treasures. It is sometimes

Colossians 3

difficult to tell the difference between an unbeliever and a believer for they seem to have the same desires and aspirations in life. Paul encourages us to be a people who seek and set our hearts and minds on Christ so that He becomes our focus and goal in life.

Verse 3

Verse 3 begins with the word “*for*.” This connects what the apostle says here to the previous verses. There is a reason why Paul challenges the Colossians to set their mind on the things above. That reason is found here. In fact, Paul offers two reasons here.

The first reason is found in the words, “*For you have died.*” How could it be said that the Colossians had died? This death was not physical for the apostle is writing to people who were living and breathing in Colossae. Nor is Paul referring to spiritual death here, for he opens the chapter telling them that they had been raised with Christ, given new life and were now to set their affections on the things of God. The Colossians were very much alive spiritually.

This leaves us two possibilities. The Colossians had died legally, and relationally.

This legal death was with Christ who took their penalty upon Himself when he died on the cross. Jesus died in their name and in their place. Legally, the penalty for their sin was covered by Christ. The full penalty was laid on Christ and completely paid. In the books, under their name, the record reads: “paid by death.” In this sense the Colossians legally died with Christ.

Something else happened when Christ died. The Colossians were released from their bondage to sin and this world. They were born again as children of God with a new heart and nature. The death of Jesus broke their tie, obligation and allegiance to the world and sin. They died to what they once were. They died to their relationship with the world. They were divorced from their abusive and cruel partner and entered a whole new life as a new people. The world and sin had no more authority over them. To return to it now would be to commit spiritual adultery. They died relationally to all these ties and no longer had any right to them.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

The second reason Paul states that the Colossians were to set their mind on the things above is found in the words – “*your life is hidden with Christ in God.*”

Having been rescued from the world and the deadly claws of sin, the Colossians were safely hidden with Christ in God where these enemies could no longer reach them. There could be no place so secure as being with Christ in God.

Why were the Colossians to set their mind on things above? Because they had legally died with Christ to this world and were now securely hidden with Him in God. It was their joy now to enjoy the blessings of this heavenly privilege.

Verse 4

In verse 3, Paul told the Colossians that their lives were hidden with Christ in God. We examined this is the context of their security from the enemies of their soul. The apostle, however, brings out another aspect of what it's means to be “*hidden with Christ*” here.

Notice the phrase, “*when Christ who is your life.*” Being hidden in Christ not only implies security but also life. Christ is the source of new life for us. Our old life was Christless. We had no connection with Christ or relationship with Him. Now, however, everything has changed. Where darkness once existed now there is Christ and His wonderful presence.

Observe carefully what the apostle tells the Colossians here – “*Christ who is your life.*” Christ does not just give life – He is our life. It is His presence that lives in us. It is His life that works and flows in us. He works in us maturing and transforming us from the inside. We have life because we have Jesus in us.

Paul goes on to tell the Colossians that this very Christ who lives in us will one day “*appear.*” There is a time coming when Jesus will make His presence visible. The apostle John explains this when he says:

Colossians 3

7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. – Rev 1:7

The Lord Jesus promised to return to this earth. On that day, every eye will see Him and recognize Him as Lord.

Notice one final detail here in the phrase “*then you also will appear with him in glory.*” When the Lord Jesus makes His presence known, Paul told the Colossians that they would also appear with Him in glory. Paul expresses it this way to the Corinthians:

52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. – 1Co 15:52

What a glorious day that will be. We will be changed when the Lord Jesus appears.

Those who are hidden in Christ, are kept secure, given the very life of Christ and will one day be glorified and appear with Him in glory!

Verse 5

Because the Colossians were hidden with Christ in God, and would appear with Him in glory, Paul challenges them: “*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you.*”

Consider first, the phrase, “*put to death.*” Paul lists five sins the Colossians were to put to death – “*sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness.*” The word used for “put to death” is *νεκρώω* (*nekrōō*) which speaks of depriving something so that it loses its influence. The apostle expected the Colossians would take active steps toward depriving these sins of the opportunity to take root in their lives. They were to do this from their position of security in Christ.

Let me say a brief word about each of the sins Paul lists here.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Sexual immorality is the first sin on the list. The Greek word is *πορνεία (porneía)*, refers to any sexual sin prohibited by God.

Impurity is second on Paul's list. The word *ἀκαθαρσία (akatharsía)* refers to defiling one's mind or body with uncleanness.

The word Paul uses here for *passion* is not often used in the New Testament. The word *πάθος (páthos)* refers to sinful lusts that defile those who act upon them.

Closely related to the "passions" referred to above is "*evil desire*," the next sin on Paul's list.

The word *ἐπιθυμία (epithumía)* speaks of a desire to satisfy the sinful appetites of the flesh. We should not see this as referring only too sexual sin but also to materialistic benefits, comforts or reputation.

The final sin listed here is *covetousness*, which Paul also calls idolatry. The word *πλεονεξία (pleonexía)*, comes from two words "*pleíōn*," meaning, more, and "*échō*," meaning, to have. The idea is that the individual is discontent with he or she has and craves more. This becomes an obsession and god to them.

Consider finally the phrase "*what is earthly in you*." Paul speaks here to the Colossians believers. He is telling them that there were still "earthly" things in them that needed to be put to death. They were hidden with Christ in God, but they were not perfect. They were set free from the penalty of sin, but they would need to live each day dying to its temptations and lusts. This will be a regular occupation for every believer as long as we are in this earthly body.

Verse 6

Paul challenged the Colossians to put to death the sins of the flesh as recorded in verse 5. Notice how he reminds them that "*on account of these the wrath of God is coming*." Let me point out two details here.

Colossians 3

First, notice that the wrath of God is coming. There are those who feel that because they seem to get away with sin that God can't be angry with them. Others wonder why God does not punish sin immediately. Paul tells us that sin will be judged on God's time.

Second, notice what Paul told the Colossians in verse 5: "*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you*" (Col 3:5). He goes on here in this verse to tell them that God's wrath was going to be revealed against the very sins that were in them.

There will be a judgement of believers. Listen to the words of Paul to the Romans:

*10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother?
Or you, why do you despise your brother? For
we will all stand before the judgment seat of
God; – Ro 14:10*

He repeats the same thought to the Corinthians when he says:

*9 So whether we are at home or away, we make
it our aim to please him. 10 For we must all
appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so
that each one may receive what is due for what
he has done in the body, whether good or evil. –
2Co 5:9-10*

Paul reminds the Colossians that they were to put these sins to death in their body because they would one day stand before God to give an account.

Verse 7

Paul recognized that the Colossians had been guilty of the sins listed in verse 5. Notice how he expresses this here.

First, observe that Paul speaks of how the Colossians once walked. The idea is that this was no longer the case. He recognizes that there was a change in their lives through the work of Jesus Christ.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Second, note the use of the word “walked” – “*In these you too once walked.*” The word translated walked is *περιπατέω* (*peripatéō*) comes from two root words. The first is “*peri*” meaning “about” and the second, *patéō*, meaning “to walk.” In other words, this was how they walked about – in sin and immorality.

Finally, consider the phrase “*when you were living in them.*” The word “living” is translated from the Greek word *ζάω* (*záō*) which speaks of one’s existence or life. This implies that the sin they chose to walk in was their manner of life and defined who they were.

This, however, was no longer what defined them. In Christ they were now new creatures.

Verse 8

Notice how Paul challenges the Colossians to put away sin. He speaks here to believers. The act of putting away refers to casting off and renouncing. This is the obligation of all who belong to Jesus Christ.

All too many believers take this command lightly and find themselves living in sin. To put away sin is a choice we must make. Paul lists five sins the believer must put away in this verse.

First, the believer must put off *anger*. The word *ὀργή* (*orgé*) is derived from the Greek word *orégō* which means to covet. It is the attitude of one who does not get what they desire. Imagine the child whose favorite toy had been snatched from him.

Second, the Greek word for *wrath*, (*θυμός* *thumós*) comes from “*thúō*” which describes a violent gust or movement. It seems to describe the physical and verbal response of one who is angry.

Third, *malice* (*κακία* *kakía*) comes from the word *kakós* meaning bad. It seems to speak of the attitude of the heart that is steeped in wickedness, and evil thoughts.

Colossians 3

Fourth, βλασφηημία (blasphēmía) is the word translated *slander*. It speaks of verbal abuse intended to hurt or damage the reputation of another.

Finally, the word for *obscene talk* is αἰσχρολογία (aischrología). The word is derived from two Greek words. The first is *aischrós* meaning “filthy or improper.” The second word is “légō,” meaning “to say.” Obscene talk is talk that is filthy and improper.

Paul challenges the Colossians to renounce these sins in their lives.

Verse 9

To the sins of verse 8 Paul adds yet another – “*Do not lie to one another.*” The Greek word used for “lie” is ψεύδομαι (pseúdomai) which carries the sense of cheating, defrauding, and deceiving. It seems to go much deeper than a simple untruth spoken with the lips. It refers to a lifestyle of integrity in word and deed before others.

Notice the reason Paul challenges the Colossians to live with this integrity – “*seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices.*” This statement is somewhat perplexing. Why would Paul need to tell those who had put off the old self and its practices, not to deceive and lie to each other?

To answer this let’s first examine the words “*seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices*” more closely.

Observe first the phrase – “*you have put off.*” This is in the past tense, indicating that the action of putting off had already taken place.

Next, consider the words “*put off.*” The Greek word Paul uses here is ἀπεκδύομαι (apekdúomai). This word is derived from two root words. The first is *apó* which means “from.” The second word is *ekdúō* which means to strip or unclothe. It also carries the sense of stripping something of its power or hold. The idea here is that the Colossians had pulled off their shackles, removed their prison clothes and left the dungeon cell as freed prisoners.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Finally notice the words, “*the old self with its practices.*” The apostle is telling the Colossians that in Christ they stripped the old self of its power and authority in their lives. No longer was it going to be seated in the throne. They owed their allegiance now to Jesus Christ alone. They stripped off all the old ways, confessed them to Christ and chose a different path.

This did not mean that the Colossians were no longer tempted to sin. Nor did it mean that they never fell under temptation. It did however, that the course and direction of their life had changed, and they were now on a new path of righteousness. Paul encouraged the Colossians to continue on this path.

Verse 10

In verse 9 Paul reminded the Colossians of how they had put off the old self and died to its authority. He goes on here to say that when they put off the old self, they also put on the new self.

The Colossians were once dressed in dirty prison garments, and chains representing their sin and the penalty they were under. That changed when the Lord Jesus died on the cross in their place. The day came when the door to their cell was opened. They were invited to leave that dirty dungeon behind. As they stepped out from behind those bars through the door, they were asked to strip of their old, tattered prison clothes and leave them there in the cell. After a cleansing they were given new clean clothes, representing their freedom and full pardon. No longer would they wear their prison garments. In fact, these old garments were repulsive to them now. Leaving them behind in their cell, the former prisoner, clothed in their clean new garments walks away from the prison never to return.

Does that mean that the former prisoner is perfect and will never sin or fall short of God’s standard again? By no means. Paul tells the Colossians that the new self “is being renewed.” Observe two details in the words “*is being renewed.*”

First, the phrase is in the present tense indicating that the renewal is still happening. This action is not yet completed. Though they are

Colossians 3

free from their prison cell and dressed in new clothes, they were still a work in process.

Second, note that the phrase “being renewed” indicates that this renewal is something that is happening to them rather than something that they are doing themselves. They are experiencing renewal as an inner work of God’s Spirit.

Paul goes on to tell the Colossians how this renewal was taking place – “*in knowledge*.”

There are different words translated, knowledge in the New Testament. For example, the word γνῶσις (gnōsis) speaks of an intellectual understanding of truth and principles. This, however, is not the word used by Paul here. Instead, he uses the Greek word ἐπίγνωσις (epignōsis), which refers to a knowledge that changes life and influences actions taken.

The knowledge Paul speaks about here is life transforming knowledge. This knowledge of Christ and His work was having a dramatic impact on the Colossians. Their lives would never be the same.

Day by day as they came to know and experience this work of God in their lives, they were being changed into the image of their Creator. He was forming His character in them as they surrendered to Him.

Verse 11

The Jewish faith revolved around nationality, traditions, rituals and regulations. Paul reminds the Colossians here, however, that all these had been broken down in Jesus Christ. According to verse 10 God was renewing His people into the image of the Father.

Paul speaks of the various people among who God was doing a work. He speaks first of the civilized and cultured Greek who worshipped many pagan gods – many Colossians were examples of this. God was also doing a work among the Jews as well – the Apostle was among these. God was renewing those who had

Light To My Path Bible Notes

submitted to circumcision and those who hadn't. Barbarians were those who spoke another language and had not submitted to the Greek culture of the day. The Scythians were likely cruel anti-Greek tribes, possibly living a nomadic life. God had not forgotten them either. From the lowest slave to the rich and free, God was doing a powerful work. He was saving them all from their sin and shaping them into the image of their Creator.

None of these cultural, social or religious distinctiveness made a difference anymore. What did make the difference was Christ. He is ultimately all that matters. If the Barbarian has Christ, he is a brother. Your denomination will mean nothing when you stand before God – Jesus will mean everything.

Notice finally the phrase “*and in all.*” We should not be confused by this. Paul is not saying that Jesus lives in everyone. There are many who have rejected Him. What he is saying, however, is that Christ is in Greeks, Jews, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarians, Scythians, free and slaves. People from every tribe, nation, faith and social standing have experienced the salvation and presence of the Lord Jesus.

Verse 12

As the Apostle begins the verse, he says three things about the Colossians.

First, he addresses them as “*God’s chosen ones.*” When they were lost in their sin, the Lord God chose to pursue them and bring them back to Himself.

Second, Paul calls them “*holy.*” To be holy is to be set apart for God. God set the Colossians apart for Himself to belong to Him and walk in service and fellowship with Him.

Finally, the Apostle calls the Colossians “*beloved.*” They were the object of the Father’s delight. It was this love that made God chose to pursue them, forgive them and separate them for Himself.

Colossians 3

God expected that His children reflect His character in the world. We have already seen that He was renewing them into His image (Colossians 3:10). Paul challenged the Colossians, therefore, to “*put on*” this character. The imagery here is of an individual putting on these qualities like a garment. While God is renewing His people it is their obligation to “put on” what He gives. The apostle goes on to list the qualities the Colossians were to put on.

First, they were to put on “*compassionate hearts*.” Compassion is the ability to feel the suffering and pain of others.

Kindness is the second quality Paul wants the Colossians to put on. The word χρηστότης (chrēstótēs) comes from the word chrēstós meaning, useful or profitable. It is the desire to be useful to those who are in need.

Humility is third on Paul’s list. This has to do with having a proper understanding of who we are before God. The word ταπεινοφροσύνη (tapeinophrosúnē) literally refers to one who is lowminded. The humble person does not think of themselves as being more important than they really are.

Meekness, as the fourth quality, describes a calm surrender of the soul to God and His work in one’s life. This is especially true in times of trial. The meek person accepts God’s purpose and walks joyfully in it.

Fifth, *patience* is the ability to endure graciously under hardship.

Verse 13

Paul encourages the Colossians to bear with one another. The word ἀνέχω (anéchō) comes from two root words. The first is aná meaning, in. The second is échō meaning, to have. Together, they carry the sense of holding something in. The general idea here is to demonstrate patience with the shortcomings of others.

It is important to note that Paul brings this challenge to the Colossians after telling them to put on “*compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience*” (Col 3:12). The

Light To My Path Bible Notes

process of putting on these qualities would not be easy. There would be failures. Paul wanted the believers, however, to stand with each other in these times. They were to support each other and bear with each other's failures.

Notice second here that Paul calls the Colossians to address any complaint they had with a brother or sister with forgiveness – “*and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other.*”

The Apostle reminds the Colossians that forgiveness was not optional for them. The Lord Jesus had forgiven them in their shortcomings. They were to follow His example in their dealings with each other.

Paul tells us here that we have a role to play in the spiritual growth of our brothers and sisters. We should not expect perfection. But we need to stand with each other patiently forgiving and supporting as we learn to put on and live out what God is doing in us.

Verse 14

Paul adds one other quality the Colossians were to put on – the quality of *love*. The great example of this love is the person of Jesus Christ who laid down His life for sinners.

If we see the qualities Paul mentions in this section as articles of clothing to be put on, then love is the overcoat that covers all these other characteristics.

Paul tells the Colossians that love was what would “*bind everything together in perfect harmony.*”

The love Paul speaks about is directed to one another but also to God. It is love for God motivates us to love, forgive and bear with each other. When we truly love one another, this will demonstrate itself through compassion, humility and patience with each other.

If you find yourself unable to forgive or bear with a brother or sister, the first place to start is to ask God to give you love for that individual.

Colossians 3

Verse 15

The apostle has been speaking about loving one another, bearing with each other, and forgiving one another. He moves on now to speaking about the peace of Christ.

Peace in a general sense, is the absence of war and strife. Notice, however, that the peace mentioned here is the “*peace of Christ*” or the peace that comes from Christ. This peace is present even in chaos and confusion. It is founded on the fact that I am right with God and that He is in control. It stems from a confidence in God and His purpose for my life. It is a peace that He gives through our relationship with Him.

This kind of peace allows me to accept the circumstance that come my way, knowing that God will give me all I need to face my trials and teach me what I need to learn through them. I can trust Him in every situation when this peace “*rules in my heart.*”

The word, rule here is βραβεύω (brabeúō), and refers to an umpire in the Greek games. The umpire made sure that the games were played according to the rules. The peace of God guards our actions and attitudes and may even correct us when we are in error.

This brings up an important question. How does the peace of Christ act as an umpire in my heart? To answer this let me say this. If the peace of God rules in our heart, and we are trusting Him in whatever circumstance that comes out way, this peace will keep our attitudes and behaviors in line with the Word of God. Peace come through trusting the Lord in our situation. It is those who cannot trust who find themselves wandering from the path of righteousness into sin and error.

Paul reminds us that we were called to peace – peace with God and with our brothers and sisters.

The Apostle concludes the verse with the words – “*And be thankful.*” It is only when we are at peace with God and His purposes that we can be thankful, knowing that He is Lord over every circumstance, and that all that happens to us will work out for good.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Verse 16

Paul exhorts the Colossians not only to let the peace of Christ rule their hearts but also to let His word dwell in them richly – “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.*”

When the Word of Christ dwells with us we give it access to our lives, thoughts, actions and attitudes. It has free reign in all we do and say. Notice, however, that Paul uses the word “richly” here. The word in Greek is πλουσίως (plousiōs) and gives the sense, in large measure or abundantly. In other words, the Word of God is not to occupy a small cupboard in our lives but every corner. It is to shed light on everything we do.

Paul goes on to show the Colossians how they could let that word dwell in them richly.

First, through “*teaching.*” Paul encouraged formal instruction in the Word of God.

Second, by “*admonishing one another in all wisdom.*” The word, admonish speaks of warning or exhorting. This might take place in a formal setting but was also possible through casual conversations and interactions that took place every day. It is important to note that these admonitions were to take place “*in all wisdom.*” Wisdom is the application of knowledge to real life. The sense here is that the Colossians were to challenge each other in the application of the Word of Christ to everyday life situations.

Finally, through “*singing.*” Remember that believers in those days did not have the scriptures in their homes. One of the ways of passing the word on from person to person was through music. Notice the kind of music they sang:

The early church sang psalms. Many of the psalms in the book of Psalms were put to music and used in the worship of God. In singing these psalms the early believers were memorizing and repeating whole sections of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Colossians 3

Paul also speaks here about hymns. A hymn was a song written in praise to God. While these hymns were not direct quotes from the Scriptures as were the psalms, they declared the glory of God in prayers of worship sang directly to God in praise.

Finally, three apostle speaks of “*spiritual songs*.” The word he uses here is ᾠδὴ (ōdē) which simply refers to a song. Paul uses the word “spiritual” to distinguish them from worldly songs. The distinction between hymns and spiritual songs is not clear. Some see the hymn as written to God to praise Him for His work and character. Spiritual songs, on the other hand, had a wider scope and might speak of Christian truths, doctrines, or testimonies.

What is clear is that music played an important role in communicating the Word of Christ in a society where the printed word was not available.

Paul encouraged the Colossians to teach, admonish and sing the Word of Christ with thankfulness in their hearts. They were to be thankful for this Word which directed and comforted them.

Verse 17

Paul believed the Christian faith was to have an impact on every aspect of one’s life. Notice how he begins verse 17 – “*And whatever you do, in word or deed*.” These words cover every action and every word the believer speaks. Paul lists two requirements for the believer’s words and deeds,

First, “*do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus*.” As believers we represent the Lord Jesus in everything we do. We carry His name with us wherever we go. It is our objective to make Him known and to honour Him in all that we do. When we do something in the name of Jesus, we represent Him. The words we speak are to reflect His heart. The things we do are to demonstrate what He would do. If we cannot represent Him in what we say or do, we should refrain.

Second, the believer is to do everything “*giving thanks to God the Father through him*” (Jesus). Do the words you speak come from

Light To My Path Bible Notes

a heart of gratitude to God, or are they bitter and angry grumblings? Do you perform your daily tasks with a joyful heart of thanksgiving or with a complaining spirit? Do your words and deeds reflect a heart of praise, and gratitude to God?

Every action and word are to come from a thankful heart representing the character and purpose of God.

Verse 18

We begin here a section related to the running of a Christian household. This too was to be done in a manner that honoured the Lord and His purpose. The apostle begins with the relationship of husband and wife.

According to Paul, the wife was to submit to her husband. The word submit here is ὑποτάσσω (*hupotássō*). It is derived from two root words. The first is ὑπό *hupó* meaning, under or beneath. The second is τάσσω *tássō* meaning, to place, to arrange or to order. Together these words carry the sense of arranging oneself under someone else. The implication is that the Lord has given the husband the responsibility to be the leader of the household. By arranging herself under the leadership of her husband, the wife in essence is accepting his role.

The apostle goes on in the verse to say that this submission to her husband's leadership is "*fitting in the Lord*." In other words, this is not a cultural issue that will change with time, but what the Lord has determined to be proper for His children. While different cultures may react against this teaching, Paul makes it clear what God intended.

Verse 19

Paul has two things to say to the husbands as the leaders of the Christian home.

First, they were to love their wives. The love Paul speaks about here is ἀγαπάω (*agapáō*). It is more than a feeling but a delight that affects one's actions and attitudes toward the object of this

Colossians 3

affection. In the case of the Lord Jesus, this kind of love made Him willing to lay down His life for us. This is the kind of love that has the best interest of another at heart and will willingly sacrifice all, for the good of those it loves. If the husband was to be the kind of leader God intended, this was the first requirement.

Second, Paul charges Christian husbands not to be harsh with their wives. The word translated, harsh is πικραίνω (pikraínō). It comes from the root pikrós meaning, bitter. The Greek word πικραίνω (pikraínō) literally means, to make bitter and seems to refer not just to the bitterness but also to the pain caused by that bitterness. The harshness of the husband would cause unnecessary grief and pain to the wife for which the husband would be accountable. If the husband wanted to be the leader God intended him to be, he would need to be sensitive to his wife and treat her with respect and dignity.

Verse 20

Paul speaks next to children in Christian homes. The assumption in the last two verses is that both the husband and wife were living with each other as God intended.

The apostle commands the children in these homes to obey their parents in all things. This command would not be possible if the parents were not walking with the Lord.

Some of the children in Colossae may have had unbelieving parents who followed other religions. These parents may even have sought to discourage their children from following Christ. Paul is not telling children to follow the ungodly advice of these parents. He is teaching a general principle that children should be obedient to their parents in so far as what those parents demand is in line with the commands of God.

Notice how Paul concludes the verse – *“for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.”* Notice that the goal of obedience is to please the Lord. There is an important principle here for children living with unbelieving parents. If the goal of obedience is to please the Lord, then the child should obey if their obedience accomplishes that

Light To My Path Bible Notes

objective. When obedience does not please the Lord, the child must choose to obey God rather than the parent.

Verse 21

Paul speaks a word to fathers about raising their children – *“Fathers, do not provoke your children.”*

The Greek word for, provoke (ἐρεθίζω *erethízō*) means to stir to anger. The apostle states the reason why fathers were not to stir their children to anger in the words – *“lest they become discouraged.”* To become discouraged (ἀθυμέω *athuméō*) is to lose heart, courage or to be broken in spirit.

Paul tells Father’s two things here. First, their children could be provoked or stirred to anger. The apostle does not go into detail about the nature of the anger. Suffice it to say that this anger was not helpful or desirable and the father was to avoid stirring this up in their child.

Second, it was possible for a father to discourage his children. He could break their spirit to a point that they lost all hope.

Fathers were to understand the delicate and influential nature of their children and be careful in how they raised them. By excessive discipline, lack of consideration and love, a father could stir up bitter anger in a child that would cause them either to lash out or lose hope in life. Paul encouraged fathers to be particularly sensitive to the nature of their children as they raised them.

Verse 22

Slavery was an established reality at this point in Colossae. Paul does not make a statement here about his opinion on the practice. There are many situations in life that are less than ideal. The challenge in these times is to respond and deal with these circumstances in a godly way.

Paul speaks directly to Christian slaves here. Admittedly, many of them would have preferred to be free, but that was not the case.

Colossians 3

They were entrapped in a system that stripped them of their freedom and forced them to labour for another. What were they to do as believers in Jesus Christ? Paul encouraged them to be the best slaves possible – *“obey in everything those who are your earthly masters.”* They were to serve faithfully and diligently.

Paul does not promote slavery here. What he teaches is important, however. He encouraged us to be godly in trying situations or when we feel we are being unfairly treated. The believer must learn to represent his or her Lord not just in ideal circumstances but also amid injustice and inequality.

Notice that Paul wants slaves to obey not just as *“people-pleasers,”* but from a sincere heart that feared the Lord. To fear the Lord has to do with loving and honoring Him. The motivation for faithfulness in difficult circumstances was the glory of God. These slaves were to make it their sincere desire to honour God in whatever circumstance they found themselves.

Verse 23

It appears that Paul continues to speak to slaves here. He challenges them to make it their ambition, in whatever task they were given, to work *“heartily.”* The phrase Paul uses here is ἐκ ψυχῆς ἐργάζεσθε literally means, out of soul work. The idea is that servants were to put their heart and soul into the work they were called to do. They were to do the very best they could.

Notice also that they were to do this not just for their masters but for the Lord. Whatever they did they were to do in a way that honoured the Lord. They were to do this when the task was easy but also when they were being treated unjustly or asked to do what no one else would do. For the believer every task, however menial, is to be done to honour God.

Verse 24

Notice the motivation for working *“heartily”* for the Lord – *“knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.”*

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Paul speaks numerous times in his Epistles of the inheritance is the saints. Here in Colossians here speaks of the “inheritance of the saints in light:”

*12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified
you to share in the inheritance of the saints in
light. – Col 1:12*

He reminds the Ephesians of “*the riches of his (Christ’s) glorious inheritance in the saints*” (Ephesians 1:18).

He goes on in Ephesians 1 to speak of the greatness of Christ’s power toward us who believe, demonstrated through Christ’s resurrection and exaltation at the Father’s right hand. (Ep 1:19-20).

The inheritance Paul speaks of here is an inheritance with the saints in light, bought for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and His victory over sin and death.

What a powerful motivation to serve the Lord. Things on the earth may not always be easy, but the inheritance promised is worth the effort. We do not live for earthly rewards and recognition, but to please the Lord in whom we have a wonderful inheritance more valuable than anything this world could ever offer.

Verse 25

There is a second motivation for working heartily for the Lord. Paul addresses this on the words – “*For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.*” We need to see two details here.

First, knowing that God will judge wrongdoing should motivate us to serve Him faithfully. Paul tells the Colossians that God will show no partiality in this matter. Maybe the Colossians were being mistreated, but that would not excuse any sinful response on their part. God would judge all sin whether that was the sin of the believing Colossians slave, or the pagan master. All would be

Colossians 3

accountable to Him for their actions. Our responsibility is to serve the Lord in whatever situation we find ourselves.

Second, knowing that God will judge all wrongdoing should keep us from feeling the need to do so ourselves. It is all too easy, for those who have been mistreated, to focus so much on the injustice done to them that they become bitter, and angry. We can spend our time judging and not doing what we have been called to do. Paul reminds the Colossians here that God would do the judging. Their role was to be faithful in the situations he had put them in. We take on God's role and neglect our own when we assume the position of judge.

Colossians 4

Verse 1

Verse 1 belongs with chapter three and concludes a series of remarks about the Christian home. Chapter three ended with comments about servants serving their masters heartily. Paul now concludes the section with a word to Christian masters – “*treat your bondservants justly and fairly.*”

Remember here that slavery was tied deeply in the culture of the day. While Paul could have demanded that all Christian masters release their slaves, it was not that simple. These slaves depended on their masters to survive. To be released from their protection and provision would have created even more hardship for them, especially if they belonged to good masters. Paul's counsel to Christian slave owners was that they treat them justly and fairly.

The word Paul uses for justice is δίκαιος (díkaios). It refers to actions that are righteous. In other words, actions that conform to God's standards. For these Christian masters the great example of God's standard was found in the person of Jesus Christ. They were to treat their slaves and Christ treated them.

The second word Paul uses here to describe how Christian masters were to treat their slaves is ισότης (isótēs) (fairly, ESV). The word comes from the root ísos meaning, equal. This concept would have been quite radical for the day – treating a slave with equality. This did not mean that slaves were not responsible to their masters or have their duties to perform. They were, according to Paul, to serve them heartily and joyfully. It did mean, however, that Christian

Light To My Path Bible Notes

masters did not treat their slaves as inferior. Paul taught this in chapter three when he wrote:

11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. – Col 3:11

In fact, Paul tells the Colossians slave owners to remember that they too were bondservants to their “*Master in heaven*.” They were to treat their slaves as their heavenly Father treated them. There was to be a clear difference in how the Christian treated and cared for his slaves and how they were treated by unbelievers.

Verse 2

In verses two to six the apostle has some words to say about prayer, Christian testimony and speech. He begins here with a word on prayer.

First, he encourages the Colossians to “*continue steadfastly in prayer*.” The idea here is that they were to endure or persevere in prayer without giving up. We need to understand here that prayer is not just about asking God for things but remaining in communion with Him.

The apostle told the Romans that “without ceasing” he mentioned them in his prayers (Romans 1:9-10). He challenged the Thessalonians to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Paul was constantly in an attitude of prayer. Throughout the day, he continued to speak with God, seeking His wisdom, committing people and circumstances to Him for His blessing and favour. It was this constant communion with God that enabled him to be the servant he became.

Second Paul told the Colossians to be watchful in prayer. The word used here is *γρηγορέω* (*grēgoreúō*) which comes from the word, *egeirō*, meaning, to arise or to refrain from sleep.

Like a watchman at the gate, the believer was to be alert and diligent in this matter of communion with God. There was danger all

Colossians 4

around, and the enemy was constantly seeking to distract and cause the believer to fall. We are in constant need of God wisdom and direction. By prayer we tap into the wisdom and resources of God to keep us in our trials and temptations.

Thirdly, Paul tells the Colossians to pray with thanksgiving. We must remember the privilege that is ours to be in communion with the Creator. We must never forget what He has done to make this communion possible. We must be increasingly grateful for His mercy that showers us with wisdom, guidance, protection and innumerable blessings.

Verse 3

Paul encouraged the Colossians to pray for himself and Timothy (see Colossians 1:1). There is something perplexing here in this request of Paul. The apostle had been encouraging the Colossians to “continue steadfast” in prayer. He obviously was doing the same in his own ministry. The question we ask ourselves is this: If Paul was praying and seeking the Lord already in his ministry why did he need the Colossians to pray as well? Doesn't God hear the request of one as much as that of a multitude? Did Paul believe that the more people he had petitioning God the more likely He was to listen?

These are difficult questions to answer. To answer this let me compare prayer to what takes place on a battlefield. The enemy is all around us. We never know when he will spring out from his hiding place and attack. We also wage war face to face. As we battle one enemy, another shoots at us from behind. This is where our fellow soldiers come into play. They see what we do not see. They block the sword headed straight for us when our back is turned. We stand with them as well when the enemy seems to be overpowering them. At times we must rest and recover. As we do, our fellow soldiers stand guard watching and praying lest the enemy gain a foothold. This is the nature of the spiritual battle before us. We stand with each other by means of our prayers for God's ongoing blessing and protection.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Notice what Paul asks the Colossians to pray for – “that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ.” Paul was on the offensive. He wanted to be sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and the mystery of salvation by grace through faith. It was his passionate desire that people hear this message. He asked the Colossians to pray that God would open doors for that to take place.

Notice why Paul made this request. He was in prison because he preached that very message. He is asking for boldness here. He is asking for prayer that even in his prison cell, God would open opportunities to share this good news. He needed sensitivity to the Lord’s leading and any opportunity the Lord might open to him while he was in his chains.

Verse 4

Notice that Paul’s desire was not just to have opportunity to share the good news of the gospel but also that God would give him the grace to make this message clear. Paul also asks the Colossians to pray for God to open the minds and hearts of those who hear him present the truth in such a way that it took root in their lives. Writing to the Corinthians the apostle said:

18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. – 1Co 1:18

Paul knew that unless God gave clarity to those who heard the message, it would have no affect on their lives. He needed the empowering of God to illuminate the message he preached so that it took root and bore fruit.

Verse 5

Paul challenges the Colossians to be wise in their relationship with “outsiders.” He refers here to the unbeliever or those outside the church. He uses a similar word in 1 Corinthians 5 when he writes:

Colossians 4

*12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders?
Is it not those inside the church whom you are to
judge? – 1Co 5:12*

Those outside the church did not walk in the ways of the Lord. Their speech, actions and thoughts were very different from those who belonged to Christ. Believers needed to interact daily with the unbeliever, but they were to be cautious in their interactions, lest they be influenced by their ways. One does not have to read the Old Testament for very long to see how pagan nations influenced the people of God. We watch the influence of the modern world on our children and see why Paul would encourage the believer to be wise in his or her interactions with the “outsider.”

Paul’s second challenge in the verse was for the Colossians to make the “best use of their time.” Remember that Paul wrote these words from prison. He was being persecuted for his faith. Tomorrow is not guaranteed to us. We must use the time we have been given wisely. All too many hours and days have been wasted. We have not completed the task given to us. How important it is to live each day as if it were our last, for we will all stand before God and give an accounting of the life we have lived.

Verse 6

Paul encourages the Colossians to let their “speech always be gracious.” The word translated, speech here is λόγος (lógos) and refers both to the act of speaking and the words spoken. In other words, both what we say and how we say it ought to be gracious.

The word, gracious, is χάρις (cháris), and refers to something that causes joy and pleasure. The word comes from the root, “chaírō” meaning, to rejoice. Gracious words then are words that bless, build up and cause the hearer to rejoice.

Paul encourages the Colossians to season their words with salt. Salt has two purposes.

First, it brings out the best flavors of the food it seasons. Second, it kills germs and bacteria and keeps food from going bad. The salt

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Paul speaks about here destroys the negative and hurtful attitudes and brings out the very best so that those who hear what we say are blessed.

The apostle concludes the verse with the words, “*so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*” How do we answer each person? By being gracious in our words and seasoning them with salt before we speak them.

How do we season our words with salt? By exposing them to the truth of God Word and surrendering them to His Spirit before we speak them.

Verse 7

Paul tells the Colossians that Tychicus would let them know what he was doing. It may be that Paul planned to send him to Colossae. We have record of Paul sending Tychicus to Ephesus in Ephesians 6:21 and 2 Timothy 4:12. Paul also thought of sending him to see Titus in Create in Titus 3:12. He was an associate of Paul’s in the ministry and one the apostle trusted deeply. Paul describes him as a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.

Verse 8

Paul’s purpose in sending Tychicus to Colossae was two-fold. First, he wanted the Colossians to know how he and Timothy were doing, especially in their imprisonment. Second, Paul wanted to encourage the Colossians. They would have been encouraged in part by hearing how Paul was doing, but Paul was confident that Tychicus could also strengthen their faith as he ministered among them. Even in his imprisonment the apostle wanted to bless and encourage the Colossians. He did not focus on his suffering but on how he could bless these God had put under His care.

Verse 9

Along with Tychicus, Paul was sending a man by the name of Onesimus. Many believe him to be a servant of Philemon who ran away and met Christ. The book of Philemon recounts the story of

Colossians 4

how Paul sent him back to his master with a letter of support. Notice what Paul tells us about Onesimus.

First, he was one of them. This may be because Onesimus was from the region or that he had come to Christ and was now a believer as they were. The implication was that they were to accept him.

Second. Onesimus, along with Tychicus had been closely connected to the Apostle Paul in his imprisonment and had information about Paul. He was being sent by Paul to inform the Colossians of Paul's status. Paul entrusted him along with Tychicus for this task. Once again, the Colossians were to receive him and his news.

Verse 10

Paul sends greetings from Aristarchus. Aristarchus was from Thessalonica (Acts 20:4; 27:2) and had accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys (see Acts 19:29). Notice that he was a "fellow prisoner." God did not leave Paul without companionship in his imprisonment. Aristarchus had travelled with Paul and suffered with him for the Gospel.

Paul also sends greetings from Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. He was also known as John Mark (see Acts 15:37). John Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on one of their missionary journeys but for some reason left them and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). This would become a source of conflict between Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15 so that Paul and Barnabas parted company. John Mark accompanied Barnabas on his missionary journey while Paul and Silas went in another direction. Paul and John Mark would eventually mend their relationship. The apostle would speak of John Mark as being useful in ministry in 2 Timothy 4:11.

What is important to note here is that Paul asked the Colossians to welcome John Mark if he came to them. He had given them previous instructions about John Mark. He does not go into detail about those instructions here but what is clear is that the past

Light To My Path Bible Notes

differences between Paul and John Mark were over and Paul expected that the Colossians recognize him as a brother in good standing.

Verse 11

Paul mentions a man here by the name of Jesus. The name was common in that day. He was also known as Justus or Jesus Justus. Paul sends greetings from him to the Colossians.

Paul goes on in the verse to tell the Colossians that these men were the “*only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God.*” In other words, the men he has mentioned so far in this getting were Jews who had come to the Lord Jesus. These men had been a support and comfort to Paul in his time of imprisonment. Likely the remainder of these mentioned in this chapter were Gentile converted.

Verse 12

We know little about Epaphras. Paul mentions him in Colossians 1:7. It appears that he had brought the Gospel to Colossae. He appears to be a native of that region of Colossae for Paul speaks of him as “one of you.”

The apostle has several things to say about Epaphras here in this verse. Notice first, that he describes him as a “servant of Christ Jesus.” The word Paul uses for servant is δούλος (doulos) is the word used to describe a slave. The idea here is that he was bound to them as a permanent servant for their good.

Second, as a bondservant to the Colossians Epaphras, “struggled” on their behalf in prayer. The word is αγωνίζομαι (agōnizomai) and refers to someone who endures great agony and pain seeking to achieve their goal.

Notice finally, the passion of Epaphras and why he agonized in prayer for the Colossians – “*that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.*”

Colossians 4

Epaphras desired two things for the Colossians. The first was that they “*stand mature.*” The idea here is that they reach their full potential as believers in fellowship and service for the Lord.

The other desire of Epaphras, for which he struggled on prayer, was that the Colossians be “*fully assured in all the will of God.*” The word translated, “fully assured,” is πληρόω (plerōō), which simply means to make full. The Greek phrase καὶ πεπληροφορημένοι ἐν παντί θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ, literally is translated, “and fill in all will the God.” In other words, it was the prayer of Epaphras that the Colossians be filled with everything God had for them – lacking nothing of His purpose for their lives.

Verse 13

Paul mentions one more detail about Epaphras here. Paul witnessed how hard he worked for the Colossians, the Laodiceans and the inhabitants of Hierapolis.

Both Laodicea and Hierapolis were in the region of Colossae. We have evidence of a church in Laodicea in Revelation 3:14. Paul expresses his burden for them in Colossians 2:1. Laodicea was a significant commercial centre of the day. Epaphras played a role in the growth of the church in this city.

Hierapolis was a religious centre with a temple to the emperor. It appears from what Paul says here that there were believers in the city as well and Epaphras had also ministered to them.

Epaphras was clearly an influential figure in this region for the Gospel.

Verse 14

Paul sends greetings from two more men in verse 14.

Luke is described as a beloved physician. Many see him as the author of the Gospel of Luke. What is clear is that Paul deeply loved him. He accompanied the apostle on his journeys. Writing to

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Timothy Paul says: “Luke alone is with me”- 2Ti 4:11. It obviously meant much that Luke stood with Paul at this time in his ministry. We know little about Demas except to that he was with Paul, but would eventually desert him because of his love for the world:

*10 For Demas, in love with this present world,
has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. –
2Ti 4:10*

Obviously, Demas was still in good standing with Paul at this time. Some commentators note, however, the fact that Paul says nothing good about him here. Possibly there were issues brewing even at this time that would eventually cause Demas to abandon Paul.

Verse 15

Paul sends greetings to “the brothers at Laodicea.” The word, brothers, here is ἀδελφός (adelphós). The word come from the root, delphús, meaning, womb. In other words, an individual who shares the same womb as another, or had the same mother. It came to refer to members of the same family, country or fellowship. Paul is greeting all believers in the church of Laodicea both male and female.

Paul makes mention of Nympha here. There is much confusion as to whether Nympha was male or female. Translators have differed on this as do Bible versions. The King James Version translates “Nymphas and the church that is in *his* house.” The New King James translates the same as the King James Version but includes a note indicating that some texts use “*her*” house. The New International Version and the English Standard Version of the Bible translate “Nympha and the church in *her* house.”

Whether this individual was a man or a woman, they opened their home to the church in Laodicea and for this Paul was grateful.

Verse 16

As Paul concludes, he gives instructions to the Colossians about his letter.

Colossians 4

First, they were to read the letter *among* them. The idea was that the contents of the letter be shared with all the believers in Colossae. This was likely done in a public setting when believers had gathered. Not everyone could read so such readings were important.

Second, Paul tells the Colossians to have the letter read in the church of Laodicea as well. Laodicea was a neighbouring community so the letter would have been brought to them and read in a public setting for them to hear as well.

Finally, Paul gives instructions to the Colossians to read the *letter from Laodicea*. The identity of the letter from Laodicea is uncertain. There is no such letter in the New Testament. While it is not contained in the Bible, Paul confirms its existence and the validity of its content and recommends its reading.

Many believe that the letter from Laodicea was written by Paul. Obviously, he was very aware of its content and encouraged its reading but there is not enough evidence in the verse to prove this to be the case.

Other commentators observe that the letter is “from” Laodicea (ἐκ Λαοδικείας). Generally, letters written by Paul would be “to” a certain church. The Greek word ἐκ can mean, out of, from, or of. The word is used to speak of the location of a certain object. Paul may simply be simply telling the Colossians where to find the letter. What is clear is that the letter would be beneficial for the church in Colossae. It also shows us how the written word was used in the New Testament period. Copies were passed around and read in various churches.

Verse 17

Paul has a word to say to a man by the name of Archippus here. The only other mention of Archippus is found in Paul’s letter to Philemon, which was written around the same time. Archippus is mentioned in Philemon 2 as a “fellow soldier” who was part of the church, meeting in Philemon’s house.

Light To My Path Bible Notes

Paul knew Archippus and the calling he had received from the Lord. We are not told what obstacles he faced in the fulfillment of that task, but the apostle understood the need for his encouragement and asked the Colossians to be that for him.

Verse 18

Paul concludes his letter with his own handwriting. Often letters were dictated to a secretary. We have an example of this in the book of Romans where Paul's secretary identifies himself and send his greetings:

22 I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.- Ro 16:22

To authenticate his letters, Paul had the custom of concluding then in his own handwriting. He tells the Thessalonians of this practice when he wrote:

17 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. – 2Th 3:17

We have further examples of this in 1 Corinthians 16:21; Philemon 19; and Galatians 6:11.

It appears that false teachers of the day would write to the churches in the name of the apostles seeking to promote their false teaching. We have an example of this in 2 Thessalonians where Paul particularly addresses this matter of a letter seeming to come from the apostle but was promoting error:

1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. – 2Th 2:1-2

Colossians 4

Paul concludes by asking the Colossians to remember his imprisonment. This was obviously not where Paul wanted to be, and it required special grace to live under these trying circumstances. He prays also that the Colossians know this special grace of God in their circumstances as well.

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