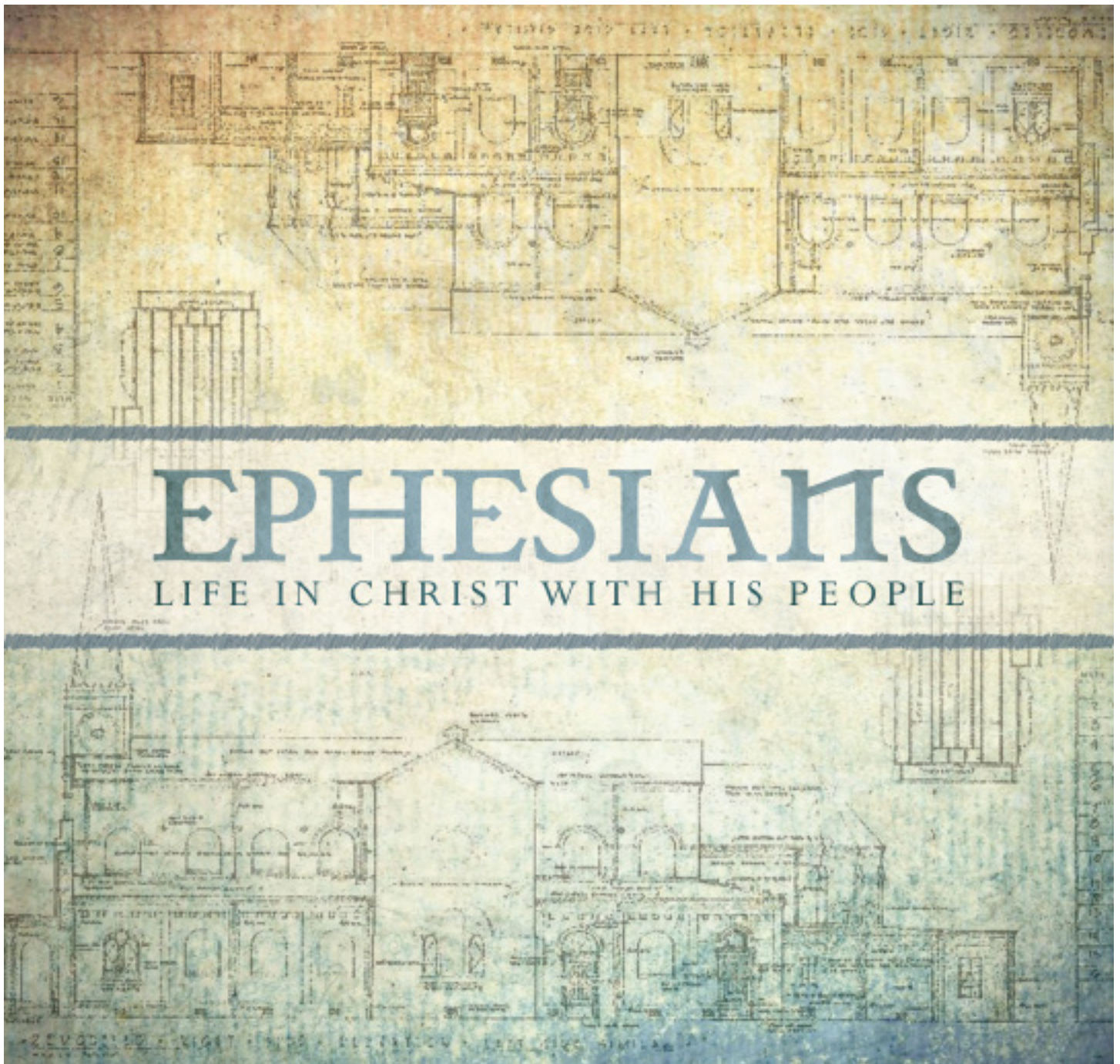




MeadowBrook Church | October–December 2020

lifeGROUP

Life together for the Kingdom of God





MeadowBrook CHURCH

MeadowBrook seeks to CONNECT people to Christ and His church, GROW them as disciples to be disciplers, and equip them to SERVE through missions, ministry, and worship, all to GLORIFY God.

Christ Centered | Community Driven | Kingdom Focused

EPHESIANS

LIFE IN CHRIST WITH HIS PEOPLE

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If you are interested in serving MeadowBrook Life Groups in either of these ways, please email hunter@mbchurch.com today!

Introduction to Ephesians

Ephesians 1:1-2 | October 04, 2020

Key Information	
Author	Paul
Date	AD 60-62
Setting of Composition	Paul's Roman Imprisonment
Destination	Ephesus (with the purpose of being circulated among other churches in Asia Minor)

“Ephesus was a wealthy port city in the Roman province of Asia. It was a center of learning and was positioned near several key land routes in western Asia Minor” (ESV Study Bible). The Gospel was likely first brought to this influential city through Aquila and Priscilla (MacArthur). Later, Paul firmly established the Ephesian church during his lengthy stay (Acts 19). After leaving, Paul left Timothy to pastor this church (MacArthur).

This church had a unique position in their culture. Ephesus was the home of the temple of Artemis (one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World), and they were proud of it. In Acts 19, the entire town was stirred into a frenzy at the idea that their cultural identity was being threatened by the gospel.

The Ephesians also had a fascination with all forms of the occult—astrology, sorcery, and incantations. When many in the church repented of their sins and ridded themselves of their spell books, the combined wealth lost would be close to \$6 million today.

Lastly, the Ephesians were constantly threatened by false teachers. In his last address to the elders at Ephesus, Paul warned of the looming threat of false teachers from within (Acts 20). Later, in his letter to Timothy, it becomes clear some of these false teachers have gained prominence and needed to be corrected or expelled from their midst.

We need a solid bedrock upon which we can plant ourselves firmly as we go about our daily lives.
Ephesians lays that foundation.

The Ephesians needed grounding. They needed, as we all do, a solid bedrock upon which we can plant ourselves firmly as we go about our daily lives. Paul's letter to the Ephesians provides this foundation.

Unlike many of Paul's letters, there is no clear occasion to the letter nor is there much of a personal touch. It is likely that this letter was written to the Ephesians with the purpose of being circulated among other churches in the area—most notably the seven churches addressed in the Book of Revelation (Köstenberger). Commenting on the background, Köstenberger states,

“Christians in Asia Minor would have required positive grounding in Paul's gospel because they were converts from a pagan past saturated with magic, astrology, and mystery religions. Their pagan past also necessitated moral guidance for living a life consistent with the lordship of Christ...The flood of Gentile converts into church [also] required Paul to address the Jew-Gentile tensions that customarily would come to the surface.”

Ephesians, for many reasons, still speaks powerfully to us today, or as Bryan Chapell puts it, “Paul pens themes so grand they can still take our breath away.”

Overview of Ephesians

Key Themes

The elevation of Christ and the uniting of all things in him according to God's sovereign will.

In Ephesians, Christ is repeatedly magnified as supreme. In Christ, all things in heaven and earth are united. Christ has been exalted by God through both his resurrection and ascension so that all things are put under his feet. He is the head of the church who brought about peace with God and others, breaking down the walls of hostility. Everything about the Christian life from beginning to end comes about from the will of God and centers around Jesus to the praise of his glorious grace. Paul makes this abundantly clear.

The church consists of the people of God saved by and united by Christ.

Ephesians gives significant instruction for the church. Paul identifies the entryway to the church as saving faith in Jesus Christ. Many may feign participation in the visible church, but none are truly in Christ's church unless they have been born again through faith. Paul gives the church heavenly identity that is not contingent on race, culture, or homeland but is established and maintained by Christ. He defines the purpose of the church as proclaiming the gospel as kingdom outposts through which the wisdom of God might be made known to the world. Paul describes the offices of the church, which exist to equip the whole body for their walk with Christ. He charges the church to be unified, holy, Spirit-filled worshippers of God. In Ephesians, God reveals, as he often does, the vital importance of the church to the fulfillment of his plans for this world.

Seated with Christ. Walking with Christ. Standing in Christ.

Believers in Jesus are first seated with Christ in his heavenly exaltation. Our position precedes our performance. We are saved by grace through faith. We do not earn it. We could never merit it. It is the free gift of God.

From this glorious position, we walk with Christ by the Spirit in the good works prepared beforehand for us by God the Father. We walk worthy of our calling by pursuing the unity and edification of the local church. We walk differently, transformed by the Spirit. We walk in love, we walk in light, and we walk in the wisdom of God revealed in Christ Jesus given to us by the Spirit. This walk with Christ transforms the way we live in our homes and perform our daily work.

Lastly, positioned with Christ as we walk with him, we stand in Christ against the schemes of the enemy. Our enemy is not flesh and blood, but the spiritual forces of darkness led by Satan. Attired in the armor of God, we take up our weapons of the Holy Scripture and prayer and stand empowered by the Spirit against Satan's forces that hold this world captive in darkness. We stand as children of the light.

The Greeting- Ephesians 1:1-2

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

Kernels of these three themes can be found even in Paul's greeting. Jesus is identified as both Messiah and Lord. Christ is the source of Paul's apostleship, the sainthood and faithfulness of the disciples in Ephesus, and the grace and peace that results from faithful living. It all flows from Jesus.

The church is highlighted by the language in the greeting as well. Paul is an apostle to the church. He has a specific role to play in the equipping and edifying of the church. The identity of the church is not based in anything other than the saintly status given to them in Christ.

Lastly, Paul's commendation of the Ephesians' faithfulness calls forth more faithful living rooted in their position with Christ and expressed in their walk and stance in Christ.

The life to which Paul is calling the Ephesians—and us—results in God's gracious favor and peace being revealed in our lives.

Outline of Ephesians

I. Ephesians 1:1-2: Greeting

II. Ephesians 1:3-3:13: Uniting All Things Under the Lordship of Christ

- a. Ephesians 1:3-14: God's eternal purpose set forth in Christ
- b. Ephesians 1:15-23: Prayer to Know Christ as Lord of All
- c. Ephesians 2:1-10: Saved by Grace through Faith for Good Works
- d. Ephesians 2:11-22: The Covenant People of God
- e. Ephesians 3:1-13: Outposts of the Kingdom of God

III. Ephesians 3:14-21: Prayer for the Strength to Live Out These Truths

IV. Ephesians 4:1-6:9: Walking with Christ

- a. Ephesians 4:1-16: Life in the Church
- b. Ephesians 4:17-5:21: Walking by the Spirit
 - i. *Walk in holiness. (4:17-24)*
 - ii. *Walk in love. (4:25-5:2)*
 - iii. *Walk in light. (5:3-14)*
 - iv. *Walk in wisdom. (5:15-21)*
- c. Ephesians 5:22-6:4: Walking with Christ at Home
 - i. *Wives (5:22-24, 33b)*
 - ii. *Husbands (5:25-33a)*
 - iii. *Children (6:1-3)*
 - iv. *Fathers (6:4)*
- d. Ephesians 6:5-9: Walking with Christ at Work
 - i. *Employees (6:5-8)*
 - ii. *Employers (6:9)*

V. Ephesians 6:10-20: Standing in Christ

- a. The True Enemy (6:10-12)
- b. The Armor of God (6:13-17)
- c. Praying in the Spirit (6:18-20)

VI. Ephesians 6:21-23: Closing

Blessed in Christ

Ephesians 1:3-14 | October 11, 2020

What comes to mind when you hear the word blessed? How do you define blessing?

Read Ephesians 1:3-14 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

One of the more popular motifs in stories tells of a chosen one prophesied to restore good in the world. People are drawn to this idea that there are forces larger than themselves bringing about some ancient plan for the good of mankind. The “chosen one” accomplishes the work and defeats the forces of evil for the benefit of those close to him as well as those in the world. We love these stories, and this is not by accident. These stories are just dim shadows of the greater story that began before the foundation of this world and has yet to be completed. They are shadows of Christ.

Paul opens his letter to the Ephesians in a lengthy praise to God for the work he has done and will do in the person of Jesus Christ. In what is only one sentence in Greek, Paul uses verses 3-14 to lift up Jesus as he reflects upon our unique and glorious position in Christ. In Christ, we are blessed by God the Father who is working in us by the Spirit to bring about his ultimate purpose: uniting all things in Christ under his Lordship. Paul’s introduction lays a glorious foundation from which he builds the rest of his letter.

“God’s election or predestination does not operate apart from or nullify man’s responsibility to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior.”
- John MacArthur

God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing according to his will to the praise of his glory.

“You are mine.” The thrust of this phrase can have varying meanings based on the context—either for great harm or great joy. When a child hears their father proudly say, “you are my son,” or when a bride hears from her groom who loves her say, “you are mine,” something glorious wells up within them. It settles one in the midst of a heartache, strengthens them for the task at hand, or calms any anxieties or self-doubts they might be feeling in that moment. In a loving context, the purposefulness behind the phrase “you are mine” brings overwhelming joy and security. Paul is reflecting upon this very idea as it relates to God and his people in this section of praise.

Before the foundation of the world, God chose us in Christ. It had nothing to do with us. We weren’t even alive yet! But God was moving toward us purposefully so that he might bless us with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus. Not some. Every. Election and predestination has been a source of division in the past, however Paul does not seem to see it that way.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Genesis 3

Matthew 11:25-30

Romans 8:28-9:29

Revelation 22:1-5

For Paul, the election of God is a joyous occasion that results in our greatest good and his greatest glory through the magnification of Jesus Christ. Throughout this section, we see that God works all things according to the purposes of his will to the praise of his glorious grace, which results in our greatest good. Paul saw this truth and was floored by it. In Christ, God says “you are mine.” What a glorious reality we know!

This begs the question: how did God purpose from eternity past to bless us? It centers around the phrase “in Christ.” Go ahead and count the times either the phrase “in Christ” or “in him” is written in these eleven verses... I count 10. God blesses us through our union with Christ. Through our surrendered faith in him, we are immersed into Christ and our lives are hidden in him. Jesus fulfilled God’s righteous standards and received all the blessings of the covenants of promise. Now, he shares those blessings freely with those who believe in him. All the promises of God find their yes in him. Paul highlights two ways God’s eternal purpose to bless us in Christ are realized:

1. We share in Christ’s holiness.

We, natural-born sinners unable to change our estate, have been set free from our sin and made holy, set apart, blameless, pure. On the cross, Jesus took our sin and offers to us his righteousness. We are declared holy in justification; we are being made more holy day by day through sanctification; and we will be perfectly holy in glorification. This holiness produces the peace of God in our lives.

2. We share in Christ’s sonship.

Not everyone is God’s son. Through creation, God is fatherly to all people. However, the special parental relationship he reserves for Christ and all those in him. It is only through faith in Jesus one receives the right to become children of God born according to his will (John 1:12-13). Now through our adoption we share in the rights and privileges Jesus knows as the Son of God (Bryan Chapell). We have unhindered access to God, our Father and the Sovereign of the universe. We share in Christ’s inheritance—eternal life in the kingdom of God.

Friendship between God’s Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

“Charles H. Spurgeon was once asked if he could reconcile these [God’s sovereignty in salvation and human responsibility] to each other. ‘I wouldn’t try,’ he replied; ‘I never reconcile friends.’

Friends?—yes, friends. This is the point that we have to grasp. In the Bible, divine sovereignty and human responsibility are not enemies. They are not uneasy neighbors; they are not in an endless state of cold war with each other. They are friends, and they work together.” — J.I. Packer

Pause and Discuss

How does our definition of “blessings” need to shift?

God’s election before the foundation of the world was meant to produce holiness in us. How does that change the way we approach the sin in our lives?

What does it mean for us to be children of God?

God's purpose is to reconcile all things in Christ.

The fall of Adam detailed in Genesis 1-3 is the greatest tragedy of all time. Through his willful rebellion, sin entered into God's good creation and brokenness resulted—brokenness with God, self, others, and creation. But God, in his love, has revealed to us his eternal purpose.

He set forth in the person of Jesus Christ his plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him. God is reconciling us to himself. He has redeemed us from the domain of darkness and forgiven us of our sins. His Spirit has sealed us, and he is working within us to bring this reconciliation to completion at the Day of our Lord. On that day, God's redeeming work will crescendo and we will acquire our inheritance to the praise of the glory of God.

Already, but Not Yet

"Because we are in union with Christ, who is in heaven, then we are in heaven with God. The apostle urges praise for God not so much because the Father is in heaven blessing us, as because we are there with him being blessed by him. As hell is total, conscious separation from the blessings of God, so the spiritual dimension of heaven is total and conscious union with God. In our union with Christ, we are already partakers of this spiritual reality, even though it is not fully realized until we are in our glorified state freed of our mortal bodies and the constraints of our temporal existence. This means we are already experiencing aspects of heaven, although we are not yet there. The benefits of this 'already and not yet,' Paul has already stated: grace and peace." — Bryan Chapell

Reflect

When you read Ephesians 1:13-14 you will see you are a part of the grand story of God's work of redemption and restoration. How does that change the way you approach the daily circumstances of your life?

Apply

Rest in God's blessing. Too often we forfeit peace by chasing after the fleeting blessings of this world. We have been given every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus. Nothing this world has to offer can top what we already have in Christ.

Be a reconciler. If Christ is uniting all things in him and we are in him and called to reflect him in our daily lives, we should seek to bring about God's restoration in our relationship to creation, ourselves, and others. Where in your life is God calling you to be a reconciler?

Live according to the will of God for his glory in every area of your life. If God works all things according to his will and for his glory, we should hold every aspect of our lives to that same standard. There is no sacred/secular divide. All of our lives are meant to be lived according to the will of God (the Word of God) and for his glory. Where does this need to change in your life?

RESPOND

There are a myriad of deep truths revealed in this passage—honestly, truths too deep to process in a single sitting. Take some time this week to meditate upon Ephesians 1:3-6 or 7-10. Write them down on a note card and carry it around with you. Try and memorize one or both passages. You'll be better for it!

Know Your Hope

Ephesians 1:15-23 | October 18, 2020

What gives you hope in this world?

Read Ephesians 1:15-23 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

The commendable life demonstrates faith in Christ and love toward all the saints. This life is empowered by Christian hope.

Transitioning out of his glorious reflection of the work of God toward us in Christ Jesus, Paul commends the Ephesians. He thanks God for their faith in Christ and their love toward all the saints. These two ideas form a general breakdown for the book of Ephesians. Chapters 1-3 focus on doctrines of Christ that must be understood and believed, while Chapters 4-6 reveal how this faith in Christ produces a love for all the saints in the church and for those in the home and workplace. These two elements of the life of a disciple—faith and love—are indispensable and firmly interlocked. However, in scripture these two are often mentioned with a third: hope.

Without either faith in Christ or love for the saints one is not living the Christian life. Both are necessary. Paul knows that for the Ephesians to persist in their faith and their love, they need to understand and be empowered by hope. His entire request to God hinges on this. What this teaches us is that our struggles in faith and love could possibly reveal an ignorance of the hope we have in Christ. We must know our hope.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

1 Peter 1:1-9

John 18:28-19:11

Romans 8:31-39

Matthew 5:13-16

The Ministry of Commendation

"By giving thanks for the good in others he knows to be imperfect, Paul indicates that, with his eyes of faith, he sees them robed in Christ's righteousness... It takes no special skill to see what's wrong with people and to criticize them. But to see people robed in a righteousness not their own and to encourage them on this basis to be more of what they should be powerfully communicates the heart of Christ.

The best leaders are those who develop the ability to see the good that is sprouting in people and water its growth with commendation, even when it is obvious to the leader (and perhaps to everyone else) that more growth is needed. We provide spiritual support by commending others for the good we can see despite the growth that they still need." — Bryan Chapell

Are you commending those entrusted to you to lead?

Husbands, are you commending your wives?

Parents, are you commending your children?

Employees, are you commending your employees?

Life Group Leaders, are you commending your people?

How do we come to understand our hope? What is our hope and how does it relate to our lives today? Paul answers all of these questions in his request.

1. We need God—Father, Son, and Spirit—to know our hope.

Christian hope is indeed that—Christian—meaning hope only comes from God and is deeply rooted in the Trinity. Our hope finds its source in God the Father and is revealed through his Son, Jesus Christ, to us by the Holy Spirit who enlightens our minds. As John Stott put it, “Christian faith and Christian life are both fundamentally Trinitarian. And the one is a response to the other. It is because the Father has approached us in blessing through the Son and by the Spirit that we approach him in prayer through the Son and by the Spirit also.”

What this means for us in terms of application is twofold: We need to approach God in prayer through our mediator, Jesus Christ, by his Spirit. This means that on the basis of Christ’s work on our behalf, we pray both boldly and humbly according to the inspired Word of God. God will never answer a prayer that contradicts his Word and is asked in pride to spend on one’s passions. As we pray we need to ask God for wisdom to understand life’s circumstances and to teach us more about his Scriptures—his revelation.

Then, we need the Father to answer our requests for wisdom and instruction so the Spirit would, in increasing measure, enlighten the eyes of our hearts so that we may grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ, the hope of the universe. The Good news is we can be confident in his promise that he will answer these requests affirmatively. As God grants these prayers, we will then have a deeper knowledge of our hope—a hope that is founded in God’s saving work toward us and is fortified by the surpassing might of Jesus Christ. This hope, and only this hope, will sustain both our faith and love during life’s many difficulties.

2. Our hope is founded in God’s saving work toward us.

In the previous section, Paul gave insight into the eternal purposes of God for disciples in Jesus Christ. His plan for salvation began in election. Then salvation was made available through Christ’s death and resurrection. It was graciously delivered to us when someone preached the gospel to us as the Spirit called us into the Kingdom of God. Finally, God’s plan for us will reach its culmination when we receive our glorious inheritance. (See Romans 8:28-30)

“For if there are two powers which man cannot control, but which hold him in bondage, they are death and evil. Man is mortal; he cannot escape death. Man is fallen; he cannot overcome evil. But God in Christ has conquered both, and therefore can rescue us from both.” - John Stott

Believing in the Trinity

1. We believe in one God, that is one Divine nature / essence / being, who equally and eternally exists in three distinct persons.
2. The Father is God.
3. The Son is God.
4. The Spirit is God.
5. The Father is not the Son.
6. The Son is not the Spirit.
7. The Spirit is not the Father.

This foundation of hope draws our attention away from us and our immediate situation. It refocuses on the eternal God who has sovereign purposes for those who love God and are called according to his will.

This is the hope to which we have been called: there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus and the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the eternal glory to be revealed to us. God has saved, is saving, and will save his people. Nothing in this world can overcome him.

3. Our hope is fortified by the power of Christ.

Paul then fortifies this hope with the reality that God sovereignly reigns over all the earth. No earthly power, no demonic power, no sickness, no dominion, no authority, nor death, nor our sin, nothing in all of creation, whether it be earthly or spiritual, surpasses the immeasurable greatness of the power of Christ. Jesus reigns supreme. Death could not defeat him. All the authorities of the world held captive by Satan and his antichrist cannot and will not overcome him. Jesus is the victor. He is our Mighty God.

The Church, the body of Christ, is filled by Christ, the only dispenser of genuine hope in this world.

Paul closes his thanksgiving with an incredible theological truth. The church is the body of Christ, in fact Christ fills the church with himself. The church of Jesus Christ is “fullness of him who fills all in all.” What does this mean? The church has been given the task to represent God to the world. We reveal Christ through our Spirit-empowered proclamation of the gospel. We reveal the peace and joy of living submitted to Christ in his kingdom. We reveal his love to the world in our ministry and service. We are the salt of the earth and the light that must not be hidden—not because of us, but because of Christ who fills us. This truth is glorious and will be further developed by Paul throughout his letter.

“We are dispensers of hope—offering the hope that God’s riches and power can make tomorrow brighter than today.”
Bryan Chapell

Apply

Look back and look forward. Lift your eyes from your circumstances and look back to the fact that in Christ, you are chosen. Because of Jesus’ death in your place and his resurrection, you are forgiven—if you have surrendered to Christ in faith and embraced him as Lord. Then look forward to the inheritance God has prepared for us that is greater than anything this world has to offer.

Be heavenly minded. There’s a popular saying out there that goes like this “Such and such person is too heavenly minded to do any earthly good.” The Bible teaches the exact opposite. We will not accomplish earthly good without being heavenly minded. We need to set our eyes on our inheritance—eternal life with Christ in Heaven. As John Stott says, “Paul does not regard it as presumptuous that we should think about our heavenly inheritance or even anticipate it with joy and gratitude. On the contrary, he prays that we may ‘know it,’ the ‘glory’ of it, indeed, ‘the riches of the glory of it.’”

Do not fret and worry over what the world concerns itself. God knows who will win the election. God knows when the pandemic will end. God is sovereign over all these things. Be faithful in our responsibilities, certainly, but do not fret. Sometimes God ordains suffering for our good. He did so with Joseph, Job, Paul, even Christ himself. In Christ, we have no reason to fret over the world’s events. We can rest in our confident hope that Christ reigns over all of them anyway!

Be a dispenser of hope. You have it. Others need it. Find ways to give them hope, namely by preaching the gospel.

Respond

In what areas do you need to know the hope to which you have been called?

You can diagnose the issue by discerning what causes you to fear and worry. List the areas and ask the Lord to help you know the hope you have in Christ Jesus.

The Gospel

Ephesians 2:1-10 | October 25, 2020

Other than the gospel, what's the best news you've ever received?

Read Ephesians 2:1-10 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

Cancer. Anytime that word is mentioned to you by a person in a white coat, it's a punch in the gut. It's bad news. This next sentence is worse news:

At birth, you are by nature children of wrath born dead in your sins.

When we are born, we are not born morally neutral. We are spiritually dead. By nature and of our own free will, we follow the course of this world that is heading to destruction. We follow the prince of the power of the air who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy. It's what we desire. We do not desire righteousness, rather we love the darkness. As Adam did in the garden, we do what we want to do and choose sin over God. The desires of our bodies and minds are set against God. We are not his child. We are not his friend. We are his enemies—children of wrath, disgustingly sinful before a holy God. It is bad news. It is the reality into which every human being is born. Rich, poor, male, female, black, white, Republican, Democrat—everyone. We do not seek after God. We do not please him. Indeed, we cannot.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Romans 3:10-25

Titus 3:4-8

Luke 4:18-19

James 2:14-26

Knowing Better Won't Change Your Kids

"You know better" This phrase is often uttered by parents when a child does something sinful. However, this passage reveals a vital and important point in parenting: Your kids are born sinners. So, if they have yet to come to Christ in faith, knowing better will accomplish nothing. If they are in faith, transformed living does not come through merely knowing better; it comes from a heart given to Jesus day in and day out. They—and we as parents—must live by faith. This has significant impact for us in our parenting:

Prayer and teaching the Word is absolutely essential for parenting. Only God can change hearts. So, ask him to as you are faithful to bring your children up in the instruction of the Word of God that changes hearts (see Rom. 10:13-17).

Parent the heart, not their behavior. A lot of good-mannered, well behaved kids with good grades are bound straight for hell. Our goal is inward transformation, not merely outward conformation. Point them to the gospel!

Expect failures, show grace, administer correction, and ask forgiveness. None of us are perfect. We should expect the flesh to be revealed most in the home by ourselves and our children. Seek to be gracious and consistent in discipline, and ask forgiveness from our children when we fail.

But God...

These two words together in this order form the greatest, most significant phrase in the entire English language. We were dead in sins, but God! Because of God's mercy and love, he moved toward us. We weren't seeking after him. He sought after us. First, God sought us out before the foundation of the world and by sending Jesus Christ to seek and save the lost. Then through the Spirit prompted prayers and gospel proclamations of those in the body of Christ, the Holy Spirit called us into the Kingdom of God. We deserved death, but God showed mercy. He did not administer the punishment we deserved, but poured out his wrath on his one and only Son, Jesus Christ. On the cross, he who knew no sin became sin for us in order that we might become the righteousness of God. In his burial, Christ bore the curse of death, yet God stopped the process of decay. The Holy One did not see corruption, rather, on the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead unto eternal life.

Eternal life is given to all who come to Jesus in faith—that is they see their sin in light of God's holiness, trust in Christ's sacrificial death on their behalf, believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, and follow after Christ as Lord. Through the salvation that comes through faith, God makes the dead alive and firmly seats them with Christ in the heavenly places. Their position is secure for it is with Christ.

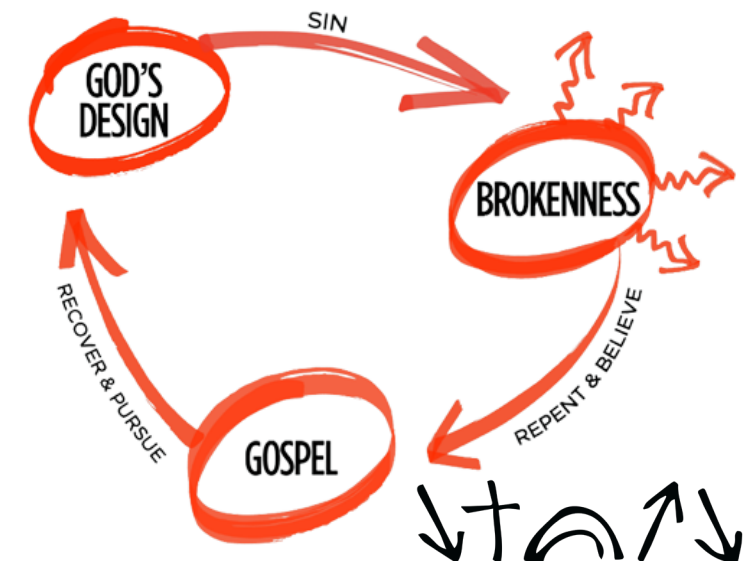
This is important, because the good news is not a call to "do better" or that "God has a great plan for your life," though God does have a great plan and he does produce righteous living. The good news is that you were once dead, but God makes you alive and exalts you to a glorious and righteous position through Christ Jesus. A dressed up dead person with great plans is still dead. We need to be made alive. God alone makes that happen in the lives of those who surrender in faith to Jesus.

Perhaps the second-best phrase in this passage is "in the coming ages." God has only just begun to show us his goodness. No matter what this life holds, disciples of Jesus Christ rejoice with firm hope that our best days are ahead of us. We've only just begun to see the immeasurable riches of God's grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. The best is yet to come.

By grace you are saved through faith.

Our salvation is not based on us. It is the gift of God. We are saved as a result of God's unmerited favor being shown toward us in Christ Jesus. Our faith in response to God's call on our lives, not our works, brings us into this saving relationship. We are saved by God's grace, which raises the question: what are we saved from?

We are saved from God's wrath. Sin alienated us from God and made us his enemies, deserving of his wrath. But through Jesus we are saved from eternal punishment in hell because Christ reconciled us to God, making peace and restoring that which was broken by sin.



Who needs to hear this message?

Write down two names and begin praying for their salvation and an opportunity to share the gospel with them. Then, take the opportunity when it presents itself!

We are saved from sin. When we think of our salvation from sin, we might be tempted to merely view our salvation as the removal of sin's punishment. That's certainly great news. But it does not stop there. We are saved from sin itself—its punishment (justification), power over us (sanctification), and presence (glorification).

Think about it: Sin robbed us of our rich standing before God set forth at Creation. Sin enslaves us to actions, attitudes, and lifestyles that destroy us. Sin blinds us, bringing great harm and aimlessness to our lives. Sin oppresses us, relentlessly tormenting us with destruction, guilt, and shame.

Sin IS your biggest problem. The gospel is the message of how Jesus saves his people from sin—the very thing against which the wrath of God is being revealed. (cf. Rom. 1:18) Now, grace sets us free from that which was killing us—what our own flesh and mind desired!

You no longer have to walk in sin. We struggle against sin, certainly. But we are no longer in the same position we were in as described by vv. 1-3. The grace of the Lord has set you free from your sin! Grace brings you near to the Lord. Grace removes the shackles of sin. Grace opens your eyes that you might see the truth and your purpose in this life. Grace liberates you from the oppressive voices of guilt and shame. God, by his glorious grace, saved us from sin.

We are saved from death. The resurrection of Christ and the spiritual life given to us in Christ points to a future, glorious reality. We, too, will be raised from the dead in glorified bodies that will inhabit the new Earth in all of its glory. There, we will reign forever in the presence of, and under the authority of, our King, Jesus. Whereas the entire world is held captive by fear of death and dying, disciples of Jesus Christ have overcome death and are set free from any fear of death. To paraphrase John MacArthur, the worst thing that can happen to us is the best thing that can happen to us.

Now, as God's workmanship, we walk transformed.

When we hear and believe the truth about our sin and the gospel, turning from following the course of this world to following Christ who died that we may live, we become the workmanship of God. He fills us with his Spirit of wisdom, who empowers us to walk as those who have been transformed by Christ.

How are we to walk as those transformed? The second half of Ephesians lays out the roadmap. We'll discuss it further in the coming weeks, but here is the overview:

- ***Walk worthy of our calling in the church. (Eph. 4:1-16)***
- ***Walk in holiness. (Eph. 4:17-24)***
- ***Walk in love. (Eph. 4:25-5:2)***
- ***Walk in light. (Eph. 5:3-5:14)***
- ***Walk in the wisdom of the Spirit in the church, home, and workplace. (Eph. 5:15-6:9)***

When we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we do not merely relegate faith to the past, but we live by faith each day. As we daily die to self and follow Christ, it is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us. His character becomes manifest more and more in our lives. He increases. We decrease. The concept of someone being a "believer" or a "Christian," yet still cherishing their sin and walking in it is foreign to the Scriptures—no matter how genuine their conversion seemed at the time. Such people are still dead in their sins and need to repent and believe in the gospel.

The Most Important Question You will Ever Be Asked

Have you truly surrendered to Jesus in faith? Has he transformed your life? Salvation is offered to you today. Will you repent and believe in the gospel, embracing Jesus as your Lord?

The Gospel from a Corporate Perspective

Ephesians 2:11-22 | November 01, 2020

What does the word family mean to you? If someone is family, how does that change the way you relate to them?

Read Ephesians 2:11-22 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

The gospel has implications that are both individual and corporate. We are saved as individuals, meaning each of us must approach God through surrendered faith in Jesus Christ, who forgives us our sin and ushers us into a relationship. No one can make that decision for us. However, we are not saved for a private relationship with God. We are saved to be a people, God's people, who are unified by our faith and dependent upon one another. Prejudiced living and Lone Ranger Christianity are strangers to the will of God for your life.

Once you did not belong to a people, cut off from God and the community of his people.

At birth, we were separated from God and cut off from his people. Inwardly, we were broken and unholy. Corporately, we found no belonging, no consolation of being included in the community of God's people. We were isolated, having no hope and without God in this world. That which was once whole at Creation had been broken. The effects of this sin-caused brokenness we are born into reverberates throughout every area of our lives.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Genesis 3:1-19

James 4:1-6

Matthew 12:46-50

Romans 12:3-8

The Fall

In the Garden of Eden, there was harmony. God ruled over man who walked with him in intimate fellowship. No strife existed between husband and wife as they ruled over God's creation in their distinct complementary roles as husband and wife. That all changed one tragic day. The order God had set in place was disregarded and cast aside. The serpent usurped the order God set in place by approaching Eve rather than Adam. It was Adam who had been given responsibility to lead his wife as they both stewarded God's Creation. In his failure of leadership, Adam allowed the serpent to deceive Eve and he willingly followed after her in disobedience to God's holy command. He chose the fleeting pleasures of sin over the superior pleasure of knowing and obeying God.

God's order in creation was flipped on its head. The results horrific. Shame entered their hearts, leading them to produce pathetic coverings for themselves. The harmony once experienced was lost. Strife entered into this world and broke every relationship we have—God, self, others, and creation. Peace was forfeited, and mankind was cast out of the Garden, cut off from fellowship with God.

Pastor Randy traced this brokenness in our lives when he said:

When people have strong feelings and desires for sensual pleasures and sinfulness for which there is no real satisfaction, they will fight and quarrel with their spouse, family, co-workers, and neighbors. They even quarrel and fight in public and on social media.

No one will satisfy sexual lusts, materialism, power, popularity, and a whole lot more that the world offers. Such flesh cravings are insatiable. That is partly why, worldly living is not good living, not for us or the people around us. Unless we humble ourselves, surrender those desires to Christ, and resist the devil, we will continuously quarrel within our spirits and with other people.

Not only does such a person fight a battle within himself and quarrel and fight with others, but God also resists him. God is his enemy. If you have given yourself to the world—its lust, power, possession, and so forth—God resists you; he stands up against you and opposes you. You will not experience his grace; thus, your life for today and eternity will be without hope.

However, Jesus is offering hope... In spite of mankind's sinfulness, insatiable cravings for sin, hatred, quarreling, and arguing, and him being an enemy of God, God extends grace beyond such sinfulness to the person who humbles himself.

Your sin may be great, but God's grace is greater.

Sermon: James 4:1-6, Part Two: "Why So Much Conflict Exists," August 02, 2020

Jesus is our peace. He makes us into the people of God, cleansed by his blood and indwelt with his Spirit.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus makes peace. First, he makes peace between mankind and God by restoring fellowship through the blood of his sacrifice. Second, Jesus makes us alive as his new creations (Eph. 2:1-10). Thirdly, he makes peace with others. Lastly, he will restore peace to his creation at his return.

"Every person who trusts in Christ alone for salvation, Jew or Gentile, is brought into spiritual union and intimacy with God." — John MacArthur

Today, we live by faith in the gospel. By its power, every hostility between mankind is broken down in the church of Jesus Christ. The cross kills it. Christ's blood was shed equally for all of us, and the same Spirit fills us all. In Christ, we are brought near. What does this mean for us today in the church? It means that...

- *Race does not divide us.* Racism, partiality, and bias are repugnant to God.
- *Income does not divide us.* No amount of money in the world makes you right before God or more pleasing in his sight.
- *Though the sexes have distinct roles given by God, males are not favored over females.* Misogyny is an affront to the gospel. Male and Female are equal in value in the eyes of God, each created in the image of God, and are co-heirs of the same gospel inheritance.
- *Nationality does not divide us.* God's church consists of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. America is not favored over other countries in God's kingdom.
- *Religious background does not divide us.* Whether you grew up in the church or not, whether you are a Jew or Gentile, we are all born sinners and just as much in need of God's grace.

Christ tears down any human identity in which we might find pride, and he replaces it with his identity. He takes that which was two and forms one man.

Pause and Discuss

What causes divisions among you? How does this passage change the way we respond?

Now, in Christ, we are fellow citizens in the Kingdom of God and members of his household, the church.

Christ does not merely save us as individuals, he makes us into a glorious people who congregate in local churches. Understanding the glorious nature of the church requires one to reflect upon how God defines its nature. How does Paul define the identity of God's church in this section?

The church consists of kingdom citizens.

Church membership, baptism, Life Group involvement, taking communion, singing, church attendance all mean nothing if you are not a citizen of the kingdom of God. If you have not surrendered your life to Jesus through faith, your participation at MeadowBrook will mean nothing in the day of judgment. Therefore, local churches function as embassies in foreign territory of the heavenly Kingdom to which we belong.

The church is a family. We operate on the basis of relationships. This means we seek to build deep friendships with those at MeadowBrook. We don't vie for power as the world does, trampling over others. Our needs and desires come second. We do not abandon ship when our needs "are not being met." We persist in the fellowship of the family of God, not on the basis of what we can get out of it, but on how we can best love and serve the other members of our family.

The church is built upon the Word of God. The foundation of the church is the Word of God revealed both in Jesus Christ as the Word and the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Scriptures of both the Old and New Testament. We do not look to culture or worldly ideologies. Scripture is sufficient. We look to the Bible. We preach the Bible. We sing the Bible. We teach the Bible. We pray the Bible. Nothing can replace the Bible.

The church is held together by Christ. As the cornerstone, Jesus holds us together, not us. We look to him for guidance, support, and sustenance. We are all replaceable. We have an important role to play, to be sure. However, we must always humble ourselves and recognize we do not hold God's kingdom work at MeadowBrook together. He does that.

The church is a dwelling place for the Spirit. This is a profound truth. The Spirit indwells us as individuals, yet also he indwells the church. Each individual has the Spirit living within them. The Spirit then manifests himself in various ways through each church member so that the fullness of the Spirit's ministry is not felt or seen on an individual level but on a corporate one.

In community with other Spirit-indwelt persons, believers better reflect God's glory and learn more about God and the gospel's impact on the life of faith than they would as individuals. Additionally, the loving care of God is best seen through church members using their gifts, talents, and abilities to love, serve, and build up the church. Simply put, God created us to be in relationship with him in the context of the godly community in the local church. We must not fall into the temptation to live isolated from the church. We miss God's blessings toward us when we disconnect ourselves from it.

The Abolishment of the Law

"Paul's primary reference here seems to be to the ceremonial law... that is, to circumcision (the main physical distinction between Jews and Gentiles), the material sacrifices, the dietary regulations, and the rules about ritual 'cleanness' and 'uncleanness' which governed social relationships... [These ordinances] erected a serious barrier between Jews and Gentiles, but Jesus set this whole ceremonial aside. And he did it in his flesh (surely a reference to his physical death) because in the cross he fulfilled all the types and shadows of the Old Testament ceremonial system." John Stott

Pause and Discuss

How can our Life Group grow in community with each other and better contribute to the community of MeadowBrook as a whole?

Stewarding God's Grace

Ephesians 3:1-13 | November 08, 2020

Has someone ever entrusted something valuable for you to take care of and use? What was that experience like?

Read Ephesians 1:15-23 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

Paul transitions into what will be his prayer for the Ephesian church in Chapter Three. However, inspired by the Spirit, Paul's thought changes. He quickly enters into an aside where he discusses his stewardship of God's grace in his unique position as an apostle to the Gentiles (MacArthur, Stott, Hughes). Through his description, we see a life that stewards the grace of God well. Paul reemphasizes the glorious news of the gospel, which he refers to as the "mystery of Christ" (3:2-7), and the centrality of the church in God's eternal purposes on the cosmic stage (3:8-13). If we believe these truths and follow Paul's example, we will live lives of faith that steward God's grace well, multiplying his ministry toward us to others. We will live gloriously.

At this point, it may be helpful to remind ourselves of a couple key truths:

- All disciples of Jesus Christ are ministers. Ministry is not something "the staff" does. We all participate in the up-building of the church.
- There is no secular/sacred divide. The entirety of our life belongs to and should be submitted to the Lordship of Christ. We are to manage the grace of God well in every area of life.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Philippians 2:1-11

Revelation 21:1-8

2 Peter 1:1-21

The Mystery of God: ESV Study Bible Note

"The mystery does not refer to something mysterious or to a secret ritual. Rather, Paul is speaking of God's unfolding plan for the world and, above all, his plan of redemption through the Messiah (cf. 2:2; 4:3; Eph. 1:9; 3:3-4, 9; 5:32; 6:19). Although elements of God's design were already known through the prophets, key aspects of it were hidden for ages and generations and thus were a mystery, which could only be known and understood when they were revealed by God. This language occurs often in the book of Daniel. After God reveals to Daniel that Nebuchadnezzar's dream foretold four successive kingdoms culminating in the kingdom of God, Daniel tells the king, "there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days" (Dan. 2:28). At the heart of the mystery that God is now revealing through Paul is the amazing hallmark of the new covenant, Christ in you, the hope of glory. God himself, in the person of Christ, will be directly and personally present in the lives of his people, and his presence assures them of a future life with him when he returns. Moreover, Christ does not reside only in believing Jews but also in believing Gentiles, so that there is one unified people of God."

Steward the grace of God well.

1. Faithfully proclaim his gospel.

Paul had the unique position of being an apostle who received the revelation of God from the Holy Spirit. Through this inspiration of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with his own personality, Paul penned the words of God. Ephesians is both authored by Paul and by God himself. Paul was faithful with the gospel revelation he received. He did not keep it to himself, rather he openly and repeatedly shared it with others.

"Although Paul had been a prisoner for about two years in Caesarea and two years in Rome, he did not consider himself to be a prisoner of any government or person. Rather, he knew he was under Christ's control, and every aspect of his life was in the Lord's hands."
John MacArthur

Today, the Canon of God's Word is complete. It is inspired by God, infallible, without any mixture of error, and sufficient for all things pertaining to godly living. To follow Paul's example, we are to respond to the revelation of God as it has been delivered to us through the Holy Scriptures in the same way Paul responded—we are to share it with others. In the church, in the home, in the workplace, and in our neighborhoods, we must invite others to become "partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." We must tell others the good news of salvation.

2. Live others-focused.

The grace of God given to Paul was not given to him for him. It was given to him for others. God poured out his grace and mercy upon Paul that he might reveal that same grace and mercy to others.

We too must move past a view of Christianity that looks to have our own needs met, and put others before ourselves. It's not about you. As God did with Abraham, he blesses us with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus that we might be a blessing to others.

3. Minister according to the gift of God's grace by his power.

Paul did not minister according to the way Barnabas or Peter ministered. Paul ministered according to how God equipped him to serve. He did so not with his own strength but with the power that God worked within him.

We should not try and fit the mold of another person's ministry. We are not them! God uniquely created you and blessed you with a unique combination of spiritual gifts, talents, and desires. We should discern how God's grace has been given to us and minister accordingly in the strength of God, not our own. Use these four questions to help get you thinking in the right track and then read Romans 12:3-8 to discern how God wants to bless others through you.

What things do you feel most at home doing? _____

What strengths have other people noticed in you? _____

What do you enjoy doing? _____

What needs are you aware of at MeadowBrook? _____

Prepare to discuss these on November 22nd

4. Embrace genuine humility.

"In light of God's perfect righteousness, Paul's assessment of himself was not false humility but simple honesty. He knew his unworthiness."—John MacArthur

If we are to steward God's grace well, we must humbly see ourselves in the light of the superior glory of Christ. This reminds us that we are in desperate need of God's grace just as much as the next guy.

5. Elevate the riches of Christ.

Our message is simple: Jesus is better. We are not simply proclaiming forgiveness from sins deep down we desire to continue. We proclaim that Jesus is worth more than all the pleasures of this world put together—and it's not even close.

6. Make known God's big picture plan for the restoration of all things.

The grand story of the gospel is not done yet, the last chapter still not written (in history that is). The best is yet to come. As John Stott puts it,

"He who created the universe has now begun a new creation and will one day finish it. Indeed, the 'mystery' includes the great promise that finally God will unite all things in and under Christ. So in verse 9, Paul brings creation and redemption together in his mind. The God who created all things in the beginning will recreate all things in the end."

We need to make known this hope. Heaven is not some boring reality where we float on clouds playing harps as culture would have us believe. The new heavens and the new earth will be unlike anything we've ever experienced. Our joy will be ever increasing, yet ever full. The colors will be richer. The laughs deeper. The worship magnificent. The scenery breathtaking. We will not even begin to contain our joy. Our lost friends and family need to hear this!

7. Empower the church as it makes the wisdom of God known on a cosmic level.

The Manifold Wisdom of God : John Piper

"This universe is finally about the many colored wisdom of God. History exists to display the infinitely varied and complex and intricate wisdom of God. Missions is the means that God uses to gather the church. And that gathering from all the nations is the focus of this wisdom displaying painting. You see that in the words "through the church," "so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known"... The painting, and the drama of history and redemption that it portrays, from creation to consummation, is meant to show angels — the good ones and the evil ones — the greatness of God's wisdom."

Paul's purpose in his ministry was that the church would be built up so that the angels would glory at the wisdom of God on display (see John Piper's note). The glorious reality of the church is that not only is it the body of Christ who acts as light and salt in this world, the church is the stage that displays to angels, either to their joy or anguish, the manifold (multi-faceted) wisdom of God. This reality should stir within us deep love and commitment to "the local manifestation of the universal Church" we attend (R. Kent Hughes), which for us is MeadowBrook.

In our ministry, then, we should seek to empower and equip the body of Christ at MeadowBrook. We can (and ought to) serve in many other capacities in the community, but MeadowBrook should hold a special place in our hearts. The rulers and authorities in the heavenly places are looking upon what God is doing in and through MeadowBrook! No other organization can make the same claim.

8. Be grounded in the sovereignty of God, strengthened by prayer, and sustained by hope.

Paul knows his ministry—and all ministry carried out in Christ—fits into a larger picture according to the eternal purposes of God realized in Christ Jesus. He was grounded in the truth that even in his imprisonment, God was sovereign. God did not lose control. He was working above and unbeknown to the forces of evil working against Paul. Paul knew that God would uphold him and strengthen him in his day of trial—even if it resulted in his death. In this faith, Paul found strength through prayer. He boldly drew near to God, his loving Father, through Christ and rested in his plan. The hope this produced in him sustained him with joy to the point where he, a prisoner, was encouraging the Ephesians. Paul was certain his imprisonment was resulting in glory for them, himself, and God.

How can you better steward God's grace?

Praying the Bible

Ephesians 3:14-21 | November 15, 2020

Using Scripture to guide your prayers is a valuable strategy to help you engage deeper in prayer. Some of us know we ought to pray, but honestly, find our desire lacking most days. Donald Whitney identifies this problem in his book *Praying the Bible* when he says:

“The problem is not that we pray about the same old things; rather, it’s that we say the same old things about the same old things. It seems that virtually everyone begins to pray this way sooner or later, and it’s boring. And when prayer is boring, we don’t feel like praying. When we don’t feel like praying, it’s hard to pray, at least in any sort of focused, heartfelt way... [When you pray the Bible] you never again say the same old things about the same old things. What you are doing is taking words that originated in the heart and mind of God and circulating them through your heart and mind back to God. By this means his words become the wings of your prayers.”

The psalms are perfect for this kind of praying for they are songs of prayer and praise toward God that cover the entire range of human experience and emotion. Other prayers, like our passage today, are great as well. Honestly, any passage of Scripture can be responded to by turning it into a prayer to God either for you or others. Let’s look briefly at Paul’s prayer, and then put this into practice.

Understanding Paul’s prayer for the church at Ephesus.

Paul begins by connecting his prayer to the gospel realities discussed in Chapters 1-3. He addresses the Father who orders not only the family of God (the church), but also every family on earth. His posture before God is humble. He is bowing before him and asking him to act not on his own merit but according to the riches of his glory. Neither the Ephesians nor Paul could merit the requests Paul is about to make. What is Paul asking God to do?

1. Strengthen the souls of the Ephesians with power through the Spirit.

Paul knew their need of Heavenly strength. The issues facing the church at Ephesus did not originate in flesh and blood, but in the spiritual world. To overcome these opposing spiritual forces, they needed the might of the Holy Spirit in their innermost being. By his strength, they would be empowered to live out the implications of the gospel in their day-to-day lives, rooted and grounded in the love of God.

2. Give comprehension of the love of God together with all the saints.

Paul asks God explicitly to increase their faith in the incomprehensible love of Christ, not merely as individuals, but together with all the saints. The contents of this request are truly astounding! Just think: it teaches us that God’s love is so vast that we cannot even understand it without his help—and even then we only know a fraction. We can be confident God will come to our aid in this manner. This is key, for the love of Christ is the foundation of all other loves. The more we comprehend God’s love for us in Christ, the more we are able to express and live out our love for God and for others—resulting in joy and harmony in our lives.

3. Fill them with all of His fullness.

This is the end result: we are increasingly filled with the fullness of God. The Spirit strengthens our inward being so we might grow in our comprehension of the love of God. His love continually fills us with his nature and character so it can be revealed to others. Before Paul commands the Ephesians to “be filled with the Spirit,” he is asking God to make that happen in their lives. Living in obedience to Ephesians 4-6 is impossible without God answering this prayer.

Pray the Bible Ephesians 3:14-21

1. Personally, respond in prayer.

Take a few moments to write out a personal prayer in response to this passage using the passage as your guide.

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:14-21 ESV)

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

2. Pray for MeadowBrook and your Life Group.

Now, let the Life Group leader pray this passage with the members of MeadowBrook and your Life Group in mind. I'd encourage you to take the time to say everyone in your group's name at the beginning.

3. Pray for your family.

Then, partner up as couples and take a moment to pray this passage over each other and your children. If you are unmarried or are not in a COED group, partner up and pray specifically for each other and/or their families. If you are a student, take this time to pray for your parents or guardians and your siblings.

4. Pray for the lost.

Finally, pray for those you know who do not know Jesus. Your class might have a running list you are regularly praying for. Great! If not, now might be a good time to make one. Pray this passage over them specifically applying it to their situation. They are not like the Ephesians. They are not rooted and grounded in love. The Spirit is not within them. They have no comprehension of God's love for them. They need to repent and believe the good news.

Have a representative in the class pray that God would open these people's eyes to the truth of the gospel taught in Chapters 1-3, so they might come to know the glory of Christ's love in their lives for the first time.

Homework: This week pick three Psalms and one passage from your daily Bible Reading to pray through in this manner.

Christian Unity

Ephesians 4:1-16 | November 22, 2020

Is there one particular aspect of Southern food that you see as unworthy of its hype? What is it?

Mark Richt currently sits as the second most winningest coach in Georgia football history and has the highest winning percentage of any coach who coached more than 29 games. Despite this, Coach Richt was let go in 2015. He could never win the big one (a plague many Georgia athletic teams experience). Though he was winning in the regular season, he was not coaching his team in a way that was worthy of his calling as the football coach of a SEC powerhouse.

In our section of study in Ephesians, Paul's purpose is clear: *walk worthy of our calling by embracing a posture of meekness, maturing in the faith, and building up the church*. Since this calling we have as Christians is much more significant, much more glorious, than to win a National Championship, surely we should want to ensure we are walking in a way worthy of our calling.

Of course, we are unable to accomplish this in our own strength. We need God to strengthen us by his Spirit as we look in faith to His Son, Christ Jesus. Through this walk of faith, the Spirit fortifies the church with these four truths:

1. What unites us far outweighs what divides us. (v. 4-6)

a. We have the same identity. (Chapell)

“Just as an individual is made up of body and spirit, the apostle reminds the people that the church, despite its many different members, is one body indwelt by one Spirit.” – Bryan Chapell

Those truly in Christ have been born again of the Spirit. We are no longer identified by our old ways. They are gone; the new has come. There is no Jew or Greek, male or female, black or white, Republican or Democrat, rich or poor. All of us have been crucified with Christ so that it is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us. He identifies us. We all share in his new identity equally and fully.

b. We are heading to the same destination.

In Christ, we're all walking the narrow road as sojourners and strangers slowly yet surely toward our heavenly home. There may be times where someone might step off the path or be walking slower than we think they ought to, but the Spirit is working in each disciple to complete the work he began in them. He will bring them home. In Heaven, all the silly things and even the important things that divide us will vanish as we bask in the glory of our King in our magnificent homeland.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

1 Corinthians 12:1-13:13;

John 13:34-35;

Revelation 7:9-17;

Psalms 133

c. We make the same confession. (Chapell)

If you are a Christian, you have confessed Jesus to be Lord over your life. You have demonstrated faith in the gospel message that we are unholy people separated from a holy God. But God, being rich in mercy and full of love sent his one and only Son, Jesus, the Christ...

- Who was conceived by the Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
- Who lived perfectly on our behalf.
- Who suffered and died under Pontius Pilate as the substitute for our sins.
- Who was buried.
- Who was raised bodily from the grave victorious over sin and death.
- Who ascended to his throne.
- Who will return one day to judge the living and the dead.

Through your faith in the one Lord, you have been baptized into the Spirit of God and the body of Christ. Through the baptism of the Spirit (pictured in believer's baptism), you are identified with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection and immersed into his people. There are many important doctrinal issues that we might disagree on. However, we are all united here. If you are not united on these truths, then you are outside the realm of orthodox Christianity.

d. We belong to the same family. (Chapell)

Lastly, we all have God as our Father and Christ as our brother. We are the family of God. This unites us to each other in a way that runs deeper than the families on this earth. Truly, what unites us far outweighs what divides us.

2. We are different by God's good design. (v. 7-10)

Though we are strongly united in Christ Jesus, we are not uniform. God has fashioned us with different talents, desires, and abilities, and he has gifted us according to his varied grace. His Spirit indwells us all fully, yet he expresses the character of Christ in unique ways through spiritual gifts. These gifts are given according to Christ's gracious generosity and are grounded in his authority.

The lack of uniformity is a good thing—though at times annoying to our sinful flesh. Through the variegated constitution of the body of Christ, Jesus is more fully displayed in the church than he is in individuals. This is why it is important at this point to remember as Bryan Chapell states, "The emphasis on our sameness encourages equal regard for one another despite our differences. The emphasis upon the legitimacy of our differences encourages equal respect for our differences."

A few weeks ago, I asked you to reflect upon the way God has gifted you by his Spirit, what did you conclude?

3. Everyone shares in the work of ministry. (v. 11-14)

God gifts each of us as individuals (see Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12-14) and he gifts the church with specific leaders (see MacArthur's note on the offices). Both his gifts to individuals and to the church have the same purpose—to build up the entire body of Christ. Ministry is not carried out by the leaders of the church, the evangelists and the pastor-teachers. Part of their ministry is to equip all the saints for the work of ministry. Everyone in Christ is a minister. Sitting in the stands as a consumer may work at the movies and the ball field, but it will never work in the church of Jesus Christ.

Everyone sharing in the work of the ministry is what it will take for us to walk worthy of the gospel call. Look at the connection Paul makes. This type of ministry where leaders and all the saints partner together produces unity, maturity, and health within the church. All of us have a part to play. What is your part?

How is God calling you to use your gifts at MeadowBrook?

4. Each of us equally and desperately needs Christ and each other. (v. 15-16)

Driving home his point, Paul calls us to speak the truth in love toward one another, emphasizing yet again the importance of the posture of meekness to walk worthy of our calling. For Paul knows first and foremost that apart from Christ we would fall apart. None of us has any ground for boasting. Paul knows we need each other. If just one part malfunctions, the entire body suffers. Each member of the body needs to be working properly for the body to be built up in love.

When we understand and act upon these four truths, we will walk worthy of the calling upon our lives. God will be glorified, the saints will be built up, and we will know the joy and fulfillment of serving God and our brothers and sisters in Christ. It will be a foretaste of Heaven.

Are you walking worthy of the calling to which you have been called?

The Descent of Christ, Bryan Chapell

“Some have argued that the ‘descent’ substantiates the claim that Jesus ‘descended into hell’ (the underworld), but the simpler explanation is that it refers to Jesus’ incarnation.” This explanation seems best because: (1) it is similar to other patterns in Paul’s writings where incarnation precedes exaltation (Phil. 2:5-11); (2) it is consistent with the citation of Psalm 68, where God metaphorically ascends to Mount Zion along with the captives of the land, requiring him first to descend metaphorically to earth to gather the captives; and (3) the logic of v. 9 likely implies that in order to ascend to heaven, Christ must first have descended from heaven so that he has need of ascending again to his original abode (heaven), such a reading assumes Christ’s descent from heaven to earth rather than from earth to the underworld. [HH- also, Paul seems to define appositionally what he means by “lower regions” with the phrase, “the earth.”]

Despite these complex issues, the clear message is that Jesus has dominion over heaven and earth, and thus he has the authority to dispense gifts here as he wishes, to whom he wishes, in the proportion he wishes, and with the expectation that we will respect his authority to dispense his gifts among his people as he knows is best. The implication for us is also clear: to despise others’ gifts is to disrespect Christ’s authority.”

Christ’s Gift to the Church

“*Apostles* is a NT term used particularly of the twelve disciples who had seen the risen Christ, including Matthias, who replaced Judas. Later, Paul was uniquely set apart as the apostle to the Gentiles. They were given three basic responsibilities:

- To lay the foundation of the church.
- To receive, declare, and write God’s Word.
- To confirm that Word through signs, wonders, and miracles.” John MacArthur

“A *prophet* was a person who ‘stood in the council of God,’ who heard and even saw his word, and who in consequence ‘spoke from the mouth of the Lord’ and spoke his word faithfully. In other words, a prophet was a mouthpiece or spokesman of God, a vehicle of his direct revelation.” – John Stott

The above two offices understood in this way have ceased. The foundation for the church has been laid. We have no need of continued revelation. We have all we need to hear from God in the Bible.

“*Evangelists* proclaimed the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to unbelievers. The phrase *pastors and teachers* is best understood in context as a single office of leadership in the church. Pastor is the equivalent of ‘shepherd.’ So, the words *pastor* and *teacher*, and the two functions together define the teaching shepherd.” –John MacArthur

Living the New Life, Part One

Ephesians 4:17-5:2 | November 29, 2020

Have you ever done a restoration project? What was it like?

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

(2 Corinthians 5:17, ESV)

This is the glorious reality for the disciple of Jesus Christ—we are new creations, made alive by God himself through faith in the gospel. However, though we are made new, God's work in us is still not complete. The old nature of the flesh, though defeated, still wars with our new nature given in Christ. As we develop and mature in Christ, the old self exhibits less and less influence over our lives as the new self is increasingly revealed. This process is often referred to as *spiritual formation*.

Spiritual formation: Put off. Be renewed. Put On.

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

Indeed, spiritual formation is the life of faith Paul talks of in Galatians 2 and the process he is describing in this passage. For in this process, we crucify the old self, are renewed in the spirit of our minds, and put on the new self.

Jesus said to his followers that those who came after him would have to deny themselves and take up their cross and follow him. As David Platt described it, “when Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die.” Of course, some do give their life as martyrs, but for most, this call is metaphorical. It is a call to die to the old self. We used to walk as the Gentiles do, but now we know the superior way of Christ. So, at the beginning of our faith journey and every day after, we die to the old nature of sin and self.

As we do this, the Spirit renews our minds, our way of thinking. The entire perspective through which we view the world shifts. We used to believe the wisdom of world, but now we believe the wisdom of God revealed in Christ and his Word. The Scriptures shape our thoughts so that what we value and our perception of reality aligns more closely with the will of God.

Though intentionality is still required, the putting to death of the old self and the renewing of the mind comes most easily and more naturally when we simply draw near to Christ. This brings us to our main pursuit: put on Christ. The good news is that God gives us Christ's holy and righteous nature as a gift. So, putting on Christ is actually laying hold of by faith that which is already given to us in Christ Jesus. Therefore, we press into righteousness not to obtain righteousness but believing that in Christ, *we are already righteous. It is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us!* What a glorious truth! Even the process of spiritual formation which seems so burdensome to so many is God's gracious gift to us through faith in Christ Jesus and realized through the work of the Spirit in our lives.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

2 Peter 1:3-11;

Romans 12:1-2;

Ezekiel 36: 25-27;

John 3:1-14

Which aspect of spiritual formation do you struggle with the most?

With that in mind let's look at some examples of life as new creations:

Example 1 (v. 25)

Put off the Old You: Put to death falsehood. (i.e. lying, flattery, and calling that which is evil good.)

Be Renewed in Your Thinking: We are members of one another. Lies do not strengthen one another. If we speak falsehood to each other, we all suffer.

Put on Christ: Speak the truth in love. Jesus is the truth, and he lives within you! He has given you his Word, which is truth. People do not need to hear more licentious lies and flattery. They need the truth spoken to them with graciousness and respect.

Example 2 (vv. 26-27)

Put off the Old You: Put to death sinful anger, i.e. outbursts, brooding, withholding or refusing to forgive because you are angry.

Be Renewed in Your Thinking: Satan is actively trying to divide the body of Christ and households and will take any opportunity he can get. Living divided due to anger is not worthy of the calling to which we have been called. This division misrepresents Christ to the world and malnourishes his body.

Put on Christ: Christ is the one who is our peace. He reconciles man to God and tears down the walls of hostility we put up against our fellow man. Pursue rapid reconciliation. There is no need to be legalistic here—if it's late and you'd be better served by picking up the conversation in the morning, then do so. Just be sure to pick it back up! Be quick to admit fault, ask forgiveness, and pursue reconciliation even if you feel you are in the right.

Example 3 (v. 28)

Put off the Old You: Put to death stealing, i.e. theft, cheating on taxes, stealing from work, cheating others in business deals, taking shortcuts when hired to do a job.

Be Renewed in Your Thinking: Others' needs are more important than our own. When we steal, we stifle generosity.

Put on Christ: Christ was perfectly honest. He paid his taxes. He accomplished the full work the Father expected of him. Though it is not in the Bible, I'm confident he practiced carpentry with excellence, setting fair prices and refusing to cut corners to save a buck at the expense of the customer. Jesus was also incredibly generous—to the point where he freely gave his life for our salvation. Following his example, we should work as he worked and give freely to those in need as he gave to you.

Example 4 (v. 29)

Put off the Old You: Put to death corrupting talk, i.e. profanity, speech that tears down (much sarcasm), rants on social media, belittling, gossip, slander, etc.

Be Renewed in Your Thinking: There are occasions ordained by God for you to speak grace in the lives of others. Corrupting talk spits on those occasions.

Put on Christ: Christ was perfect with his words—gentle where he needed to be gentle, firm when he needed to be firm. He is the Word through which all of Creation came into being and by which we are given new life. When Jesus speaks, he speaks words of life. Every utterance of his lips poured out from a pure heart and built up those around him. Since God has given us a new heart our words should flow from that fresh spring of life rather than the bitter waters of our old heart.

Example 5 (v. 31-32)

Put off the Old You: Put to death malicious hatred, i.e. bitterness, wrath, sinful anger, clamoring (inciting others), misrepresenting other's character, and any malicious action, thought, or feeling.

Be Renewed in Your Thinking: God was tender toward you and forgave you, though you were his enemy.

Put on Christ: Christ was patient and tender to those around him, even when they openly opposed him. He forgave the very people who were crucifying him! And he forgave you and filled you with himself. Extend the same kindness to each other. Be tender to one another and forgive each other.

(Note: forgiveness does not necessarily mean trust is restored in the same manner it was before the hurt, but we can entrust the sin to Lord and forgive the individual knowing whatever the offense is either already judged in Christ or will be judged in the final days)

Reflect: Where is the Spirit seeking to conform you more fully into the image of Christ?

Live out your relationship with the Spirit and rest in his seal upon your life.

"God is grieved when his children refuse to change the old ways of sin for those righteous ways of the new life... The Holy Spirit is the guarantor of eternal redemption in Christ for those who believe in him." —John MacArthur

Just as your deep relationship with your wife and kids causes you to live in such a way that does not intentionally grieve them, we too are in a deep relationship with the Holy Spirit with whom we should not desire to grieve. If the thought of your actions grieving the Holy Spirit gives you no pause whatsoever, you might question the legitimacy of your relationship with him. For those truly in relationship with God, however, we can be confident in his sealing work. We will mess this up. A lot. But God is faithful. The work he began in us, he will bring to completion.

When in doubt, imitate God and walk in love toward others looking to Christ as your example.

God did not leave us to figure things out on our own. Scripture is the full revelation of God and sufficient for all things pertaining to this life and godliness. Additionally, we have the perfect example in Jesus Christ. So read the gospels regularly. Look at his life. Look at his teachings given to the church through the Epistles. We are not in the dark. Imitate God and walk in his love.

Oh soul are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Savior
And life more abundant and free
Through death into life everlasting
He passed and we follow Him there

O'er us sin no more hath dominion
For more than conquerors we are
Oh, turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace

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Living the New Life, Part Two

Ephesians 5:3-21 | December 6, 2020

What is the wisest piece of advice you have ever received?

Worship drives behavior.

Continuing his discussion about living the new life in Christ, Paul directs his attention to the core of the issue: the heart. The sinful lusts for sexual immorality, possessions (covetousness/greed), and sinful speech that flow from sinful hearts are out of place with the new identity given to us. For the saints of God, these heart issues are “improper,” a word depicting old clothes that no longer fit.

However, in Christ, we have forsaken the idols of the past and been given new hearts. We now worship the living God and put on the clothes of Christ’s righteousness—clothes that fit our new identity.

This reveals an important point about our behavior: our behavior finds its source in who or what we worship. Those given to sin reveal themselves to be idolaters. They worship a false god; therefore, their behavior reflects their sinful heart.

Such people do not just commit sexual immorality or greed. They are sexually immoral or greedy. On the other hand, those who worship the Living God, revealed in Jesus Christ his Son, grow in their reflection of his righteousness and character.

This separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep worship God and reflect his character as they live under the authority of Christ’s Lordship in his Kingdom of light. Goats worship idols, which find their source in Satan and his demonic horde (Deut. 32:16-17; 1 Cor. 10:19-21). These goats reflect Satan’s character as they live under his dominion in darkness. Worship drives behavior.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

John 8:12;

Romans 12:1-2;

Galatians 5:16-26

Pause and Discuss

Have you examined your heart for idolatrous affections?

- With what sins do you struggle? Why?
- Is there a root idol you might be still worshipping in the flesh that reveals itself in many sinful behaviors?

Walk as children of light.

As citizens of the Kingdom of light whose King is the Light of the world, we are called to walk as children of light in this world of darkness. As the church, we point others to the true source of light and expose darkness for the folly it is. How then do we walk as children of light?

- 1. Partner well.** Pastor Randy often reminds us that we are “to be intentional in our relationships with the lost, while reserving our deep relationships for those in the household of faith.” This is wisdom. We are not to be hermits. We must engage the world where the people are in order to make disciples. However, if we become partners with those who walk in darkness, we will be affected. Our deep relationships—those from which we seek counsel, encouragement, and community—should be with other children of light.
- 2. Elevate what is good and right and true.** Children of light should seek to celebrate all that is good, right, and true in every aspect of our life. In our work, leisure, and discourse we should be lifting up these things.
- 3. Expose wickedness for the emptiness it really is.** However, as children of light, we must also expose that which is darkness. We fight against injustice of all kinds, lifting up our voices for the oppressed, abused, and marginalized.

Walk in wisdom.

Paul’s final “walk” command is for disciples of Jesus to walk in wisdom. Jesus Christ is himself the Wisdom of God made flesh and the Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom and understanding. Any effort to walk in wisdom not focused on the person of Jesus nor empowered by the Spirit is a fool’s errand. Additionally, the natural flow of life is towards folly. This means the walk of wisdom requires intentionality on our part. Thankfully, Paul gives guidance in two ways believers are to walk in wisdom. The first is to...

- 1. Know the will of the Lord.** Paul does not give extra guidance in this passage as to how we can discern the will of God, however the Bible speaks often to this topic. Here are seven ways you can work to understand the will of God.
 - a. Read the Bible and look to the example of Christ.** The Scriptures reveal God’s will and often spells it out directly saying: “this is the will of God for you.” Also, Jesus perfectly lived out the will of God, leaving us the perfect example to look to as our guide.
 - b. Pray.** We need God’s help in discerning his will. We often lack understanding because we simply failed to ask him for wisdom. He has already given us the mind of Christ and his Spirit to teach us. He wants us to know his will. We can confidently ask for his help, resting in his goodness.
 - c. Consider the long-term effects of a decision.** It may not be immediately clear which option is the will of God. In this situation, think about the resulting effect of each decision. If one leads to something down the road that is contrary to the will of God, you have your answer.
 - d. Examine your heart.** What is the motivation behind each option? If one is for the glory of self or the passions of the flesh, you likely have your answer.
 - e. Seek godly counsel.** Seeking godly counsel is a good thing, for the Spirit does not just teach us through personal time in his Word and prayer. He also teaches us through others. Others can look at a situation with more objectivity, helping you see things that were potentially overlooked.
 - f. Don’t expect the heavens to open up with an answer.** God has given his full revelation in Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. If you are waiting for an “inner peace” or a sign from heaven, you’ll be waiting a long time, or worse make a decision based off your feelings rather than the Word of God.
 - g. Rest in the sovereignty of God.** Sometimes we simply do not know and just have to make a decision. I believe that is part of the freedom God gives us. In those situations, after doing the above, simply make a decision or hit pause, resting in sovereignty of God.

Do you need help discerning the will of God on a specific issue? Would you like to discuss this issue with the group and seek the Lord together in prayer?

2. Be filled with the Spirit. The second aspect of this walk of wisdom is to be filled with the Spirit of wisdom. This is different than the indwelling of the Spirit. All believers are fully and equally indwelt with the Spirit at conversion. However, the fullness of his presence is yielded to and experienced in varying degrees as we walk with him. When one is filled with the Spirit, their thoughts, emotions, and actions are led and controlled by the Spirit. This is not to suggest that people lose inhibition and are “drunk with the Spirit.” It simply means that one has consciously yielded themselves to the Spirit’s leading as his influence is increasingly being revealed in their lives. How does this look?

a. Worship with others and personally with a spirit of gratitude. The Spirit glorifies Christ. When we commit to personal and corporate worship with a spirit of gratitude without grumbling, the Spirit’s fullness is increasingly felt and revealed in our lives.

b. Defer to others in humility. As the Spirit works to reveal and glorify Christ, we seek to defer to others, putting their needs before our own. In the familial relationship within the church, we are constantly looking for ways to elevate those around us. This means we die to our own preferences and put others’ needs before our own. In this practice, the fruit of the Spirit is revealed and his character is expressed in our lives.

Reflect

- How is your practice of corporate and personal worship going?
- Does your life currently exhibit gratitude and thanksgiving?
- How often do you defer to others in humility?

The wrath of God is coming to the sons of disobedience.

The wisdom of the world consistently seeks to deny that the wrath of God is coming to the sons of disobedience. Do not be deceived. Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. Those whose names are not written in the lamb’s book of life—those who have not repented of their life of sin and believed the gospel with surrendered faith—will face horrifying judgment. It is not loving nor just to affirm someone’s sin or sinful lifestyle. We must lovingly and graciously warn them of the wrath that is to come as we invite them to know the supreme joy of life with Christ.

If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.
(Ezekiel 33:8 ESV)

Reflecting God’s Image

G.K. Beale

“God has set up humans as the only legitimate images of God, since they are made by divine hands, and to function as legitimate living images they are to reflect the glory of the image of the living God (Gen. 1:26-28). God is the true image-maker—humans are his image, and as his image they are to worship him and reflect his authentic image and not worship and reflect false images made by human hands.” – G.K. Beale

Being Filled with the Spirit | ESV Study Bible

“Whereas wine can control the mind and ruin one’s judgment and sense of propriety, leading to debauchery. In contrast with this, being “filled with the Spirit” leads to self-control along with the other fruits of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [and] gentleness” (Gal. 5:22–23). The command in Greek (plērousthe) is a present imperative and does not describe a onetime “filling” but a regular pattern of life.”

Gospel Households

Ephesians 5:22-6:4 | December 13, 2020

If you could go back and give yourself one piece of advice on your wedding day or the birth of your first child what would it be?

³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5:31-32 ESV)

“This is the secret (of marriage)—that the gospel of Jesus and marriage explain one another. That when God invented marriage, he already had the saving work of Jesus in mind... [The gospel] gives you both the power and pattern for your marriage. On the one hand, the experience of marriage will unveil the beauty and depths of the gospel to you. It will drive you further into reliance on it. On the other hand, a greater understanding of the gospel will help you experience deeper and deeper union with each other as the years go on.”

– Tim Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*

Tim Keller, along with many others, has identified the core of Paul’s vision for godly households: the gospel. Every relationship in the household is a picture of the good news. Marriage pictures the reality of the church as the bride of Christ. Parenting pictures the reality of God as our Father in Christ and his disciples as children of God. It is impossible to build godly households apart from a robust understanding of the gospel and its repeated application in the life of the family. A godly household is a gospel household.

This also means, contrary to what our culture teaches, that family is not primarily about personal fulfillment. Ultimately, our families are meant to bring glory to God as we demonstrate the truths of the gospel on a daily basis toward one another in the covenant of marriage and the relationship between parent and child. This of course brings about great personal fulfillment, but the glory of God is ultimate. In light of this, what is God teaching us in this passage about living as gospel families?

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (Written by Taylor H.)

If we think of the Church submitting its will and ways to Christ, it’s not difficult to see the beauty and harmony that comes as the result. When the Church carries out the will of God, she understands that Christ is her authority who takes responsibility for her well-being and flourishing. A wife submitting to her husband exudes this same beauty and harmony. As she comes under his authority and follows his leadership as he seeks the will of the Father, she communicates the joy found in submitting her life to Christ.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Genesis 1-2;

Colossians 3:18-21;

Deuteronomy 6:4-7

Biblical submission to your husband is not always easy (especially when there's disagreement), but just like submitting to Christ takes faith, so does submitting to your husband. When a wife submits to her husband, she is trusting in God's sovereignty, trusting in God's purpose for ordering marriage in this way, trusting that it is her husband who is accountable before God in how he leads his family, and trusting that the Lord sees her heart, knows her needs and cares for her. So as wives submit themselves and their children under the headship of their own husbands, it is an act of worship of the One who is over everything.

Wives, take time to reflect on how submission to your husband is an act of worship and obedience to the Lord. Ask him to help you surrender your desires and vision for your family to that of your husband.

Husbands love your wives...

Paul's charge to husbands is simple: love your wives. The word Paul uses (agapaté) describes an intimate and faithful love that cherishes and delights in the other. GotQuestions.org describes it in this manner:

"The essence of agape love is goodwill, benevolence, and willful delight in the object of love. Unlike our English word love, agape is not used in the New Testament to refer to romantic or sexual love. Nor does it refer to close friendship or brotherly love, for which the Greek word philia is used. Agape love involves faithfulness, commitment, and an act of the will. It is distinguished from the other types of love by its lofty moral nature and strong character. Agape love is beautifully described in 1 Corinthians 13."

Trusted Books on Marriage and Parenting

Marriage:

The Meaning of Marriage
by Tim Keller

Sacred Marriage
by Gary Thomas

Parenting:

Gospel for Life Series: Parenting
by Russell Moore and Andrew T. Walker

Equipping for Life
by Andreas and Margaret Köstenberger

Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles that can Radically Change Your Family
by Paul David Tripp

Submission Does Not Mean you...

Are less valuable in creation or in the Kingdom.

Both men and women are equal in their creation in the image of God, giftedness by the Spirit, and inheritance of the gospel.

Never voice disagreement.

Submitting to your husband does not mean your opinion is made null and void. Speak your disagreement and humbly follow his leadership. (See next point)

Have to follow into sin.

On the other hand, you never have to follow your husband into sin. The Lord outranks your husband. If your husband is leading you to break the law of Christ, you do not have to follow him.

Submit to abuse.

Many use this passage to abuse their wives. They are wolves. Submitting to your husband does not mean submitting to abuse. If your husband is abusing you or your children, seek help from the proper channels.

Submit to all men.

The Bible does not call women to submit to all men but to their husbands.

In order to project the meaning of his words from being high-jacked by various cultural understandings, Paul describes this love with two clear pictures: Christ's love for the church and our love for our own bodies.

As Christ loved the church.

-Willfully sacrifice for your spouse. Never once has Christ submitted to and been led by the church, but he willfully sacrificed his entire life for the good of his bride. As husbands, we should follow Christ's example and seek to put our wife's needs before our own and go out of our way to serve her. This does not mean we, as husbands, defer to our wife by default in decision making. Christ does not do that with the church. It means that in every decision, we seek the good of our wife (and the whole household) rather than what we selfishly desire.

- **Lead your wife spiritually.** As Christ leads his church, we are to lead our wives. Practically this means we seek to develop our spiritual lives and knowledge of God so we might lead more effectively. Even if your spouse might know more about the Bible than you do, we as husbands are entrusted with the task of spiritual leadership. Spiritual leadership is not about knowing the most about the Bible. Good leadership recognizes when it's good to humbly listen to your spouse. The simple place to begin spiritually leading your wife is to read the Bible together, share what God is teaching you and pray together. Over time you will grow in your ability to shepherd your wife and children in various situations with the wisdom of God's Word.

As your own body.

- **Nourish, protect, and strengthen your wife.** Just as you feed your body when it's hungry, protect it from harm, and strengthen it through exercise, work diligently to do the same with your spouse. What nourishes her? How can you make her feel secure and protected in your home and your love? How can you support her and fortify her as she goes about her days?
- **Cherish your wife.** As husbands, we should delight in our wife. Christ delights in his bride and cherishes time with her. Likewise, we should seek to spend time with one another. This might mean less golf, hunting, video games, fishing, work, or _____. As men, we are to seek out and cherish the time we have with our wives.

Honor your father and mother.

Even though in marriage you leave father and mother and hold fast to your spouse, you are still called to honor our parents. This changes throughout the course of your life. Consider how you can honor your parents in this stage of life.

Fathers, lead out in making disciples of your children.

Though both mothers and fathers are entrusted with making disciples of their children, fathers will give a special account to God for how they lead their household. How can fathers disciple their kids well?

Do not provoke anger. Unrealistic and unjust expectations, belittling, withholding mercy, and outbursts of anger all exasperate your children and do not reflect the fatherly nature of God.

Administer both positive and corrective discipline. Discipline is not just meant to be a corrective endeavor. As the Scriptures teach, warn, correct, and train, so fathers are to teach, warn, correct, and train their kids.

Preach and model the gospel to your children. The instruction of the Lord is not "do good and earn my favor." The instruction of the Lord is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our kids need to hear the gospel from our lips and see God's unconditional love and grace reflected in our parenting. Our children do not need to think our love for them is based on their behavior, academic ability, or athletic talent. Show them the love of Christ.

Three Motives for Caring for Aging Parents from 1 Timothy 5:4 | John Piper

1. "He says, 'Show godliness.' In other words, caring for the parent is a Godward act. It's not just social welfare. This is part of what God is working in his people.
2. "Make some return to their parents." In other words, it's right and good for children to look back on all the years of what their parents gave to them. Ten thousand needs were met in their early years by the parents. They should look back and feel some sense of indebtedness to them.
3. "For this is pleasing in the sight of God." We're told plainly, God delights in this. He's pleased when children care for their aging parents. The main issue is if the heart of the children is a selfish heart or a servant heart.

Are we ready to make sacrifices for our parents? Or are we resentful that they are becoming a burden? That's the real test. All of this may or may not mean that the parents come to live with us or near us. There are innumerable variables that make one situation right for one family and another situation right for another."

Spirit-Filled Work

Ephesians 6:5-9 | December 20, 2020

Share with the group a job that you have had that was your:

- Most difficult job
- Most unusual job
- Most enjoyable job

Over a 40-year span of time, an average American will spend roughly 83,000 hours working. Most adults' lives are significantly involved in work, many times with some level of dissatisfaction. Since we will spend so many hours investing in our professions, shouldn't we seek to find satisfaction in our work? Wouldn't it be wonderful to be placed in a position where God can prosper our work for His kingdom? God's Word teaches us about work in general and more specifically about the responsibilities of both the employer and the employee. The Christian's work, as with our very lives, should be set apart, holy, and spirit filled.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Genesis 1:26, 2:15

Philippians 2:3-4

Mark 10:42-45

Colossians 3:23

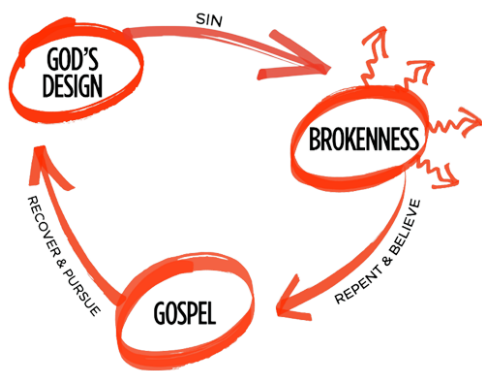
Many of us lack a basic theology of work and, therefore, assume that work is a product of the fall. But God designed humanity to work from the beginning. We work because our Creator works, and we are made in his image, to reflect him. According to one Bible dictionary, God has infused "the act of work with meaning and divine significance, enjoining upon humans an obligation to engage in work even as God works."

- Phillip Holmes, contributor to www.desiringgod.org

The Bible makes it clear that work matters to God. No matter what your profession or occupation – whether you are a parent, a bus driver, an artist, or an engineer – God cares about your work.

For the Christian, we find our contentment and joy in the Savior, Jesus Christ. It is impossible for our work to be spirit-filled without Jesus. Have you surrendered your life to Him? If not, why not today? God is good. In fact, He is perfect. We are not. We are sinners by birth and by choice. In His goodness, He looks upon us with eyes of mercy, grace, and love. He has made a way for any one of us to be forgiven of all our sin. God has come to us in the Person of Jesus, a Man just like us in every way—yet without sin. He had no sin for which He needed to pay, yet in love Jesus chose to pay the price for our sin by dying on a cross in our place. He shed His blood as a sacrifice for our sin, taking the judgment we deserve upon Himself and then being raised from the dead unto eternal life.

Therefore, when we turn from our sin (repent) and trust in Him and in what He has done for us (believe), we can be forgiven of all our sin, be reconciled to God, and receive eternal life with Jesus Christ. Starting now and continuing throughout all eternity, we enjoy his presence as we walk with him in his designs.



A sincere heart surrendered to Jesus is the foundation upon which a life of Spirit-filled work can be built. (v. 5-7)

Look back to chapter 5, verse 21, to see the foundation from which Paul is teaching about various relationships in life. “**...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.**” This guiding principle of demonstrating humility in our relationships frames our relationships at work.

Throughout scripture, we are taught the heart of a Christian submits to others and considers others first (Eph 5:21; Phil 2:3-4 among others). What does submission look like in the office or on the jobsite? It starts with a sincere heart. Paul addresses several things in his letter to the church in Ephesus regarding a sincere heart in the workplace. Paul’s letter speaks to our behavior, our attitude, our faithfulness, and our motives.

Behavior = Obedience

God calls us to obey those over us at work. So much is revealed about our character in our obedience to our work requirements.

Attitude = Respect

Christian employees should show sincere respect to their employers, a small reflection of our reverence for the Lord.

Faithfulness = Even when no one is watching

Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching. - C. S. Lewis

From our love for and service to our Lord Jesus who saves us, Christians must strive to do the right thing (to live a life of holiness) always, but especially in times when it goes unseen. In everything we do, we do it for God’s glory. When we give less than our best, we rob God of His glory in that moment.

Motive = As if working for Christ

Working for Jesus does not mean he is our employer; he is much higher than that. Jesus is the Lord of all, and we need to approach our work like Jesus is our everything. True faith is not compartmentalized. It permeates our entire life. It is who we are. As the Scriptures say, **Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men. (Colossians 3:23, ESV)** This means, as John Piper states, that “our motivation to work is driven by our Father’s character and his commands. As bearers of his image, we work because our Creator works... We do not work for his acceptance or to meet his needs; we work because we are already accepted, to meet the needs of others.” - John Piper

An understanding of the motives or purpose of our work will move us toward respectful, obedient submission to authorities in the workplace.

Pause and Discuss

1. What is God’s will for your work?
2. How should a Christian work differently than a non-Christian? How should a focus on Jesus change our occupation on earth? What does this mean for you?
3. How can I prepare myself spiritually as I go to work each day?
4. Why should I respectfully obey my boss, as though he or she were Christ? See Ephesians 6:5.) What does this mean for me this week?

A focus on earthly rewards will always leave us wanting. (v. 8)

The world's motivation for work focuses on immediate rewards—compensation, promotion, praise, etc. A focus on earthly rewards from our work will invariably result in one of two things, 1) underwork (only when the boss is looking) or 2) overworked (doing all I can and more in order to get the promotion, the raise or the praise). A focus on the earthly rewards creates an environment of enslavement to the opinions of others and a growing dissatisfaction with our work. The earthly rewards are never enough. They never satisfy.

So, a biblical view of work reveals in our hearts the joys and privileges of serving others with the gifts that God has given us, without regard to personal gain or advancement. This allows us to serve with a great attitude regardless of our condition, “whether slave or free”. For the Christian, our satisfaction is not found in our work, and we are not identified by our work.

As a result, we should not expect from the world what only heaven can provide. In Jesus we find our identity, in Jesus we find satisfaction. Interestingly, the best way for us to engage more deeply at work requires us to stop seeking our ultimate reward in our work and seek from Jesus, believing the last promise of the Bible when Jesus says: **“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.” Revelation 22:12**

“The recognition of the heavenly reward from Jesus translates into being pleasant and productive employees at work.”
- Chip Bugnar

Reflect:

1. What is my motivation for the job I do?
2. Am I a people-pleaser? A gossip? A complainer? A workaholic? How can I resist these things?

The Christian leader is a respectful, gracious, humble servant leader. (v. 9)

For those in authority in the workplace, scripture clearly addresses the equality of people before God. Moreover, God calls Christian leaders in positions of authority to lead by serving. To lead well, Christians must serve those we lead. A proper view of the Gospel at work leads to a respectful use of authority. Christian employers must lead their employees in a such way that others see the character of Christ.

Reflect

Read Mark 10:42-45.

If you are an employer, are you reflecting Christ's model of leadership?

How can you serve or encourage your employees this week?

“Under the plan God has ordained for Christian leaders, leadership is a position of humble, loving service. Christian leadership is ministry, not management. Those whom God designates as leaders are called not to be governing monarchs, but humble slaves, not slick celebrities, but laboring servants. Those who would lead God's people must above all exemplify sacrifice, devotion, submission, and lowliness. Jesus Himself gave us the pattern when He stooped to wash His disciples' feet, a task that was customarily done by the lowest of slaves (John 13). If the Lord of the universe would do that, no Christian leader has a right to think of himself as a bigwig.”
- John MacArthur

The Million Dollar Question

Perhaps the most important question Christians can ask every day regarding our work is:

“For whom do I work?”

If the answer is anything or anyone other than the Lord, the biblical principles of work are not being applied. God's Word has given some very direct principles concerning work that all Christians should know and observe. When we do, we can experience the joys of work in the way God intended all along, truly working for an audience of ONE.

The Armor of God

Ephesians 6:10-24 | December 27, 2020

If you played sports growing up, what was it like getting dressed out for the game? Was that an important process in your preparation?

After describing in glorious detail our position in Christ and our walk with him, Paul calls his audience to stand firm in Christ against the schemes of the enemy. As we walk with Christ in the church and in our homes, Satan and his horde will attack us. The good news is God has given us everything in Christ Jesus to withstand his wicked and fiery attacks.

Be strengthened by the Lord and his strength.

The CSB best captures the passive tense of the verb in the original language when it says, *“Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength.”* This is an important idea lost in both the ESV and KJV translation “Be strong in the Lord.” When a verb is in the passive tense it means that the action is carried out on the subject by an external force. In this instance, the action is the strengthening, you are the subject, and Jesus is the one graciously providing the needed strength from without. This good news frames the way we understand the passage. This section is not a call to pull up your bootstraps and storm hell with a water pistol. Paul is calling us to humble ourselves, recognize our inability to stand firm, and be strengthened by Christ, who alone stands in victory over and against the enemy.

As commentator Peter O’Brien notes, “[The phrase ‘the strength of his might’] has already been used in relation to God’s all-powerful strength which raised Christ from the dead and exalted him to the place of honor, far above all rule and authority (1:19-20). The apostle prayed that his readers might understand and experience the extraordinary power of God working on their behalf (1:19). Now he calls upon them to appropriate this might, which in the case of Jesus had already proven itself sufficient to overcome powerful, diabolical opposition.”

What this all means is that we are not strong enough. That’s ok. Jesus is. We need to lay hold of his strength, not muster up our puny and insufficient best. We need to be made strong. We need Jesus.

We do not struggle against flesh and blood.

One of the works of the enemy is his ability to divide. He does this by convincing us that our struggle is against someone, whether it be a co-worker, a boss, a spouse, a child, a fellow church member, an opposing political party member, or any other image-bearer. Paul reveals the key to possessing Christ-like unity and loving one’s enemies: our struggle is not against flesh and blood. The reality is that people are not who we fight against. Our war is waged against the spiritual forces of darkness. This means we do not overcome through physical might, but through the spiritual strength given to us through Christ by his Spirit. When conflict arises and we are sinned against, we can love the offender with the love of Christ rather than attacking them, extending mercy and grace as we reason with them with gentleness and respect. This demonstrates that while we might be against what they have done or are doing, we are for them. We want the best for them. Believing this truth and operating in light of its meaning will transform the way you handle conflict and injustice.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Romans 8:1-37

Isaiah 52:1-10

Matthew 6:9-15

Put on the whole armor of God so that you might stand firm against the enemy.

As mentioned, this passage is not about you demonstrating your strength. The armor belongs to God and is given freely to you as a gift. However, it is a gift we must actively receive and lay hold of through faith. Additionally, we need to lay hold of all of God's armor. He is giving out the entire set. To embrace one but not another is the height of folly—just as it would be on a physical battlefield. This age is evil. Sometimes the enemy puts extra pressure upon the children of God through temptation or persecution—and we know it's only going to get worse. If we are to stand in this evil day and the evil days to come, then we must put on God's armor.

- The belt of truth

"When a soldier tightened his belt he was ready for combat, because in the process of tightening he drew up his tunic and cinched it so it could not impede him as he charged into battle. It also fixed his sword in place... His belt held everything in place. Without it, he was powerless in battle. [God's truth] holds the spiritual armor in place and safeguards against deadly entanglements."

— R. Kent Hughes

What holds you together? Is it the truth of God's Word or your feelings?

Are you a person who reflects God's truth? Are you honest? Are you easily captivated by false teachings or slanderous lies?

- Breastplate of righteousness.

The breastplate protects the vital organs of the midsection, particularly the heart (Stott). The righteousness of Christ is freely given to us at conversion and progressively manifested in our lives as we follow him. It is this righteousness that protects us from the fatal attacks of the enemy.

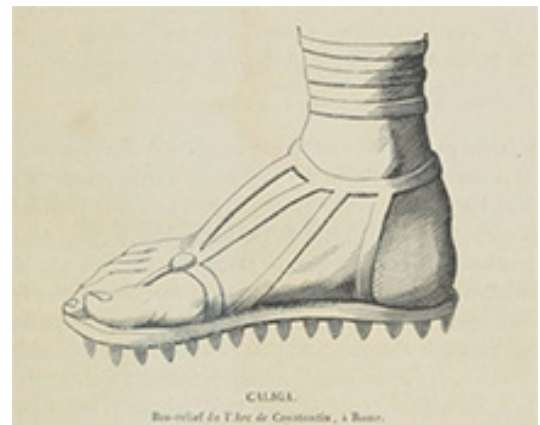
Are you resting in Christ's gift of righteousness?

Are you pursuing his righteousness in your daily life?

- Gospel Shoes

This image of these shoes "comes from the Roman soldier's war boot, the caliga. It was an open-toed leather boot with a heavily nail-studded sole that was tied to the ankles and shins with straps. These were not shoes for running... These boots served for marching, especially in battle. Their function was like today's cleated football shoe. They gave the foot traction and prevented sliding."

— R. Kent Hughes



What Paul is trying to communicate with this image is that disciples of Christ are planted in the peace they have with God through his Son. With this firm footing, we experience the peace of God in our lives and march forward, carrying "the attack into enemy territory by sharing and proclaiming this good news with others." (O'Brien)

- Shield of Faith

When the devil sends his fiery darts our way, the shield of faith extinguishes them. When he tempts us with the pleasures of sin, we believe Jesus is better. When we feel powerless under the barrage of his attacks, we believe that Jesus is stronger. When trials arise in our life that tempt us to despair, we believe Jesus is sovereign and is working all things together for his glory and the good of his saints. When Satan attacks, we believe in Jesus.

- **Helmet of Salvation:** The helmet protects the head from fatal blows. In spiritual warfare, the helmet of salvation protects the mind. When Satan accuses, we know we have been saved (justified). When Satan points out our failures as we struggle against sin, we know we are being saved (sanctified). When Satan seeks to cause us to lose hope, we know the best is yet to come in our salvation (glorification).
- **The Sword of the Spirit, The Word of God:** “A sword was a soldier’s only weapon. In the same way, God’s Word is the only weapon a believer needs, infinitely more powerful than any of Satan’s devices.” – John MacArthur

Pray in the Spirit.

“Paul adds [praying in the Spirit] not because he thinks of prayer as another though unnamed weapon, but because [prayer] is to pervade all of our spiritual warfare. Here are four ways Paul urges us to pray in the Spirit:

1. **Be guided by the Word.**

Praying by the Spirit is not using ecstatic utterances we do not understand. But working to align your prayers to the will and character of God as revealed in the Spirit-inspired Scriptures.

2. **Pray continually.** Prayers should often be on our lips. We should schedule times of prayer and take advantage of sporadic opportunities for prayer that are interspersed throughout our days.

3. **Pray for others.** Prayers that focus on our desires to spend on our passions do not constitute praying in the Spirit. We should pray for the good of others.

4. **Pray kingdom-focused.** Our prayers do not need to be only reserved for temporary needs such as praying for the sick or temporary provision. We certainly need to pray for those things, but even more than that we need to be praying that the kingdom of God might go forth. To paraphrase John Piper, prayer is our war-time time walkie-talkie not our intercom.

How do we effectively use the sword?

- Ask God to teach you by his Spirit.
- Read God’s word.
- Study God’s Word—alone and with others (Life Group).
- Memorize God’s Word.
- Meditate on God’s Word.
- Pray God’s Word.
- Listen to faithful preaching of God’s Word.

Are you using the sword of the Spirit effectively?

Who are you relying on?

Bryan Chapell

“We do not put on the armor of God by trusting in the more vigorous performance of our duties, but by relying on God’s provision for our protection. We gain the confidence to rely on God’s armor and utilize it when, on Scripture’s authority, we perceive his protection to be as real as the armor Paul observed on the soldier guarding him in prison when the apostle penned these words... The spiritual disciplines and godly practices of our lives are not what protect us against Satan; they are the means of grace by which God builds within us greater understanding and confidence in him, so that we will stand on his promises and provisions when the day of battle comes.”



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