



THRU the **BIBLE**

with *J. Vernon McGee*

EPHESIANS

BIBLE COMPANION



EPISTLES

READ THIS FIRST

This Bible Companion is a summary of Dr. J. Vernon McGee's teaching of the book of Ephesians heard on THRU the BIBLE. These summarized lessons get to the heart of Bible passages and are intended to stir your own thinking, prayer, and study.



Begin with prayer. Dr. McGee said, "We are living in the day of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the day of grace, when the Spirit of God takes the things of Christ and reveals them to us." Before you start each lesson, ask the Lord to use it to grow you up in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as He is revealed in that section. Dr. McGee said, "This is the secret of life and of Christian living."



As you study, read the Bible passage first. Invite God to open your eyes and deepen your understanding of His Word. That's a request God loves to answer!



If you want to listen to Dr. McGee's complete teaching on any specific passage, go to TTB.org/Ephesians (or any book of the Bible). The corresponding audio messages are listed at the top of the summaries. You can also use this Bible Companion to follow along and take notes while you listen to Dr. McGee teach a book of the Bible on the radio or online.



After every lesson, several questions are listed for your personal consideration or, if you're reading this as a group, for your discussion. Ask the Spirit to help you take to heart what He wants to show you.

LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU
RICHLY IN ALL WISDOM AND TEACHING...

COLOSSIANS 3:16^A

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LESSON 1

THE BEAUTIFUL RELATIONSHIP WE HAVE IN CHRIST



Begin with prayer



Read **Ephesians 1:1-4**



Listen at [TTB.org/Ephesians](https://www.TTB.org/Ephesians) to *Ephesians Intro*, *Ephesians 1:1, 2*, and *Ephesians 1:2-4*

In 62 A.D., four men left Rome, traveling east to modern Turkey. Tucked in their satchels, each carried a letter written by a Roman prisoner waiting to appear before the emperor. These four letters are in the Word of God, called the “Prison Epistles of Paul.”

- Epaphroditus, from Philippi, carried home the Epistle to the Philippians (see Philippians 4:18).
- Tychicus, from Ephesus, brought his city the Epistle to the Ephesians (see Ephesians 6:21).
- Epaphras, from Colosse, had the Epistle to the Colossians in his bag (see Colossians 4:12).
- Onesimus, a runaway slave from Colosse, hand carried the Epistle to Philemon addressed to his master (see Philemon 1:10).

These letters present a composite picture of Jesus Christ, the church, the Christian life, and how they interact together.

Ephesians presents the body of Christ, the invisible church.

Colossians presents Jesus as the Head of this body, the church.

Philippians presents how to live a dynamic Christian life with Christ as your strength.

Philemon presents Christian living in action in a pagan society.

The gospel walked in shoe leather in the first century, and it was working.

But Ephesians—this glorious letter tells us how the body of Christ is God's masterpiece. The church is a mystery not revealed in the Old Testament and more wonderful than any temple made with hands. As God's children, we are built with *living* stones, that's the Holy Spirit living in us. As His body, we are to walk as Jesus would walk and not give in to the devil's strategies. And someday, God knows when, we will be presented to Christ as a bride.

Ephesus was the leading church (of seven) in Turkey. From this base, Paul founded the church and began a far-reaching ministry.

The gospel had its greatest entrance in Ephesus, second only to Rome in this part of the Roman Empire. In that day, millions lived here, at the heart of the Empire. East and west met in Ephesus. It was a cultural center, a religious center, had a great climate, and was a vacation destination spot.

Picture the Apostle Paul sailing into the magnificent harbor, right up to a beautiful, wide, white marble walkway leading to one of the seven wonders of the world. All focus led to the temple of Diana, four times larger than the Parthenon. Inside the 127 graceful carved columns stood the vulgar idol of Diana, the many-breasted goddess of fertility. All sorts of gross immorality took place in the shadow of this temple. Not to mention, the souvenir trade thrived, mostly on the silver models of the temple and Diana.

It was to such a city that Paul came. He went first to the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months. Then to the school of Tyrannus for two years from where students took the gospel to every region of Asia (Acts 19:10). It spread enthusiastically and began the greatest season the gospel has ever had.

Paul considered this season in Ephesus his greatest opportunity (1 Corinthians 16:8-9), the high watermark of his missionary work. The people of Ephesus heard more Bible teaching from Paul than anyone, which is why he could write them about the deep truths of this epistle.

Paul also faced great opposition here because his preaching put the silversmiths out of business, causing a city-wide riot. God miraculously saved his life, which encouraged him and kept him preaching (see Acts 19:23-41). Paul loved this church in Ephesus.

A huge number of believers turned to Christ because of Paul's ministry in Ephesus. The gospel was more effective here than in any place and at any time in the history of the world. Ephesus was the church at its best, at its highest spiritual level.

Ephesian believers loved the Lord Jesus, even while living in a pagan Roman society. They modeled what it means to be drawn to Him. Paul wrote to the Ephesians that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. Return His love, Paul encouraged them and us. Respond to Him. Say to Him, "I love You because You first loved me." This beautiful letter to the Ephesians invites you to a closer relationship with Christ.

To look at Ephesians logically, you see two sections. The first half is doctrinal and the last half is practical. We need both. A lovely high view of our salvation (chapters 1-3) gets down where we live (chapters 4-6). In the first half we see the church as a body, a temple, and a mystery. In the second half, the church is seen as three metaphors: a new man walking through the world, the bride of Christ, and a soldier fighting an enemy.

Though it had its place in history as a letter that traveled to all the churches of the day, Ephesians is also for the invisible body of believers in every generation, including the body of Christ alive today.

Paul's greeting holds treasures in every phrase.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. –Ephesians 1:1-2

Actually, in the original text Paul always emphasizes the title of *Christ* first—Christ Jesus. *Jesus* was His human name. Paul didn't know Him as the Jesus of the three-years' ministry, but rather as the glorified Christ he met on the Damascus road. That's who Jesus is right now (see Matthew 16:16 and 2 Corinthians 5:16).

Paul states he is an apostle, the highest office the church has ever had. No one today can meet the requirements of an apostle. An apostle received their commission directly from the living lips of Jesus and saw Him after His

resurrection. Apostles also exercised a special inspiration by God's Spirit to write the Bible and had supreme authority, proven by their power to work miracles and to found churches. Today, the power to do miracles is no longer the badge of authority. Instead, the mark of a godly leader is teaching the right doctrine.

Paul rested his apostleship on God's will rather than any personal ambition or request of a church. (On apostleship, see Mark 6:13; Luke 9:1-2; Acts 2:43; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1; John 14:26 and 16:13; Galatians 1:1, 11-12.)

The book of Ephesians was written "to the saints" Is that you? A saint is one who has trusted Christ and is set aside for God. There are only two kinds of people today: the saints and the ain'ts. Saints should act saintly, it's true. But we're not saints because of how we act. We're saints because we belong to Him to be used of Him. Some saints are not being used of God, and that's their fault. Saints are also believers, the "faithful in Christ Jesus." God calls us *saints* and man calls us *believers*. A saint should be saintly and a believer should be faithful.

We are "faithful *in Christ Jesus*." The critical word? *In*. Ephesians will teach us about all that is ours because of the little preposition "in." What does it really mean to be saved? It means to be *in Christ*. We are irrevocably and organically joined to Christ and put into the body of believers. We belong to Him, and there's nothing as wonderful or profound as that. (See 1 Corinthians 6:17, Romans 8:1, and John 15:6.)

The believer is in Christ and Christ is in the believer. The church, which is "the body of Christ" is *in Christ*, the Head. All the truths of Ephesians revolve around this fact.

"Grace to you." *Grace* was the typical way to greet someone in the Gentile world in Paul's day. When you meet someone on the street, you'd say, "*Charis!*" which is *grace* in Greek. "And peace." In a Jewish community, "*Shalom!*" is how people say hello.

Paul combines these two greetings and lifts them to new heights. Grace is how God saves you. You have to know this grace before you can experience His peace. Paul always puts them in that order—grace before peace. You must have *charis* before you can experience *shalom* (see Romans 5:1).

“From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Grace and peace are from God our Father. He becomes our Father when we experience His grace. Grace and peace also come from the Lord Jesus Christ, who is seated at God’s right hand in the heavens. So why didn’t Paul complete the Trinity and say grace and peace from the Holy Spirit? Because He is already with us, indwelling us as believers.

GOD OUR FATHER PLANS THE CHURCH

If all that blessing wasn’t enough, we now begin to learn the deep and marvelous truths about our salvation. Paul says we are blessed “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (v. 3).

He has blessed us. Notice that we praise Him with our lips because He first made us blessed. His blessings are deeds; our blessing is a declaration. We *pronounce* Him blessed; He *makes* us blessed. The word *blessed* has in it the thought of happiness and joy. God is happy today because He has a way of saving you and He can bless you. So wonderful! He blesses us today, not just someday in heaven. This blessing is ours right now because we are *in* Christ.

“In the heavenly places in Christ.” We don’t know exactly where the heavenlies are, but the Lord Jesus is there, and our blessings are *in* Christ there. We are seated *in* Christ. As believers today we’re already in the heavenlies *in* Christ. It doesn’t matter if you stumble in your walk down here, if you are a child of God, you’re already there in Christ. He has given you this position—*in* Christ.

Stop and think of what you have in Christ. In Christ, God has blessed you with all spiritual blessings. Jesus Christ gives you a way to know Him as Savior and walk with Him in a new life. You have everything in Him. You don’t have to wait for the Holy Spirit to give you something special, like a baptism or a sign. You have it all the moment you believed in Christ. To say that you are lacking something denies what Christ did for you. You got *everything* when you came to Him in faith. Jesus Christ not only has saved you, but He is also the One who blesses you. Let’s grasp this truth and live as a real child of God.

You wouldn’t build a house today without a blueprint, right? When God planned the church, He had a blueprint. He planned three things: He chose us in Christ, He predestined us to the place of sonship, and He made us accepted in the Beloved. God the Son paid the price for the church and God the Spirit protects the church.

And there's so much more in Christ...

NEXT: What predestination really means.

4. Ephesians shows us that deep spiritual truths lead to real, practical action.
Are there any biblical truths you are struggling to put into practice?

5. What are some reasons saints are not being used by God?

6. What is the significance of our salvation placing us “in Christ?”

7. Think of the images Paul uses: a house, a body, a bride. Are there any other pictures you can think of to represent the relationship of believers to one another and to God?

LESSON 2

CLIMBING THE MOUNTAINTOPS OF EPHESIANS



Begin with prayer



Read **Ephesians 1:4-6**



Listen at [TTB.org/Ephesians](https://www.TTB.org/Ephesians) to ***Ephesians 1:2-4, Ephesians 1:3, 4, and Ephesians 1:5, 6***

Many people run for cover when they hear the word *predestination*. The natural man hates this word and the average believer finds it difficult to accept at face value. Although the explanation might be clear, the truth it contains is hard to receive.

But let's look closely at the pivotal verses that are like a walnut—hard to crack, but with a lot of goodies on the inside.

Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. –Ephesians 1:4-5

God planned our salvation in eternity before we were even in this world. The plan initiated “when the fullness of time had come” (Galatians 4:4) for the Lord Jesus Christ to enter time, and make our salvation possible by His death on the cross. After Jesus’ time on earth, God the Holy Spirit followed. He came to dwell with believers. He brings us to a saving knowledge of God’s grace revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Think about this: God has always been the One who does the saving. Our part has always been the sinning. You don't find Jesus. *He* finds you. He is the One who goes after the lost sheep and brings us home.

God chose believers in Christ before the foundation of the world, way back in eternity past. He didn't choose us because we were good or because we would do some good, but He did choose us so that we *could* do some good. The entire choice is thrown back on God's wisdom and the goodness of God alone. The responsibility is on Him. If He did the choosing, then He's responsible. That makes it quite wonderful!

Let's look closer at the verse. "Just as" connects these new thoughts to the previous verse. God gives us spiritual blessings according to His purposes. Look how these blessings build: He blesses us "with every spiritual blessing," which is then wrapped "in the heavenly places," and finally put in the larger package of "*in* Christ." The whole thought is: Open your gift and see what God has done for you, and then move out confidently in faith and live today on the high plane to which God has brought you. He's made you His child and blessed you with all spiritual blessings. That's the confidence we should live in today.

This world and this universe *will* operate according to God's plan and purpose.

All this was according to His plan. God the Father planned the church, God the Son paid for the church, and God the Holy Spirit protects the church. The source of all our blessings is God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He takes us back to eternity past to help us see our salvation is completely from Him and not about us at all. God did it all.

We are climbing the mountaintops in Ephesians. We're peeking into eternity past, and God is telling us how He planned the church.

Perhaps you've heard the word "election." This means God chose us to be in Christ. People are not spiritually lost because they have not been elected. They are lost because they are sinners, and that is the way they want it and have chosen. The free will of man is never violated by the election of God. The lost person makes their own choice.

But to the lost sinner, God is prepared to extend His mercy.

These are the heights of Ephesians right now—it demands disciplined thinking. Some skirt the issue by saying they have "intellectual problems" with the Bible. But the hurdles aren't creation versus evolution or if there was a literal flood or if Jonah was swallowed by a whale. The real problem is

the Bible condemns the sin in our lives. God will save you when your heart is willing to turn to Him. He's planned salvation like this so that He might bring you to heaven someday; and when you get there, you're going to find out He's the One who did it all.

Look at our verse again to see the next thing God did for us. The words "in love" really belong with verse five. "In love, having predestined us" Some say, *Oh no, there's that word predestination!* But don't be scared of this word—it is one of the most *wonderful* words in Scripture. These truths are like strong medicine. If you take it, it'll do you good. You need to *know* you've been chosen in Him in order to stand for Him today. It makes a world of difference in your life.

Some would never imagine that predestination and love could be together in the same verse, but here they are. God's love is behind this concept so many are afraid of. The word *predestination* means "to define, to mark out, literally to horizon." If you live where it's flat, you can see the horizon. You're "horizoned"; you're put in that area. When it refers to God, predestination describes God's purpose for your life.

Predestination never refers to unsaved people. God doesn't predestinate someone to be lost. If you are lost, it's because you have rejected God's remedy. It's like a doctor offering a dying man the cure. "If you take this, it'll heal you and you'll live." The man stares at the doctor and says, "I don't believe you." Then the man dies, and the doctor's report accurately says he died of a certain disease. But there was a remedy, and he actually died because he didn't take the remedy. God has provided a remedy for the lost to be saved. He never predestines anyone to be lost. In your free will, you determine your own choice.

Long ago, God decided to adopt us into His family through Jesus Christ and give us the position of full-grown heirs. He took tremendous pleasure in planning how to lavish us with salvation by the Spirit of God, giving us access to Him in a new way, through a new relationship (see 1 Peter 1:23). That is what the Lord Jesus meant when He told Nicodemus he must be born again. Adoption also means a place of position and privilege. We are in a position where we can understand the Word of the Father because He has given us the Holy Spirit as our Teacher.

This whole glorious process shines a light on God's grace. It was His kind intent to show us favor and mercy, freely given to us in the Beloved—the chief end being the glory of God.

You may wonder who is this Beloved? It is the Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:23-24). God sees the believer in Christ and accepts them just as He receives His own Son. That is the only basis on which we could be in heaven. We are accepted in the Beloved. God loves you just as He loves Christ, because you are *in* Christ.

God the Father does a threefold work on our behalf. He chooses us in Christ. He predestines us to the place of His child. He accepts us in the Beloved. It is all to the praise of the glory of His grace. He is the One who gets the praise. He is the One who did it all. How we need to see the grace of God as it is revealed in Christ in our lives!

God did all this for a purpose. Long before He laid down earth's foundations, He had us in mind. He settled on us as the focus of His love, to be made whole and holy by His love. God chose us to make us holy in our inner lives. That's the positive side of His purpose.

God's choice demands that we live a holy life. His grace doesn't give us license to sin all we want "because now that I'm saved, I can do as I please." (See Romans 6:1-2.) If you want to go on living in sin, then you're a sinner who hasn't yet been saved. A sinner who has been saved will show a change in the way they live.

Not only did God elect us so we could be holy but so we also can be "without blame." This is the negative side. "Without blame" means your life has been changed. If there is no evidence of change, then you are not one of the elect. Yes, a Christian will still sin, but your life will not reflect a pattern of sinfulness. God has given us Jesus, our substitute, to free us from sin's blame (see 1 John 2:1-2).

When we are God's child, He guides us out of sin. But when we do sin, we have Jesus Christ, a righteous advocate. When He became a sacrifice for our sins, He solved the sin problem for good—not only ours, but the whole world's. Jesus died for the world. He sends a legitimate invitation to you today from God. If you hear His voice, you are elect. You also have free will not to hear His voice. This is difficult to understand, but you can believe it.

Jesus said about Himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). The Lord pictures a great big, wide highway and off that highway is a little, narrow entrance. *I am the only way in*. The broad highway on which most people travel leads down and gets narrower until finally it leads to destruction. You can keep on that broad highway if you want to, but you can also turn off at the invitation.

You can be sure He will never reject anyone who comes to Him (see John 6:37). When you enter at that narrow entrance, the road eventually widens out to a big, rich, full life (see John 10:10). But *you* must make the choice to a legitimate invitation.

The Lord extends the invitation to whoever will come. That “whoever” means you. Just because there are the elect, doesn’t mean we know who they are. That’s why we keep telling people about Jesus; you don’t know who God has elected. If they open their heart, they can come. That’s all anyone has to do, but most people can’t leave their sin behind. The Bible condemns it, and they don’t want to turn from it.

God “chose us in Him.” Again and again the Word of God emphasizes God’s sovereign choice (see 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 and 1 Peter 1:2). If God has saved you, it’s not because you are good but because you are *not* good. God lavishes mercy and compassion on you (see Romans 9:14-16). If you want to experience God’s mercy and compassion, then turn to Him.

Think of it this way: On the door to heaven from our side, it could say, “Whosoever will may enter.” Jesus said, “*I am the door. Come in through Me and find life.*” When you get on the other side of the door someday in heaven, you might look back at it and see written over the door, “Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.”

God has planned the church. After all, this is His universe, and the church is His church. What is His plan? “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.”

NEXT: From eternity into time, and from space into time ...

LESSON 2



FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. What does it tell us about God that He isn't passive, that He pursues us for salvation?
2. God chose believers before they were ever born, and not because they would do anything to deserve it. How does it make you feel about yourself to know that God doesn't make mistakes in His choices?
3. What would you attempt for God today if you had more confidence?

7. Imagine you had been a companion of Paul's when he wrote Ephesians. Would you have advised him to not use words like "predestination" or "election," or would you tell him to leave them in?

LESSON 3

BOUGHT WITH A PRICE



Begin with prayer



Read **Ephesians 1:7-10**



Listen at [TTB.org/Ephesians](https://www.TTB.org/Ephesians) to ***Ephesians 1:7-9*** and ***Ephesians 1:8-11***

Back in eternity past, God chose us, predestined us, and made us accepted in the Beloved. Now we move from out of eternity into time, where God the Father puts His plans for the church into the hands of His Son, Jesus Christ, who then moves into space and time.

It's a historical fact Jesus was born into this world 2,000 years ago. After walking among us for 33 years, He died on a cross, was buried, rose again bodily, and ascended into heaven. His death redeemed us, made possible through His blood shed on the cross. *Ew—the blood part is so messy!* This important detail is not popular today, but Jesus' blood is the key to our salvation.

This entire messy sacrificial system required in the Old Testament was the only punishment of sin. Yet even the blood of an animal sacrifice couldn't take away sins—only Christ could do that. No matter how many sacrifices were offered year after year, they never added up to a complete solution to the sin problem. Every year they had to make the sacrifice again, and it heightened their awareness of their own guilt. Even the fragrance and smoke from the altar intensified their anticipation for Jesus' body, sacrificed once and for all for them. This was God's way.

When the Old Testament priests sacrificed year after year, they didn't make a dent in the problem. It was like putting a band-aid on cancer. But as a priest, Christ made a single sacrifice for sins, and that was all that was needed, today and forever. Jesus Christ made the perfect sacrifice to save us when we had no other hope. (See Hebrews 10:6-13.)

After God the Father had drawn the blueprint for the church, the Son came to this earth to rescue us with His nail-pierced hands. Through His sacrificial death, Christ purchased us from the slavery of sin to set us free. The literal wording is “in Him we have redemption through His blood” (v. 7). The word “redemption” is given prominence and top priority. This is why He came—to pay a price for our redemption. We were slaves in sin, and He came to deliver us. Our freedom came at a great cost, but He gladly paid it.

The word “redemption” can be translated three different ways in the original Greek language. One means “to buy at the marketplace”—to buy it and take it home. You paid the price and now it's yours (see 1 Corinthians 6:20). Another word for redemption means “to buy out of the market”—to buy it and then resell it at a profit. You are also free to keep it for your own use. You've paid the price and taken it off the market. It belongs to you. (See Galatians 3:13, which describes how when Christ was cursed by hanging on a tree, He redeemed us so we would not be exposed for sale again).

A third word for redemption is a marvelous one and describes what Jesus Christ did for us. God went into the marketplace where we were sold on the slave block of sin and He bought us, all of us. He paid a ransom for us in order to set us free. We can't do anything but sin; we're slaves to it. But Christ stepped in and paid for our freedom. He makes us free indeed (see John 8:36).

This redemption is “through His blood”—that's the price He paid. The blood of Christ is more valuable than silver and gold (see 1 Peter 1:18-19). For one thing, there is not much of it. A limited supply increases its value, but that's not why it's so valuable. One drop of the blood of the holy Son of God can save every sinner on top side of this earth, if that sinner will trust in Jesus as their Savior. He saves us this way because blood is the evidence of death; without blood there can be no forgiveness (see Hebrews 9:22). This Old Testament principle applies to the entire human race from Adam down to the last person. We can be redeemed now, not with the blood of bulls and goats, which never worked—but with the precious blood of Christ.

When God forgives our sin, His mind is on justice, righteousness, and holiness. Forgiveness only comes after the shedding of blood: It demands and depends on the payment of the penalty for sin. Christ's death and the shedding of His blood is the foundation for forgiveness and, without that, we could not be forgiven.

Human forgiveness and God's forgiveness are not the same. Human forgiveness is always based on a penalty that is deserved, but not imposed. We just wipe the account clean. God is holy and righteous. His forgiveness is always based on the execution of the penalty, and the price has been paid. Human forgiveness comes before the penalty is executed. God's forgiveness depends on the penalty being executed. The righteousness of the law demands that a penalty must be paid. God paid the penalty and *then* He forgave.

A righteous God forgives on the basis that a penalty has been completed. When was the penalty paid? When Jesus Christ shed His blood on the cross. Sure, it's messy; it doesn't appeal to our refined nature. But of course, we don't think our sin is all that bad. We cover it up and make it look clever. But the truth is, we are lost, hell-doomed sinners, and God can't forgive us until the penalty has been executed. The good news is that it has. Look at God's Word and you'll always find forgiveness back to back with the blood of Jesus Christ. Forgiveness depends on it. That's how valuable His blood is. He can forgive you your sins because He paid the penalty for your sins. This is the only way we can be forgiven for our sins; without this there is nothing. God can't forgive until the penalty has been paid.

"According to the riches of His grace." God can save you, and He can keep you, and it is due to His grace. God never asks you what you have done for Him. When He saves you by grace, it doesn't put you in debt to Him. He bought you in order to set you free.

Someone may ask, "But aren't we supposed to serve Him?" Certainly. But God wants us to serve Him on the basis of our new relationship with Him—a relationship of love. The Lord Jesus said, *If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you* (see John 14:15). He didn't say, *Because I'm dying for you, you are to keep My commandments*. He said, *If you love Me* Today, if you love Him, He wants your service. If you don't love Him, then forget about service.

We hear so much about commitment to Christ, but we have very little to commit to Him. God wants us to respond to Him in love. We love Him because He first loved us.

God loves you. Jesus Christ paid a price for you. He gave Himself and shed His blood so you could have your sins forgiven. This is all yours if you willing come to Him and accept Him as your Savior.

Your redemption and your forgiveness are “according to the riches of His grace.”

THE MYSTERY OF GOD’S WILL

So, Jesus Christ redeems us through His blood. That’s His primary goal in coming to earth. He does a second work on behalf of the church: Jesus Christ reveals “the mystery of His will” (v. 9).

A mystery in Scripture is not a whodunit story, or something you wonder about. A mystery is when God reveals something that, up to that time, He had hidden. A New Testament mystery always has two elements: 1) We can’t discover it on our own. It’s always a revelation from God. 2) Enough is revealed at the proper time without all the details being disclosed. God doesn’t tell us everything.

God reveals to us now what was not revealed in the Old Testament. What is the mystery of His will? First, it’s something revealed according to God’s wisdom and prudence. It is not a simple “a-b-c” something; it plumbs the depths and the wisdom of God we can’t easily probe—sometimes not at all. We need to apply all our mental abilities to try to understand something of God’s great purposes, the plan of God. God wants us to know these things because now this mystery has been revealed.

God reveals His will according to our dispensation, the way God runs something at a particular time. Obviously, He related to Adam a different way than He relates to us. But God has always had one way to save people. Everything has always rested on faith. The way of faith has been different through the ages, but not the necessity of faith. For example, Abel, Abraham, and Old Testament priests all offered a lamb to God. God had said that was the right way. But God doesn’t tell us to approach Him with a lamb today. We are under a different economy.

God is moving everything forward to the time when Christ will rule over all things in heaven and earth. This will be “the fullness of the times” (v. 10), when the time is right for everything in creation to be brought under the rulership of Jesus Christ. In this long-range plan, everything will come together and be complete in Him. All that is past, present, and future is moving toward the time when every knee must bow and every tongue must

confess that Jesus is Lord. This mystery will someday be revealed to us, a time when all things will be “under His feet.” In a time still future, everyone will know He is sovereign and ruler of everything (see Hebrews 2:8). We’re under a different dispensation today.

Heaven and earth are not in tune today. We play our little song here opposite of what the mighty chorus sings in heaven. But there’s coming a day when heaven and earth will be in harmony and all things will be gathered together in Christ.

NEXT: You don’t deserve it, but you’ve got a reward coming.

4. What does the messiness and violence required to pay the penalty tell us about our sins?

5. Our service for God should be our love for God in action, but sometimes it can be easy to forget that. How can you focus more on serving as an expression of your love for God?

6. Imagine you were given the opportunity to explain Christ's sacrifice to an Old Testament Israelite. How would you explain it?

7. If God is ruler of everything, why do you think He chooses not to make everyone submit to Him right now?

WHEN WE AS BELIEVERS
ARE IN THE CENTER OF
the will of God,
WE LIVE A LIFE OF
FULLNESS, SATISFACTION,
and joy.



LESSON 4

THE REAL WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



Begin with prayer



Read **Ephesians 1:11-23**



Listen at [TTB.org/Ephesians](https://www.TTB.org/Ephesians) to ***Ephesians 1:8-11***, ***Ephesians 1:12-17***, and ***Ephesians 1:17-23***

As we are learning, Jesus Christ works in three specific ways for His body, the church. First, He redeems us through His blood—His primary goal in coming to earth. Jesus also reveals the mystery of God’s will. Now we come to the third work: Jesus Christ rewards us with an inheritance.

In God’s plan and purpose, as believers we take part in Christ’s inheritance, because we are *in* Him. (See Romans 8:17 and 2 Corinthians 3:21-23.) It’s impossible to grasp how marvelous this is. Everything that belongs to Christ, belongs to you, as God’s child. It’s yours because He has given it to you. God has predestined us to receive an inheritance; He determined it. You don’t deserve it, but it’s a reward out of His grace and because of His will. It’s good, and it’s right, and it’s best. Why? Because God has purposed it and Jesus has paid the price for it.

Jesus redeems us with His blood.

He reveals the mystery of His will.

He rewards us with an inheritance.

The church is very important to God today. We make our little plans and think they're important, but they won't last 20 years. God's great plans *will* be carried out.

As he tells us about the amazing things the Trinity does for all believers, the apostle Paul stops and "sings" a doxology. After telling us about the work of God, the Son, he writes, *We should praise God and give glory to him for doing these mighty things for us, who were the first to trust in Christ* (v. 12). Too often, people think God's reason for existing is to satisfy their whims and wishes. But we exist for the glory of God. When we as believers are in the center of the will of God, we live a life of fullness, satisfaction, and joy. (If you aren't in God's will, there's trouble brewing for you.) Living in God's will adds purpose and meaning to life: We exist for the praise of His glory. In endless ages of eternity, God will point to us and say, "Look there, I loved them and I saved them." This gives us worth and standing and dignity and purpose and joy and glory to life. We exist today to the praise of His glory, and that is enough.

That's what Jesus Christ does for His church, and now a third doxology (vv. 13-14) tells us how the Holy Spirit works in the life of the church. In a word, He protects us. We learned about God's work *for us*; now we see the work of the Holy Spirit *in us*. He regenerates us, He is a refuge for us, and He gives reality to our lives.

Let's first look at how the Holy Spirit regenerates us. He first causes you, as a sinner, to hear and understand the truth. When you simply believe on His name, He makes you a child of God (see John 1:12).

The good news is, Jesus died for you and if you trust Him, you will be saved. The Holy Spirit makes those words real to us, and we respond to it. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God, according to Romans 10:17. The moment you trust in Christ, you are regenerated. Once you hear the truth, believing is the next logical step. "In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (v. 13) is a great explanation of what it means to be born again. You hear the Word of Truth—the gospel of your salvation—and you put your trust in Christ. You are baptized and sealed in the Holy Spirit the moment you trust Christ. The Spirit does the work. God the Father gave His Son to die, and He offered up Himself willingly. They both gave. They also both sent the Spirit to do the work. He regenerates the sinner and gives Himself to seal the sinner.

When He seals us, the Holy Spirit stamps the image of God on our hearts to give us the reality of our salvation. Just the way a seal with an image is stamped on a document, the Spirit of God impresses Himself on the believer's heart (see John 3:33).

The Holy Spirit's seal on our heart also declares His rightful ownership of us (see 2 Timothy 2:19). He guarantees God is going to deliver us and seals Himself to us until that day of redemption, the day He delivers us to Christ.

When we receive the Holy Spirit at the time we are saved, He becomes a pledge that more spiritual blessings will follow. He is like the earnest money we put down as a down payment on a piece of property. We pay it to hold it for us and to promise money will follow. The Holy Spirit is that earnest down payment, our guarantee that God will honor our salvation.

All this is "to the praise of His glory" (v. 14). Paul offers a doxology after each of the three descriptions of the Trinity's work. The glory of God is seen in how the Holy Spirit regenerates us, becomes our refuge and seal, and gives us reality. All these glorious truths now move Paul to prayer.

The Ephesian church was noted for its faith and love. Love wasn't just a motto or a bumper sticker for this group. The saints expressed real love, based on their faith in the Lord Jesus. This was the church at its highest. In the book of Revelation, the Ephesian church represents the early church at its very best. Because of their faith and love, Paul thanks God for them.

Instead of only praying when we are motivated by trouble, sickness, or a crisis, Paul was often motivated to pray by the good things. When he heard the good news and wonderful reports about the Ephesian church, he continues to pray for them. He loves these people, and they love him and God's Word.

Paul prayed twice in this letter for the Ephesians, both times showing his concern for them. You can tell a lot about a person's spiritual life by how they pray. Does it express a dependence on God? Does it reflect a need they believe God can meet? Will they intercede for others? Paul first thanks God for the Ephesians, and then he prays for them. He doesn't ask for material things for them but for spiritual blessings.

Having written that the church is the body of Christ—and that God the Father planned it, God the Son paid for it, and God the Holy Spirit protects it—Paul knew we wouldn't be able to understand all this unless the Spirit of God teaches us and opens the Word of God to us. Only the Holy Spirit of

God can reveal truth about God. He opens the eyes of our heart (not our mind). You can be brilliant intellectually, but that's no guarantee you will understand spiritual truth. It's more important to understand with your heart than just with your head. (See Romans 10:9-10.)

The Spirit of God wants to teach you today. Often people aren't willing to be in the Word of God because they'd rather be spoon-fed by their pastor or Bible teacher. These all have their place, but it's much better to be in the Word for yourself and let the Spirit of God teach you. Spend time in the Scriptures. When you read a hard passage—because it looks barren of meaning or because it's a difficult concept—read it many times. If you still don't understand it, get down on your knees before the Lord and say, "I missed the point, and You will have to teach me."

Paul prayed we would also know about the riches of the glory of His inheritance that is ours in Christ. We have an inheritance in the Lord. But did you know He has an inheritance in us? Today God operates through us, but the time is coming when we will rule and reign with Him. He will claim us as *His* inheritance. The Spirit of God will make this real to us.

He also wants to make God's power real to us. His "dynamite power" towards us is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Not only is it resurrection power, but it's the power that set Christ at God's right hand. It is ascension power. We emphasize Christmas and Easter, but have you ever thought about the power that took Jesus back to the right hand of God? Think of the power it takes to launch a missile off its base and take it into space, and the power it took to take men to the moon and bring them back. A physical power took Christ to the right hand of God, and it's the same power available to believers today. Paul wants us to experience the greatness of that power. (See Philippians 3:10.)

Jesus is the head of the body, His church. Right now, only we are under His authority, but someday, everything will be obedient to Him. He will be in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments. No name or power will be exempt from His rule. And not just for the time being, but *forever*. Jesus is in charge of it all.

For now out of our love for Him, Jesus wants us to exercise whatever gift He has given us in His church (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-13). At the center of it all, Jesus rules the church. He speaks and acts through it and shows the world how to follow Him.

The Lord Jesus expresses Himself in the world today through His church. The power that raised Jesus from the dead now lifts a person out of spiritual death into spiritual life and is the same power Jesus gives His church.

We were once dead in our sins, but Jesus' resurrection power makes us alive in Christ. Our goal is to experience this power as the body of Christ and show the world Jesus.

THE CHURCH IS A TEMPLE

In many ways the church is a metaphor for the Old Testament temple, and before that, the tabernacle in the wilderness.

The church can be compared to the temple:

- The tabernacle and the temple, for instance, were made of living acacia trees that were hewn into dead boards. In order to form the church, God takes dead souls and makes us into a living temple.
- God lived temporarily in both the temple and tabernacle—they were “dwelling places for the glory of God.” The church is now where the Holy Spirit dwells in believers.

The church is different from the temple:

- The tabernacle and temple existed for the performance of a ritual and the repetition of a sacrifice for sin (see Hebrews 9:25-26). But the church doesn't have a ritual like these. It's a functional organism in which the Holy Spirit moves through the living stones.
- The church is not a temple “made with hands.” Today, God indwells us as individual believers. (See Acts 17:24-25 and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.) Israel never thought God was confined to the temple. Instead, the temple was where God would meet with them when they came with a sacrifice and a ritual. The church has none of that today.
- In the Old Testament temple, Gentiles were not allowed to get too close, confined to the court of the Gentiles. But now in Christ, Gentiles come from far off to draw near to Christ through His blood.

NEXT: The difference between life and death.

4. How would you describe what is meant by believers being regenerated?

5. What does it mean that the Holy Spirit is our seal?

6. Paul's pattern of prayer was to intercede for other people, asking God for spiritual blessings. Is there anyone in your life for which you need to intercede?

7. Think about the Ephesian believers who lived under the powerful might of Rome. How do you think it felt for them to realize that, through Christ, they had access to all the power ever known?

LESSON 5

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH



Begin with prayer



Read **Ephesians 2:1-13**



Listen at [TTB.org/Ephesians](https://www.TTB.org/Ephesians) to ***Ephesians 2:1-3***, ***Ephesians 2:1-7***, and ***Ephesians 2:8-13***

Once we were dead. We lived according to the world's lifestyle and principles, energized by the evil one who prompted us to disobey God.

When God saves us and we are reborn, Satan becomes powerless against our lives, though he still can deceive and lead us astray.

We were dead in our sins because of Adam's choice to sin, passed on to us. (See Romans 5:12.) Adam's sin made us all fall and gave us a nature with no capacity or inclination to God. Adam died spiritually that day he disbelieved and disobeyed God. He ran and hid from God, never again to look for God on his own. That's where we are today without our new nature. We don't want anything to do with God.

That's what sin does. It steps over God's boundaries. It's an arrow that misses its mark. We fall short of God's standards by a million miles. It's because we are dead in our sins and, like fools, we're led around by Satan. Without Christ, we are dead men walking like spiritual zombies.

After all, that's what death is. Physical death separates the spirit and the soul from the body. When someone dies, we don't see their spirit and the soul leave; we see only the dead body. Spiritual death separates us from

God. After Adam sinned, he could go on living physically and mentally, but he was spiritually dead because he was separated from God. He passed that same dead nature on to all of us. Only the Spirit's convicting work can prick our conscience today. We can't make ourselves want to be right with God, only the Spirit of God can do that in us.

Before we were in Christ, the world patterns drove our thinking and actions. Even now sometimes when our focus isn't on Christ, Satan still energizes us. Whoever we yield to is our master. Even the Christian must choose whom he will serve.

We're all in the same boat, Paul said. We all did whatever we felt like doing. We all walked away from God (v. 3).

"But God" That little conjunction changes everyone. "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us ... made us alive together with Christ" (vv. 4-5). God is *rich* in mercy. When you couldn't save yourself, He had mercy on you. And not too-little-too-late, but God has *oceans* of mercy—all that we need. The only requirement is that we believe Him. He saves us by His grace.

What does it mean to be saved by God's grace? When we were still dead in our sin, completely incapable of saving ourselves, God reaches down to us in grace. Why? There's no reason in us; He finds it in Himself. It's not because we were good and beautiful and were serving Him. No, we were stiff-necked. But God hears our cry. His love for us gets His attention and motivates Him to extend grace to us and save us.

God does love you. Don't lose sight of that. God loves all of us. But God cannot, on the basis of His love, open the back door of heaven and slip us in under cover of darkness. He can't let down the bars of heaven at the front door and bring us in just because He loves us.

It's because God is also light. As the moral ruler of this universe, He is righteous, holy, and good. That adds up to one thing: God can't do things that are wrong according to His own standard. So God couldn't save us by love—that would just put Him in a moral bind. He could also love without being able to save. Instead, He acted in love and extended His grace.

Does John 3:16 say God so loved the world that He saved the world? No, God so loved this world that He *gave* His only begotten Son. God couldn't save the world by love, so He paid the penalty for our sins. By His grace, He made a way to save us.

Frankly, grace is much more wonderful. This way, you can never get out of God's favor. If you sin, you will lose your fellowship with Him, but you never get out of His favor. You can grieve the Spirit of God when you don't listen to His prompts, but you can always come back to Him. (See 1 John 1:7-9.) If you walk in the light of God's Word and discover you've sinned, the blood of Jesus Christ just keeps on cleansing you from all sin. Why? It's because of His grace. *Oceans* of mercy and grace.

God stretches His arms to a lost world and says, "*You may come, if you come My way.*" It's good to remember this is God's universe, and He does things His way. You may think you have a better way, but you don't have a universe to run. He makes the rules. He loves you; you can't keep Him from loving you. Neither can you keep the sun from shining, but you can block the sun. When you sin, you turn your back on Him. This will keep you from experiencing His love. When you come to Him through Christ, not only will He save you, but you are in position to experience His love.

God has lifted us out of a spiritual graveyard. Our present position is that He has "raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (v. 6). What is our future?

God wants to show overflowing kindness to us in Christ. Someday in heaven we will say, *It is only through the grace and kindness of God that we are here.* We won't get any credit, because we couldn't do or achieve it. He lifted us right out of the old life to take our place with Christ in heaven. For all time, He will express His generosity and grace. It's God's gift to us from start to finish.

Our past, present, and future are all tied up in Jesus Christ. When we were dead in trespasses and sin, God saved us by His grace. He raised us to heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and someday in heaven we will put God's grace on display. The unworthy and undeserving will show off His favor.

If you believe in the name of Jesus Christ, you can be sure of this. You are saved. Your salvation rests on the *grace* of God—not upon your faithfulness. If you are a child of God, you may wander from Him, but He will always make a way back for you because it is by His grace alone that you are saved. You have a finished salvation. On the basis of what Christ has done for you, that the Holy Spirit has inclined you toward Christ, and that you have believed the Word of God and trusted Him, you can say, "I am saved." It's not an "I hope so" salvation or an "I'll try" salvation. It is salvation accomplished by the grace of God, by means of faith, and not by anything you do. Salvation is a gift that eliminates boasting. It is all of God and not of us. It is God's *gift*.

It's His love in action.

Now faith is what brings you to salvation—it’s the only thing you contribute. Yet it, too, is God’s gift. God tells us that faith comes by hearing and hearing by His Word (Romans 10:17). If you want to trust Christ, listen to the Word of God and He will give you faith. Many who resist God’s Word reason that God didn’t give them faith. The real reason people don’t come to God in faith is they don’t want to give up their sins.

The process of salvation goes like this: You finally get sick of your sins. You turn from yourself—from the things of the world, from religion, from everything the Bible condemns—and turn to Jesus Christ, then He gives you to the faith. God will draw every willing heart to Himself. Sin is the real problem behind our deaf ear to His Word; that’s even why many saints don’t enjoy their salvation as they should. We are stubborn about admitting and surrendering our favorite sins.

But God doesn’t give up on us. In fact, we are His personal project, His work of art, His new creation. All together we build His church, His workmanship, created in Jesus Christ, for good works. He planned fruitful lives for us that please Him. And while we are at this moment seated in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, we are also walking down here in a way that brings glory to His name.

A NEW KIND OF BUILDING

Almost everyone in the church in Ephesus was Gentile; there was only a small Jewish colony in Ephesus. This would become the new normal for the church. For ages, God made a definite distinction between Jew and Gentile, beginning with Abraham all the way to the Holy Spirit coming at Pentecost. Israel held a unique place in God’s eyes among the nations. In time, this valid distinction caused friction between Jews and Gentiles. Israel became proud of her position and looked down on Gentiles. Eventually hatred crept into the hearts of both groups.

Paul acknowledges this friction and describes the sad lot and hopeless plight of the Gentile, which could also be said of anyone “lost.” This is what it means to be lost:

- The opposite of being “in Christ” is being “without Christ” (v. 12). This is the best definition of what it means to be lost.
- Gentiles had no God-given religion like Israel. They couldn’t go back in the Old Testament and adopt for themselves a promise God gave to Israel. We don’t have that right, either, since God didn’t make those promises to us.

- Speaking of promises, God had made certain covenants just with the nation Israel. These covenants are still valid, but no Gentile has the right to appropriate them. For example, in a covenant God gave the land of Israel to the children of Israel—all of it. They will get it someday, but on God's terms.
- Gentiles also have no hope. Look at the religions of the world. They can't promise resurrection and are pretty hazy about what happens after death. Gentiles only have this present life. If they miss out on the fun here, then they are doubly hopeless.
- Lastly, they are "without God in the world" (v. 12). God hasn't removed Himself from people, but rather people have removed themselves from God. As a result, they wander around in darkness, with no hope. If this world is their only hope, then they better squeeze this life like an orange and get all the juice they can out of it. There's nothing to look forward to after death. That is what it would be like to be without hope and without God.

This is what it means to be lost. But now notice something has happened. Ephesians 2:13 says, "But now in Christ Jesus" There's good news ahead.

NEXT: Something brand new is taking place—in you!

7. If you had been a Jewish member of the Ephesian church, do you think you would have struggled to not feel superior to the gentile believers? Why or why not?

LESSON 6

THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY



Begin with prayer



Read **Ephesians 2:14–3:21**



Listen at TTB.org/Ephesians to *Ephesians 2:14–3 Intro, Ephesians 3:1-13,* and *Ephesians 3:14-21*

The ground is level at the Cross. Have you heard that expression? We are all on equal footing in Christ. Makes no difference who you are, what culture you're from, your ethnic heritage, your financial status, or how many followers you have on social media. When you come to Jesus Christ, you stand before God on par with everybody else.

When Paul encouraged the Ephesians towards unity, he specifically had in mind the split between Jews and Gentiles. The Lord Jesus Christ is the peace that has been made between them.

First, let's talk about the Gentiles. In the Jewish temple, the court of the Gentiles was way off to the side, with a partition to keep them at a distance. They were allowed to come in but were kept in a far corner. But now—for the Gentiles who are in Christ—all that changed. The partition, the enmity between them, has been broken down. Gentile and Jew are put together in Christ, and He has made peace—not only peace with God, but peace with each other. When they were without Christ they were kept at a distance; now they are in Christ and, because of His blood, welcomed close.

It's Jesus who brings this peace. Because of the price He paid on the cross, every person who trusts Him is placed *in Him* and becomes a new creature.

Now, let's talk about the Jews. Originally, God separated them out from all other nations. They eventually developed a spiritual pride, and ultimately this led to hatred between Jew and Gentile. But when a Jew and a Gentile are in Christ, there is peace, not only because of their new position in Him, but because there is something new.

In our new position in Christ, the Gentile has not been elevated to the status of the Jew. We are both sinners, all children of Adam (see Romans 3:9). But now saved, we both have been elevated to a higher position in Christ. When the Jew and Gentile come to the cross as sinners, they are made into a new creation. They become a new man, the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 2:18 is like a little atom bomb, describing our salvation. "For through [Christ] we both have access by one Spirit [the Holy Spirit] to the Father [God the Father]." Jew and Gentile are on the same footing as sinners at the foot of the cross and have equal access to God. Any one believer has as much access to God as any other believer. What a wonderful privilege.

This is the new building, the temple, God is building today. No more are Gentiles strangers, cut off from God. Now they are fellow citizens with the saints, the other members of the body of Christ. They are relatives (not servants), members of the family of God. This is a new relationship, completely foreign to the Old Testament. Even David and Moses were called God's servants, not sons (see 2 Samuel 7:8 and Numbers 12:7).

As saints, we are citizens of heaven. It is now our hometown. (See Philippians 3:20.) The apostles and prophets laid the foundation for our citizenship on the rock of Christ Jesus. (See 1 Corinthians 3:11 and 1 Peter 2:6-8.) The Lord Jesus is the chief cornerstone. The temple God is building today from the church is currently under construction. Every new believer is fitted into the total structure. (See 1 Peter 2:5.) God takes dead material, dead in trespasses and sins, and gives it life. These new living, born again stones are growing into a living temple. It's called "a holy temple" because the Holy Spirit dwells inside each believer (see Romans 8:9). When believers come together in a building to worship, the Holy Spirit is present. In that sense, God is in that building. But when every believer has left the building, God has left it also. He isn't in a church building any more than He is in any bar room. Today God indwells believers, not buildings.

As a temple, the church reveals God's presence and the glory on earth. When believers assemble together in a church, the world should notice the difference—that God is there with them.

THE CHURCH IS A MYSTERY

We've learned how the church is a body and how it's a temple. Now we learn that the church is a mystery.

The word *mystery* here isn't the same as a modern "whodunit?" A mystery is something that was hidden, but now is obvious. Like the church in the Old and New Testaments. God hadn't revealed it in the Old Testament, but now He has in the New Testament. Like a divine secret, He lets us in on it.

Paul, speaking as a prisoner because he took the gospel to the Gentiles, reveals that the Gentiles are now given new privileges. They were once strangers, without hope, and without God, and now brought in through Christ. He wants to pray for them, but first he explains what this mystery is all about.

By God's divine plan, God calls Paul to take the gospel to the Gentiles. His message wasn't different from other apostles, but his audience was. Peter told his own people, the Jews, "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Paul said to the Gentile, Philippian jailor, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 4:12 and 16:31). They had the same message, but they told two different groups of people.

Something brand new is taking place. The Old Testament is over. Nobody preached to the Gentiles in the Old Testament. God's method of salvation hasn't changed. The Jews weren't saved by keeping the Law, but by bringing a bloody sacrifice when they saw that they had come short of the glory of God. That sacrifice pointed to Jesus Christ.

This new economy became real to Paul when Jesus talked to him in a blinding light on the road to Damascus. The Lord Jesus Christ informed Paul that when he persecuted the church, he was actually persecuting Christ. The church is the body of Christ. That day, Paul learned God was doing something new. It wasn't just revealed to him alone. A church had come into existence on the Day of Pentecost.

Jesus revealed that day something new, something that had been hidden. His Spirit is the teacher of this mystery. Jesus had promised this on the night before He died (John 16:15).

The mystery is that Christ is risen and is the Head of a new body made up of Jews and Gentiles and of all tribes and peoples of the earth. The Old Testament clearly taught that Gentiles would be saved (Isaiah 11:10, 42:6, 60:3, Zechariah 2:11; Malachi 1:11).

So what precisely is the mystery? It is that Gentiles and Jews were placed in the body of Christ *on the same level*. By faith in Christ they were brought into a new body, which is the church, as equals.

Therefore, now there is a threefold division in the human race:

- All people were Gentiles from Adam to Abraham—2000 years (plus)
- All people were either Jews or Gentiles from Abraham to Christ—2000 years
- The threefold division is Jews, Gentiles, and the church from the Day of Pentecost to the Rapture—2000 years (plus)

When Jesus Christ said, "... on this rock I will build My church ..." (Matthew 16:18), it was still future. The church began on the Day of Pentecost, after the Lord returned to heaven. When it began, the church was all Jewish, but within a short while, Gentiles believed on Jesus Christ and were brought in. The church is one body, made up of both Jew and Gentile, and Christ is the Head of that body.

God chose the Apostle Paul to usher in this change and escort Gentiles into the body of Christ. What a gift of grace! God had transformed him from Saul, the proud Pharisee who persecuted the church, to Paul, the apostle who was now a prisoner for Jesus Christ. He had been taken out of one group and put into another. He is now a member of the body of Christ. All that had been accomplished was through the working of the power of the Holy Spirit. A mighty revolution took place in Paul's life. He was chosen to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. How wonderful!

We live today in the economy of the mystery of the church (the gospel of grace), which from the ages past has been hid in God who created all things. God hasn't told us everything! This mystery isn't to be debated but is to be preached.

As the mystery of the church is revealed, all angelic powers now see the complex wisdom of God's plan being worked out through the church, in conformity to that timeless purpose which God centers in Jesus, our Lord. This all is new to them. They not only see the love of God displayed and

lavished upon us, but they see God's wisdom and then they see us, God's trophies of grace, having access to God by faith in Christ. This is remarkable to them.

Because of these great goals of this mystery, Paul is willing to suffer anything to take the gospel to the Gentiles. He didn't want the Ephesians to be discouraged that he was in prison, because this was working for his good and their glory (see Colossians 1:24).

But he did want to pray for them. He called the church "the poem of God," the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the mystery of the ages. He asked God to make these great truths a reality in the lives of believers. He wanted us to experience all the riches of God's grace in Christ Jesus.

It's important to see that Paul prayed to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was his formula, the same as Jesus Himself who said, "Whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you" (John 16:23). *Direct your requests to the Father in My name*, He said. Jesus is our great intercessor. When we go to God the Father with a prayer, the Lord Jesus Himself can lift it to the Father for us. If we pray to the Lord Jesus directly, we rob ourselves of an intercessor.

Paul then asks four specific things for believers. He asks that:

1. We would "be strengthened with might [power] through His Spirit in the inner man" (3:16). Not only should we pray for physical needs, but we should also pray for our inner man. We need power to live the Christian life, to grow in grace, and to develop into full maturity—all the work of the Holy Spirit.
2. "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (3:17). Christ has not come as a temporary visitor but as a permanent resident by means of the Spirit to live in our lives. Paul prays that we would think the Lord's thoughts after Him.
3. Paul prays we would know the dimensions of what passes our understanding about the love of Jesus Christ. This is one of the many paradoxes of the believer's life. The arms of Jesus reach around the world (the breadth). The length of His love begins with the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world and stretches to the endless ages of eternity. The depth of His love goes all the way to the cross. The height of His love reaches to the throne of God. Only the Holy Spirit can lead a believer into this vast experience of the love of Christ. It's beyond human comprehension.

4. Finally, Paul prays for God's all-consuming fervor to fill us up "with all the fullness of God" (3:19).

Paul finishes his prayer with both worship to God and a blessing for us. How good God is and how small we are. We can't contain all of His blessings. The glory of God is His ability to carry out His purpose and do superabundantly beyond whatever we pray for, hope for, and dream about. His power at work in us is the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus in our generation and every generation to come.

We end these first three chapters of Ephesians on one of the highest mountain peaks in the New Testament. As we continue on in Ephesians, our focus turns from the heavenlies to our daily walk on earth.

**NEXT: These are the mountaintops of the Christian life.
Will it work on the street?**

7. What do you think were the emotions of gentile believers, who had been separated and kept outside the temple, who were now being told they were true equals with Jewish believers?

SALVATION
IS A GIFT THAT
ELIMINATES BOASTING.

IT IS ALL OF GOD
AND NOT OF US.



THRU the BIBLE

LESSON 7

WALK LIKE YOU BELIEVE IT



Begin with prayer



Read **Ephesians 4:1-13**



Listen at [TTB.org/Ephesians](https://www.TTB.org/Ephesians) to ***Ephesians 4:1-6*** and ***Ephesians 4:6-13***

In our study of Ephesians so far, we've visited the mountaintop of the Christian life where we are in Jesus Christ. Now we turn from the heavenlies to our daily walk, specifically for the church in Ephesus as they confront a demon-possessed world and a skeptical mob. The perspective is right down where the rubber meets the road. Are we able to translate the truths of the mountaintop into shoe leather? Are we able to stand and walk through the world in a way that pleases the Lord?

Funny, Ephesians is like the Old Testament book of Joshua in that we have been promised a place that we now enter. We've "passed over Jordan"—symbolic of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—and now stand in the Promised Land, resurrection territory.

But just like Joshua who had to take possession of the land, we also need go to battle. Enemies and obstacles stand in our way, but God promises that He gave us all the spiritual blessings we need. Now we need to live out those truths. Up until now the letter to the Ephesians has been glorious declarations, but now God will give us commands—more than 35! Those who have been called to an exalted place now must live worthy of that calling. The invisible church is to make itself visible where it meets in a local neighborhood.

The commands here in Ephesians are written only to those who are *in Christ*. The Spirit of God only talks to saved people, those who have been redeemed and have heard the Word of truth. If you are not a Christian, God doesn't ask you to do these things. First you must become His child through faith in Christ; you must become a member of His body. Dead men can't walk no matter how much we urge them to. The dead man who is lost in their trespasses and sins must first be made alive.

Isn't it interesting?—world religions say to a dying world, “Do something and you will be somebody.” God says just the opposite: “Be somebody and then you can do something.” If you are not a Christian, just stay on the sidelines and listen. You will learn what God asks of you if you are going to be a believer. When you look around you, you will know whether or not the saints are living as God wants them to live.

In the first three chapters of Ephesians, we see all that God has done for us as believers. Now, Paul begs us—with a gentle, loving wooing—to walk worthy of the life we have been called to live, worthy of the position we have in Christ. (See also Colossians 1:10 and 1 Thessalonians 2:10.) “Worthy” literally means “in balance”; what we believe is to be balanced by our way of life.

People may not say this outright, but they evaluate whether you are a real child of God by your walk. If you want to walk in step with God, you must walk in the light of His Word (see 1 John 1:7).

This mindset shows up in our lives in four different ways: godly character, moral courage, personal integrity, and mature behavior.

You accept life with patience, making allowances for each other because you love each other. Make it your aim to be at one in the Spirit, and you will inevitably be at peace with one another. You bear with each other even when it's not fun.

You accept life with humility. This “lowliness of mind,” the opposite of pride, describes how the Lord lived here (see Matthew 11:29 and Philippians 2:3). Humility is the flagship of all Christian virtues. This meekness doesn't mean weakness. It's a willingness to stand and do the will of God regardless of the cost. Meekness is bowing yourself to the will of God.

You're also to have a long temper (not a short fuse). Only the Spirit can give you this control.

Finally, because you're called to travel on the same road and in the same direction as each other, stay together. Work hard at unity (see John 17:21). The Spirit of God has baptized us into one body (1 Corinthians 12:13), so we all should keep that unity. We can't *make* that unity, only the Holy Spirit can, but we are to maintain it. All true believers in Christ Jesus belong to one body. We are one in Christ. Together, in our unity we share:

- “One body”—all believers from Pentecost to the Rapture is the body of Christ, the church.
- “One Spirit”—who baptizes each believer into the body of Christ. He unifies believers in Christ.
- “One hope of your calling”—to be taken out of this world into Jesus Christ's presence is the blessed hope of all believers (see Titus 2:13).
- “One Lord”—this is the Lord Jesus Christ, the One in whom we are unified.
- “One faith”—correct doctrine, the body of truth the apostles taught (Acts 2:42) must be the core around which we are unified.
- “One baptism”—water baptism is a symbol of the real baptism of the Holy Spirit by which believers are made one.
- “One God and Father of all”—as believers, we are the children of God. He is not the Father of unbelievers. Sonship only comes through Christ. He is “above all, and through all, and in you all” (v. 6). This means God is transcendent—above His creation, not dependent on it. He doesn't need oxygen to breathe. We live in His universe; He is motivating it, and He is moving it according to His plan and purpose.

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit baptized believers into the body of Christ and then gave them certain gifts, helping them function as members of the body. The Holy Spirit placed each of us in a certain place in the body, and He has been doing the same with each new believer ever since.

Now we are to walk as a new man in this world, a witness to the life we have in Christ Jesus. This takes some growing up. God knows what we need and has given grace to each child in which to grow. After all, being unified doesn't mean we are all the same. He gives each of us gifts suitable for us to grow and serve His body. The Holy Spirit placed each of us in a certain place in the body, and He has been doing the same with each new believer ever since.

God's Spirit is doing something in each believer to build up His whole body. His gift is given to you so you can benefit and bless the church. No gift is for private use only or for personal profit. We each have a very specific way we can serve the body; like the different parts of your physical body, we must work together, each member doing their specific job. This produces a beautiful harmony. However, when one member of the body suffers, the whole body suffers. This means if you do not exercise your gift in the body, you throw us all out of tune.

Christ takes certain men who have been given certain gifts and He gives *them* to the church to help it grow up to full maturity. The purpose of the church is to grow up and show the world Jesus Christ—this is the goal of the unity of the faith. The Lord Jesus is the One who has the authority and enables our gifting to grow up His church.

The Lord Jesus gave apostles to the church. An apostle saw the resurrected Christ and had been directly and personally commissioned by Jesus and enjoyed a special inspiration. This office, by virtue of its very nature, has long since disappeared from the church.

He gave prophets—men who were given particular insight into the doctrines of the faith (see Ephesians 3:5) through the immediate influence and inspiration of the Holy Spirit (unlike teachers). No one has the office of apostle or prophet in the church today.

Jesus Christ gave evangelists to the church. The evangelists were traveling missionaries, like Paul. They went into new territory, and they did it all alone with the Spirit of God who went before them.

He also gave the church pastors—shepherds of the flock. The pastor has a special gift of teaching the Word of God so that those he leads might do the work of the *ministry*. If you are a Christian, you are as much a minister as he is. All believers need to be trained in the Word of God so they can do the work of the ministry.

He gave teachers—those who were to instruct the flock in correct doctrine. (See Romans 12:7, 1 Corinthians 12:28-29, and 1 Titus 3:2.)

God designated all these giftings so the church might fully grow up and do the work of ministering and building up the body of Christ.

NEXT: When you become a new person in Christ, a radical change takes place and people notice it.

7. The Ephesian believers were familiar with beautiful temples dedicated to idols. How life-changing would it have been for them to be told they were being built up to be God's temple?

LESSON 8

WHEN WE GROW UP



Begin with prayer



Read **Ephesians 4:14–5:2**



Listen at [TTB.org/Ephesians](https://www.TTB.org/Ephesians) to ***Ephesians 4:14-24*** and ***Ephesians 4:22–5:2***

We're all in the process of growing—if we're healthy, that is. Healthy things grow up. Everyone loves a baby, but nobody loves a babyish adult. When Jesus Christ gives different gifts to people in the church, the gifts are meant to develop the whole body from babyhood to full maturity. Teachers are like pediatricians—that is, they give the saints the Word of God so they can grow up healthy.

What happens when you don't grow up? You're unstable. You're like a ship at sea out of control on the ocean. You're deceived by anyone telling you their version of the truth. Your immaturity hurts you because you act like you're not responsible for sin. And you're a mark for devious manipulators. What a scary picture of the possible fate of a child of God.

But it doesn't have to be that way. We can grow up. We can sail our ship with everything pointed toward Christ. He is our true north, our magnetic pole.

We can listen to the truth and love it and live it and speak it in love. We can grow up by following Jesus' example, the head of our body and the source of everything we do. His breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, full of love. He gives us direction and

feeds us. This produces a harmony where each member thrives in their place as we get spiritual strength and direction from our Lord. Of course, this happens all by choosing God's way to live.

We can choose to live the old way, controlled by sin like the world, as we lived before we knew Christ. The lost person leads a foolish, futile, and empty life. They've convinced themselves that sin brings satisfaction. Their sense of morality is skewed and driven by clouded reasoning. Because of their hard hearts, they walked away from God and have no idea what they're missing.

They're so far from God they're past feeling anything for Him. Like we studied earlier, they are far off, strangers without hope and without God, living in sin (2:11-12). They're not able to discern any wrongdoing—but they also don't care. They're on a vicious, downward spiral deeper into sin, without any hope of turning around. But they also don't want to. They've abandoned themselves to sin but are never satisfied.

Can anything change their direction?

Yes. If they listen to Jesus. If they hear His words and respond to His call. The Lord Jesus is the Shepherd, and His sheep hear His voice. If you haven't heard His voice, then you're not one of His sheep. The saved person looks to the Lord and listens and follows Him. The unsaved person goes his own way.

When we put on "the new man" in Christ Jesus, it's like we change clothes. Off with your dirty clothes and on with new and clean clothes. The Lord Jesus changes our clothes for us, like we're children not old enough to dress ourselves. The Lord gives us His robe of righteousness and true holiness, and we are in Christ seated in the heavenlies. Our walk down here should correspond with our position. Our old man has already been crucified with Christ, so we can put it off in the power of the Holy Spirit. As long as we're on earth, we'll live with our old nature; but we can keep it from controlling our lives.

The Spirit helps us live by a whole new set of orders. We began this list earlier (4:17) with instructions to walk no longer as the Gentiles walk. Now here are more instructions with practical details.

Be done with lying. When the old man died, the lying tongue and deceitful heart were also put on the cross. Instead, speak the truth (it would resolve most problems in the average church today).

Be angry about some things, like in the battle for truth. No Christian can be neutral. Hate that sin of lying and gossiping, but love the sinner. Malice (concealed anger) doesn't belong in a believer's life. When a wrong is corrected, don't harbor any animosity. Forgive and forget. Harboring hatred and sinful feelings gives the devil an advantage in our lives. We're told God is angry all day long with the wicked, but the minute they give up their wickedness and turn to Him, He saves them. That should be our attitude, too.

Stop stealing. It's in our hearts to take something that isn't ours. We're just naturally that way. Rather, work hard, not for your own gain, but so you can help others with the surplus.

What's in the well of the heart will come up through the bucket of the mouth. What's coming out of yours? If you're a believer, your speech should be for instructing and encouraging other believers. Don't even come close to the line.

The Holy Spirit is a person—a person who can be grieved. These offenses hurt Him. When a Christian lies, it grieves the Holy Spirit. When a Christian has dirty thoughts, it grieves the Holy Spirit. What happens when any person is grieved? It breaks the fellowship. The Holy Spirit can't work in your life when you are grieving Him, when your fellowship with Him is broken. Now, you can grieve Him, but praise God, you won't grieve Him away because your salvation is sealed in Him the moment you were saved. This guarantee will continue till the future day Jesus Christ redeems us.

The greatest difference between Christians today is that some Christians live with a grieved Holy Spirit and some live with a fully functioning, alive Holy Spirit. This is a precious, intimate part of your new life in Christ. What a gift! Don't live another day on your own, without Him.

This also grieves the Holy Spirit:

- Bitterness—an irritableness which produces harsh and hard opinions of others.
- Wrath and anger—outbursts of passion. Wrath is intense; anger is chronic.
- Clamor—the bold assertion of your supposed rights and grievances.
- Slander and malice—concealed hatred that comes out in words.

Be done with these things once and for all.

When you become a new person in Christ, a radical change takes place so there is no vacuum in your life. These things please the Lord:

- Being kind to each other.
- Being tender-hearted—an intense word full of deep and calming affection. Some believers are wonderful friends. When they see you, they put their arms around you.
- Forgiving each other means to give and take in stride to each other's faults. Do it as quickly and completely as God in Christ forgives you. We forgive each other because we want to please the Lord and because we, too, have been forgiven. We don't forgive in order to get forgiveness. We forgive on the basis of God's *grace* when He forgave us, because Christ died for us.

This is quite a wonderful way to live.

NEXT: What does it really mean to “look like Christ”?

7. Kindness may be something we overlook in the Christian life. How can you make a habit of being kind?

LESSON 9

WALK IN THE LIGHT



Begin with prayer



Read **Ephesians 4:30–5:20**



Listen at [TTB.org/Ephesians](https://www.TTB.org/Ephesians) to ***Ephesians 4:30–5:13*** and ***Ephesians 5:14-20***

What does it mean to look like Christ? We hear that phrase often, but what does it mean?

Ephesians 4 has given us a long list of ways to look like Jesus—all of them counter our own bent. When these things show up, it's proof the Spirit is working in us.

All these commands—like tell the truth, stop stealing, be careful what you say, love each other—apply to our Christian walk. Paul now calls the Ephesians, “dear children.” These Gentiles who once walked on a very low plane now are lifted up by the love of Christ. He proved this love when He made Himself as an offering and a sacrifice for us on the cross. Instead of just a public execution of a criminal, the cross becomes a brazen altar where the Lamb of God was “a sweet-smelling savor” offered as the burnt sacrifice that takes away the sin of the world. It identifies Christ with every sacrifice offered in the Old Testament by God’s command. They all pointed to Him.

Now, because of this sacrifice, the believer in Christ Jesus lives loved. We now live with God’s Spirit alive in us, loving us (the first fruit of His Spirit). When we ignore His prompts and live as we please, we grieve the Spirit and prevent Him from bringing more fruit from our lives. The Spirit won’t walk with us if we’re letting sin control our lives. The believer can’t live like

the world anymore. No more dabbling in sexual sins, no more craving other people's stuff or grasping at what you want, no more joking that crosses the line, no more foolish-talking or bragging about sin. If you are a believer and you get into sin, you're going to be bothered by it.

So when you find yourself caught up in sin, there's a way back to God! As quickly as you can, turn back to Him. Spell out each sin. If you have a biting tongue and are a gossip who hurts people, tell Him *that* is your sin. When you go to God in confession and name the specific sin, it restores fellowship with Him. Unload your heart to Him. He will forgive you. He will comfort you. He will purify your heart. Tell Him about your temptations that He may shield you. If you pour out all your weaknesses, needs, and troubles, there will be no lack of what to say to Him. You can talk out of the abundance of your heart. You are blessed to have this kind of conversation with God.

Someone who makes a regular practice of these sins has no portion in the kingdom of God. If a professing Christian regularly practices these sins, he tells the world he isn't a child of God. He knows what pleases God, and he willfully does otherwise. Sounds like a heart condition that God will judge (see 1 Corinthians 11:31-32). He'll take you to the woodshed for discipline. If God doesn't call you out, that's worse. It means you aren't His child. God doesn't spank the devil's children.

Before we were God's children, Paul reminds us who we were. We weren't just *in* darkness, we *were* darkness. "But now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (5:8). In other words, reflect Him who is the Light of the world. What characteristics always accompany light? Goodness—kindness; righteousness—moral integrity; and truth—sincerity and genuineness. *Test yourself on these*, Paul said. Make sure you're walking in the light and pleasing God. Don't mingle darkness with light. In fact, by the light of your life, call out the works of darkness. Light reveals what the darkness conceals. Darkness is not driven away by preaching at it; darkness is dissipated by the presence of light.

No one ever comes to Christ because they've been lectured on what they're doing is wrong. The unsaved person can't change his conduct. They need to be born again in order to change. You are to be attractive, bright light, and light will always affect darkness. If you are asleep, God will wake you up to "rise and shine"!

The days are short, Paul said. Our opportunities are limited. All the more reason to walk carefully, wisely in front of the world. Show them how to live for God. Don't be foolish, but understand where your priorities are—you

want to please the Lord. Your objective is to stay in the will of God like a train runs on the track. The way you walk shows the world that you belong to Jesus Christ.

Do you want to do this? Do you want to know how? There's only one way. You must be filled with God's Spirit. His power determines your victory day after day.

Paul compares what it's like to be filled with the Spirit with being drunk. *What?* Like today, alcohol abuse was the besetting sin of the day. Why would Paul say this?

When someone is drunk, their thinking, responses, speech, coordination—all are being controlled by the alcohol. Like that, the Holy Spirit should control the believer. A divine intoxication! This is the dynamic we need for living and accomplishing something for God. When we are filled by the Holy Spirit, it means He takes control! He continually renews our lives for strength and action. The Spirit-filled believer not only walks wisely, but their godly character is evidence of the fruit of God's Spirit in them (see Galatians 5:22-23).

Filling is the one thing we ask the Spirit to do. He does it all. The Holy Spirit regenerates every believer (John 1:12). He indwells us (Romans 8:9), He seals us (Ephesians 1:13), and baptizes us into the body of believers (1 Corinthians 12:13). These four ministries of the Holy Spirit take place the moment the believer puts his trust in Christ. He does it all for us. The only thing which is left up to us is to obey His command to be *filled* with the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 5:18). But we need His power to serve Christ.

To be filled with the Spirit is as simple as filling your gas tank. You start in the morning saying, "Lord, I want to walk today in the Spirit. I can't do it myself. I need Your power and help." We desperately need Him to fill us every day. You may have been filled with the Spirit yesterday or last week, but that's not enough for today.

This is why we can be used of God one day and feel so empty the next. A fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit will enable us to walk in the Spirit. We may stumble and fall at times; it's a process to learn how to walk with God.

One proof we are being filled with the Holy Spirit? It's joy—joy that overflows into "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (5:19). Formal, informal, personal, corporate expression of the worthiness of Jesus Christ—all to glorify God.

The apostle John says one reason he wrote his gospel was so “your joy may be full” (see John 15:11). That fullness of joy comes through our fellowship with the Father and with Jesus Christ (see 1 John 1:3-4). The joy we experience, personally and with each other, is proof the Spirit is there, too.

Another proof of the Spirit in control is an attitude of thankfulness. His life in us produces gratitude to Him for *all* things. Be filled with the Spirit so there will be love and joy and thanksgiving in your life. This is very practical and personal. People will look at you and see Christ at work.

If you feel like the old gas tank is empty, ask God to fill it up with His Spirit. We don't have anything worthwhile in ourselves, but when He fills us, we can live for Him. Do you get it? It's impossible to live for Jesus on our own, but He can and wants to live through us.

NEXT: Submission means *that*?

7. Think about someone you know who you think of as being an example of a Spirit-filled person. What do you see in them that leads you to that conclusion, and how can you follow their example?

The purpose of
the church is to grow up
and show the world
Jesus Christ—
this is the goal of the
unity of the faith.



THRU the BIBLE

LESSON 10

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SUBMIT?



Begin with prayer



Read **Ephesians 5:20–6:9**



Listen at [TTB.org/Ephesians](https://www.TTB.org/Ephesians) to *Ephesians 5:20-31*, *Ephesians 5:30–6:1*, *Ephesians 6:1-9*, and *Ephesians 6:5-9*

As Christ's body on earth, we are to imitate Him. People should watch us and understand a little more what God is like.

We represent Him as children of the light specifically in three sets of relationships. God begins with us in our home, as we relate with our spouse, then as we relate to our children. Then He moves with us into the world as either an employee or employer. In all three of these relationships one overarching principle guides us. We are all to submit to one another because of our respect and reverence for Jesus Christ.

In marriage, the husbands take the role of Christ and put their wives first. He is to provide for her and protect her. He should encourage her personal and spiritual growth.

This attitude frees the wife to submit to her husband because she knows she can trust him. She sets the tone of the home by being responsive and caring. Neither the husband or wife is "over" the other in authority, but each ministers to the other in their unique ways. They show respect, appreciation, and honor for each other. Honor is not just obedience to a stronger person, it's also an expression of love.

In the family, submission means children are urged to obey their parents, but parents are told not to exasperate their children with harsh, unfair treatment.

In households with slaves, slaves are to give sincere obedience to their masters, while masters treat their slaves with consideration and respect. The first century Roman empire had slaves in almost every home. But when the church began to teach that we are all equal before God, one body, one family, the slavery industry suffered. Now slaves had new motives for serving their master, and masters had a new perspective on their slaves as people and as family.

Those are the three relationships we'll unpack now.

Submission is a complex concept—surprisingly, it doesn't mean to obey. Unlike Romans 13 where we are called to submit to authority, here in Ephesians we are told all believers should be willing to respond and yield to each other out of love. There's no room for the hierarchy of power, but rather a sensitivity to others frees us from pride and helps us act in loving, caring ways.

Submission says we are to walk with one another in humility. Our walk should be in lowliness and meekness (4:1-2). Paul wasn't commanding people to act a certain way; his request came from God's grace. The Law has been tried and found wanting, now Paul pleads with new believers to act humbly with each other.

"Submitting to one another in the fear of God" (5:21). This means as we live as the church we're not going to say, "I will do as I please. If I want to do it this way, I will do it this way." A Spirit-filled believer doesn't say that. Instead we say, "Let's work it out together."

Wives are not told to obey their husbands (as so many misinterpret this as saying). Instead, it says, submit to him. It's a loving, mild word that means to respond to him as you do the Lord. We love the Lord because He first loved us. That says something about both the wife and her husband's action and attitude.

The husband doesn't have the authority to be the top sergeant in the home, barking and ordering his wife around. Instead, he is the primary lover, the one who pursues her. He's the provider, the breadwinner. He protects her. Her role is to listen and respond to him in sweet, loving submission. He is to be a picture of how Christ is the head of the church. He leads her in a love relationship.

This submission helps establish a sense of order. Husbands are subject to Christ. Wives are subject to their husbands. Children are to be subject to parents. Servants are to be subject to masters. This is to be a willing subjection to someone who loves you. If there is no love in it, the idea of submission isn't worth a snap.

The Christian home is to be a mirror of the relationship between Christ and the church. The husband is to love his wife because the marriage relationship makes the wife a part of his own body. On this basis the husband is the head of the wife. The husband is to love his wife because she is his own flesh. Like Jesus Christ knows the weakness of the church, He nourishes and cherishes her. Husbands do the same. Of course, this kind of love is only possible through the Spirit's power, filling you every day.

God never asks a woman to submit to any man who doesn't love her and love her like Jesus Christ loves the church. Not many marriage books talk about this, but this is how people look at you and see Jesus. Only a Christian couple can know what is real love in marriage, because it looks like the relationship between Christ and the church.

In the *past*, "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (5:25).

In the *present*, He sets her apart as special for Himself. He cleans her with the water of the Word of God that not only takes out the soiled spots, but it keeps her from getting future spots in her life. Today, He is washing up each believer, preparing us each for a great event in the future.

In the *future* He will present a glorious church to Himself, without a spot or wrinkle but holy and without blemish. She will be a holy and perfect, radiant bride with all sin removed (5:27).

It would be lovely to keep talking about what Jesus will do someday, but let's return to today's reality. The truth is it's nearly impossible for two sinners to live together in harmony. Sin has marred this glorious relationship—as it has marred everything else. But this relationship with your spouse can be yours if you want it to be the best.

Paul takes us back to the ordinary routine of Christian living in the home and brings the romantic into the realm of reality. Love each other better than you love yourself. Respond kindly to each other. It doesn't get any more practical than that!

As we discuss the relationships within the home, it seems far removed from military training. Yet, a soldier's training doesn't start in boot camp; it begins when he is a child in the home.

Being spiritually trained in the Lord also begins in the home as a child—not at church or in Sunday school, but in the home. Every child who doesn't get that first lesson is handicapped. Proper training means discipline. Early on, a child must learn that to *obey their parents in the Lord is the right thing to do*. It's actually more than that, it's just—because it's God's way.

The first lesson a soldier learns is obedience to authority. He must follow orders. This basic training is also learned in the home. After the soldier has learned to obey, then he can be promoted to an officer's rank where he gives commands. To know how to give orders depends largely on how the soldier learned to obey. This basic training is found in the home with the parent-child relationship, and then with the master-servant relationship. The victories of the Christian life are won in the home and in the place of business.

Two essential things to keep in mind in this discussion is first, that we're talking about a Christian home. A child's obedience is confined "in the Lord." Christian parents have the privilege of claiming their children for the Lord. This doesn't mean the child is a believer just because they have a Christian parent. But it's the parent's responsibility to claim the right to raise this child "in the Lord."

When a child is taught to "obey your parents in the Lord" (6:1), the word for "obey" is different from the word in Ephesians 5:22 that talks about how the wife is to submit. The wife occupies a place of equality with the husband, and submission is merely a question of headship. Here the child is to obey as a servant is to obey (see also 6:5).

To be disobedient to your parent is the last and lowest form of lawlessness to occur on this earth (see 2 Timothy 3:1-2). It characterizes the last days. Even the Ten Commandments says to honor father and mother, and as we grow older we are to continue to honor them by how we live our lives. Honoring your father and mother carries with it a promise of long life to those who keep it (see Exodus 20:12). That promise is repeated here.

The responsibility to nurture (instruct) your children's relationship and obedience is given to the parents. Under the Law, no such commandment was given to parents, but under grace, we have mutual responsibilities and

interactive duties. Parents are not to punish a child in a fit of rage. It's their duty to teach the child the Bible and model how to live God's truth in front of the child. As a believer, you are to live at home like a believer.

Don't provoke your kids to anger. They don't understand. Instead, take them by the hand and lead them in how they should go. Discipline them in a way that brings positive change; in a way that is "of the Lord" (Proverbs 13:24, 19:18, 22:15, 23:13-14, 29:15-17). When you do, they learn how to have a relationship with Jesus, and they will be ready to face the confusing and daunting philosophies of the world. Wouldn't it be wonderful if every Christian parent had the privilege of leading their child to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ?

We've looked at how submission begins in the home with the relationship between the husband and wife, then with the parent-child relationship. Now we move out of the home into the street, to the marketplace. It's a different situation here, for the love that holds a home together isn't necessarily found here; yet we as children of God who are filled with the Holy Spirit will be submissive one to another.

In the first century Roman Empire, half of the 120 million people were slaves. Christianity never attacked the evil of slavery. It preached a gospel which was more revolutionary than revolution has ever been. It reached down to the slave and lifted him up, assuring them of their freedom in Christ. The very nature of the gospel condemns slavery and eventually broke the shackles of slavery from the bodies of people and cut the fetters from their minds and souls. The gospel of Christ breaks down the middle wall of partition—which in our day is prejudice and discrimination of one race against another—and replaces it with real brotherly love.

In Paul's day, the community was sharply divided into master and slave. Yet, he begins this section by saying, submit yourselves "to one to another in the fear of God" (5:21). This applies equally to Sunday church as it does to Monday. Believers who play both roles—those who work and those who lead—both have a responsibility.

Servants (slaves) are to be obedient to their masters down here on earth. They are to serve as if they are doing the will of God from their soul. This obedience was to be with "fear and trembling" (6:5), meaning they treat their master with respect and dignity. They were to be whole-heartedly, singular of purpose—not duplicitous in their loyalty. Now they are slaves of Christ, and Christ has set them free.

Paul called himself a bondsman of Jesus Christ, meaning he had been set free but now he serves the Lord out of choice. He calls us also to yield our souls to the Lord. We should serve with good will—meaning our attitude reflects our love of God. When a child of God—whether a slave or a master, employer or employee—gets to the place where their goal is to please Christ, then the hurdles posed by the slave community are easily passed over.

The Lord lifts us to a high position, no matter what we do for a living. As a child of God we can say, “I serve the Lord Christ.” Even as an employer, before the Lord, you are just another man. Your Master is Jesus Christ. In His presence, you stand on the same footing as a servant. So, don’t take advantage of your position as employer. Don’t abuse your power. Don’t threaten. Before the Lord, you and your employee are brothers in Christ.

This is really where the rubber meets the road.

**NEXT: We’re in for the fight of our lives,
but learn how to battle God’s way.**

7. Imagine the life of a slave in first-century Rome. How could the gospel bring hope despite your situation?

LESSON 11

THE BATTLE OF OUR LIVES



Begin with prayer



Read **Ephesians 6:10-24**



Listen at TTB.org/Ephesians to ***Ephesians 6:10-12***, ***Ephesians 6:13-15***, and ***Ephesians 6:16-24***

The church, the body of Christ, is also the bride of Christ, as we have studied. Now let's explore how the church is also a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

The hard truth is, we have an enemy who wants to slaughter us.

The enemy is Satan and his cohorts, the demonic realm who rebelled against God and all things holy. He is a spiritual enemy, intent on destroying Jesus Christ, and he doesn't mind using us to do it. He knows his time is short and wants to take everyone he can with him to destruction.

The battle is before us. We face three tactical challenges.

1. We live in the world. We cannot overcome the world by fighting the world. Most of us have learned that by mistake (see 1 John 2:15 and 5:4-5). The only way we can overcome the world is by not loving the things of the world and putting our affection and trust in God.
2. Our second challenge is a battle of our own flesh. To get the victory here, we need to confess sin and put away the petty pride that says, "I don't do this and I don't do that." It's obvious you are being defeated

by the flesh when you judge your righteousness this way. Instead ask, am I a gossip? Do I lose my temper? Do I battle my own selfishness instead of loving and forgiving others? Don't let your own flesh defeat you. Consider your flesh dead and *yield* to God—that's the way to victory over the flesh (see Romans 6).

3. We battle the deceiver himself. The evil one can make his demons look like angels of light. In our day, cult leaders and false teachers look attractive and personable. But remember Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). He will use every possible way to deceive you. What can you do? Realize you *cannot* overcome him yourself. You are no match for the devil. You shouldn't even fight him. God will fight for you.

Instead of fighting, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might—that's the only place you'll get power. God tells you to put to use everything He's given you to battle the enemy; you need each one. You're up against far more than you can handle on your own. This fight is to the death—a fight to the finish against the devil and his demons. The fight is against the world forces of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in supernatural places. The warfare is spiritual, which is why you need spiritual power.

Where do you get this power? *Only* God's armor can withstand all the different kinds of weapons Satan uses strategically against you. The way to victory over the devil is to obey God's commands to put on His armor and "to stand" (v. 11).

Like in any battle, the commander arranges his minions by ranks. Satan does the same. We *wrestle* against his soldiers—as in, we engage in hand-to-hand combat with the spiritual forces of wickedness. Spiritual forces control this world and ensnare people in all kinds of darkness; evil forces work against the church, against the believer, against God, against Christ. We alone are no match for it. We are up against the unseen power that controls this dark world and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil.

Satan's powers are organized. We wrestle against "principalities," demons who have the oversight of nations (like generals). And "powers," the privates, the demons who want to possess human beings. We wrestle "the rulers of the darkness of this age," the demons who run Satan's worldly business. And against "spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places," the demons who have charge of religion (v. 12).

Satan's armies are well-organized, and his organization is manipulating this world this moment. The heartbreak, the heartache, the suffering, the tragedies of life are Satan's work in the background. He stirs up trouble everywhere he can find it brewing.

A spiritual war is being fought today, and we must be grounded in the Word of God. It's demonic power plain and simple that blinds people and carries them off into all kinds of cults and religions and "isms" with false beliefs. They fool people with spiritual sounding deception that robs all glory from the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan and his demonic hosts work hard to sink the Word of God into insignificance in churches and organizations.

This is why God tells us to armor up and stand firm. Our arsenal is all for defense. Nowhere is the believer told to attack and advance. But instead, we must *stand*.

The Bible speaks of believers as pilgrims who are to walk through the world. It describes us as witnesses who are to go to the ends of the earth. We are athletes who run with our eyes fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ. (See Hebrews 12:1-2.)

However, when the Bible speaks of us as fighters, it says we are to stand.

Paul speaks to us like an army sergeant. We are to stand ready in our protective armor. We shouldn't be outwitted by the enemy's methods, but instead, guard ourselves against his attacks in these specific ways:

- "Having girded your waist with truth" (v. 14). In the first century, a soldier's girdle about the loins held his whole uniform in place. If the girdle was lost, your toga would fly open, and your pants would fall down. Funny to us now, but it would be tragic in battle. A great battle in the past, we are told, was won by a clever general who told his men to cut the belts of their enemy while they were sleeping. The next morning the enemy troops were so busy holding up their trousers that they weren't able to shoot their guns and, therefore, they lost the battle. Gird your waist with truth of God's Word in the face of the enemy; truth holds everything together.
- "Put on the breastplate of righteousness" (v. 14). Whose righteousness? Our own is just filthy rags of self-righteousness. It'd be useless as a breastplate. Instead, we put on Christ again, and underneath it should beat a heart and a conscience right with God. Only when we stand in

the righteousness of Christ can we stand before God and people. When we stand clean, without sin, we are protected. How awful to try to carry on a spiritual battle when our hearts aren't right with God. We can never win that way.

- *Strap on your feet the gospel of peace* (v. 15) so you can face the enemy with sure-footedness. Shoes are necessary for standing. You need to anchor your feet on a good, solid foundation, and there's none better than Christ. You need His stability to face the spiritual darkness of this world.
- As a believer, your "shield of faith" (v. 16) is spiritual armor to fight against a spiritual enemy. The shield covers the rest of the armor. The shield is the size of a door; the soldier is fully protected behind it. In John 10, Jesus describes Himself as the door to salvation and the security door that protects the believer from the enemy without.
- Faith allows us to enter the door (John 10:9, 27-28) and places us securely in Jesus' care. Faith empowers us to grip our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and also stand behind that shield when all the fiery darts of the wicked one are flying overhead. Faith in Jesus is the only thing that will quench them. Behind the shield, the soldiers were protected while the enemy shot everything they had at them. When the enemy was out of ammunition, they would move in, certain of victory. That's how to stand against the fiery darts of the evil one.
- *Put on the helmet of salvation* (v. 17). Your helmet protects your head. When God appeals to a person's mind, their intellect, He doesn't ask for "faith to leap in the dark." God wants you to leap into the light. God has a solid foundation for you that is intellectually satisfying and right. (See Acts 24:25 and Romans 10:17.)

All this armor mentioned so far covers the front of the soldier. No protection is provided for retreat. A retreating Christian is open season for the enemy.

God provides for us two weapons for offense. The Word of God, called the "sword of the Spirit" (v. 17), and prayer.

The sword of the Spirit, God's Word, is quick and powerful and sharp (see Hebrews 4:12). It discerns our spirit. Jesus used the Word of God to meet Satan in His wilderness temptation and, someday, out of Jesus' mouth will come a sharp two-edged sword in the battle of Armageddon

(see Revelation 1:16 and 19:21). He gains the victory with that sword. You need that sharp sword coming out of your mouth today. Use God's Word as a powerful weapon in spiritual warfare.

Our second weapon of offense is prayer. Praying in the Holy Spirit is not turning in a grocery list to God. We recognize our enemy, and we lay hold of God for the spiritual resources we need to battle. We ask God's Spirit to fill us with all the fullness of God. We ask Him both for our general needs and for supplication—our specific needs. The only way to approach Him in prayer is through His Spirit.

Paul does this kind of praying and asks for the Ephesians to pray for him. He was a prisoner in Rome, and he suffered from a thorn in the flesh. He doesn't ask for these physical hardships to be removed, but only that he would be able to be brave and keep sharing the mystery of the gospel.

What is that mystery? It's the gospel—something not revealed in the Old Testament as it is so clearly laid out now. Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day. This is the gospel and the mystery Paul was preaching.

Paul himself experiences the enemy's assault at the very moment he was writing about spiritual warfare. But he didn't back down. He asks the Ephesians to pray for him, that he continues to boldly share the gospel. That's a great prayer for us today as well.

As Paul is wrapping up the letter, he tells them that their pastor, Tychicus, shepherd of the Ephesian church, not only is carrying this letter to them, but he would also fill them in on the details of Paul's imprisonment. He will comfort them. Paul had a lot of confidence in Tychicus, as well as many other faithful servants of Christ in the early church. Paul had a real love and concern for his brothers and sisters in Christ.

As he says goodbye, Paul writes a masterful double benediction that includes so many of the great words of the gospel: peace, love, faith, grace.

"Peace" (*shalom*) was how a Jew would greet you on the street. But this peace Paul used is a kind no one understands. This kind of peace follows the grace of God.

"Love" joined with "faith" is evidence of the Holy Spirit controlling your life. It's a sincere and active love that flows from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, “grace” is the key word of this letter. It opens the epistle (1:2), is the subject of the letter (2:7-8), and now grace wraps it up like a bow. And that is appropriate, because grace is the gift of God by which you are saved and sustained today.

Yes, we are in for the fight of our lives, but the Lord Jesus has already won the war.

7. How can grace sustain us, even in the midst of spiritual battles?

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a park-like setting.

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A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone. The phone screen displays a webpage with several articles, each with a 'Download' button. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

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