

AFRICA BIBLE COMMENTARY:

Ephesians

Most, though not all, scholars recognize Paul as the author of Ephesians, both because of evidence within the letter itself (1:1) and because of the ancient tradition that supports his authorship.

This letter, like Colossians, Philemon and Philippians, was written while Paul was under house arrest (3:1; 4:1; 6:20), probably in Rome, where he was a prisoner between AD 60 and 62. While there, he was surrounded by friends such as Luke, Timothy, Aristarchus, Ephaphras, Onesimus and Tychicus, all of whom he mentions in his letters to the churches. Tychicus delivered Paul's letter to Ephesus (6:21). Even though Paul was a prisoner, his influence was still widely felt because of these faithful friends.

This letter was specifically addressed to Christians living in Ephesus, but it was circulated widely among the Christian churches in what is now known as Turkey. Paul had founded the church in Ephesus during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18–21). He had then moved on, leaving Priscilla and Aquila to continue the work there. Apollos later joined them in their work (Acts 18:24–26). On a later visit Paul stayed in Ephesus for about three years (Acts 20:31). On his final journey to Jerusalem Paul's ship stopped at Miletus and he invited the elders of the church at Ephesus to meet him there (Acts 20:17–35). Paul had thus put a lot of work into building this church, and we can understand why he wrote this very important letter to Christians whom he had helped to bring up in the Lord. His affinity, passion and love for this church are clearly revealed in this letter.

Purpose of the letter

In the first part of this letter, Paul explains the blessings or riches enjoyed by the believer in Christ (1:1–3:21). In speaking of these blessings, Paul addresses the strategic position of the church in God's universal plan of salvation. It is through the church that God wants to manifest his glory and salvation to the whole world. In the church he is creating a new humanity. In fact, the church has been made the centre of unity for all humanity. Human differences in race, ethnicity, tribe and religion are dissolved or broken down in Christ. In him there is no longer any reason for racial, tribal or religious conflict.

Africa faces the problem of getting people with different tribal, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds to live together in peace and harmony in a society that is just, participatory and sustainable. So the message of Ephesians about how different peoples can live together in unity, love and peace is highly relevant.

The second part of the letter deals with the details of how Christians should live in unity (4:1–6:24). Paul addresses what unity means in practice in the church and the family, and how we should use our spiritual gifts and wage spiritual warfare.

Outline Of Contents

1:1–2 Greetings

1:3–3:21 The Position of Christians in Christ

1:3–23 Believers' Position: Chosen, Redeemed and Sealed

1:3–6 Chosen by the Father

1:7–12 Redeemed by the Son

1:13–14 Sealed by the Spirit

1:15–23 Thanksgiving and prayer

2:1–10 Believers' Position: Made Alive with Christ

2:1–3 Old Condition: Dead to God
2:4–10 New Condition: Alive to God

2:11–22 Believers' Position: United in One Body

3:1–21 Believers' Position: Equal in the Body

4:1–6:20 Christlike Living

4:1–6 Saved to Walk in Unity

4:7–16 Gifted to Operate in Diversity

4:17–22 Put Off the Old Life

4:23–32 Put On the New Life

5:1–7 Imitate God

5:8–14 Walk as Children of Light

5:15–20 Live Wisely

5:21–6:9 Live Responsibly

5:22–33 In marriage

6:1–4 In the family

6:5–9 At work

6:10–20 Into Battle: The Armour of God

6:21–24 Conclusion

COMMENTARY

1:1–2 Greetings

Africans generally regard someone who does not greet others as rude. Such a person will have little spiritual or social impact. Thus we can appreciate the care Paul takes to greet his readers in a way that communicates both his care and love for them.

Paul begins by introducing himself as an apostle of Christ. An *apostle* (**1:1a**) is someone who has been divinely commissioned to represent Christ, especially as a pioneer in establishing new churches or new Christian ministries. The term was not restricted to the original disciples of Jesus, but was also applied to

other Christian missionaries and is listed among the gifts of the Holy Spirit (4:11).

Paul stresses that his apostleship is *by the will of God* (see also Gal 1:1).

Consequently, his message comes with divine authority. Because of his past (see Acts 26:9–11), Paul is very aware that God's appointment of him as a messenger of the gospel and a witness of Christ is indeed an expression of his grace.

Paul uses two words to describe those to whom he is sending this letter: they are *saints* and *faithful* (**1:1b**). The word 'saint' is not a description of what they are like but of what God has done for them. It indicates that they have been set apart for God and made pure and holy for his service, and thus it applies to both OT and NT believers. We cannot make ourselves *saints*. We are made such by the Lord. By contrast, the word 'faithful' refers to our commitment to maintain a good relationship with the Lord through holding fast to his word and being obedient to him. Just as in Africa we have obligations to the clan to which we belong by virtue of our birth, so now that God has chosen us to be part of the clan of 'saints', we have obligations to one another and to God. Any failure or refusal to live up to these obligations marks us as unfaithful.

The greeting *grace and peace* is a common one in both Hebrew and Greek, but gains rich meaning from its association with *God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* (**1:2**). 'Grace' is the act of giving freely when the giver is under no obligation to do so. It is quite different from giving because one has been bribed or persuaded to give. God's grace is shown in his redemption of human beings through Jesus Christ, something that was done purely on God's initiative (1:11–12), as Paul is well aware.

When Paul prays for grace for the believers, he is praying both that God's

grace will work in their lives, transforming them, and that this grace will then be apparent in their actions as they themselves show grace to others and gratitude to God.

'Peace' is not a natural state for human beings, for as a result of sin we are more familiar with hostility, conflict, selfishness and anxiety. But Christ's kingdom is characterized by peace, both between God and believers and between believers. The ongoing wars and violence in Africa indicate a continent that is in deep need of the virtues of grace and peace.

1:3–3:21 The Position of Christians in Christ

1:3–23 Believers' Position: Chosen, Redeemed and Sealed

Originally, 1:3–14 was a Trinitarian hymn sung by the early church in praise of God the Father who chose believers, God the Son who redeemed them, and God the Holy Spirit who sealed them. Such celebrations of all the persons in the Trinity should still play an important part in our worship today.

1:3–6 Chosen by the Father

Paul starts by praising God the Father for who he is and all he has done. Speaking of him as the *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1:3) establishes the unique relationship between God the Father and Jesus the Son. But it should not be misunderstood as implying a biological relationship. Rather, it is a theological concept that recognizes that Jesus Christ and God are both equal and eternal.

The God who created the heavens and the earth is the same one who gives us

every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3). In other words, he gives us the blessings that flow from Christ's redemption of us. These blessings are not material but spiritual. They are what is necessary for salvation and godliness. The *heavenly realms* (1:3) are the unseen world of spiritual realities in which Christians live. Africans are very aware of these spiritual realities, and many live in fear of them. But because of God's blessings, believers in Christ can face them with confidence.

One of the blessings we have received is that God has chosen us *in Christ* (1:4a).

What an honour, to be specially chosen by God to receive his gift of salvation! This was no impulsive decision, but was made *before the creation of the world* (1:4b). God selects believers individually while Jesus Christ does the work of transforming them into a community, the church, his body. The election of believers and the gift of eternal life do not date from the cross of Christ, but are part of God's eternal plan. Jesus Christ was the one who put this plan into effect, making these blessings a reality that all who believe in him may obtain.

The two great purposes for which believers are chosen are firstly to be *holy* and secondly to be *blameless* (1:4c). God wants us to reflect his glory by demonstrating his holiness or purity in our lives. Animals for sacrifice had to be *blameless*, that is, without any blemish. We are not called to be physically perfect, but to be morally perfect. If God chose us in Christ so that we can be blameless before him, all of our life should be dedicated to him.

Some people claim that God's choice of believers (1:4) or his predestination of them (1:5) is unfair because it selects some and excludes others. What they fail to see is that the underlying motive for God's choice

and predestination is *love* (1:4d), which does not exclude anyone (John 3:16). Those excluded in the end are those who refuse God's offer of salvation (John 3:17–19).

Another thing that God has done for us is to adopt us as his sons and daughters (1:5a). Adoption is a legal process that makes believers co-heirs with Christ. This special family relationship changes our whole perspective on and relationship to God. He is no longer remote and unapproachable, but becomes a Father who is near and dear to us.

Our adoption is purely an act of God's grace, rooted in his *pleasure and will* (1:5b). It is not done out of pity or motivated by selfishness or by what someone has done. Thus we should respond with thankfulness, praise and worship (1:6). Africans know how to give praise and honour to national heroes such as Nelson Mandela and Miriam Makeba. Our understanding of what God has freely done for us should evoke even more praise and worship than we give to human leaders.

1:7–12 Redeemed by the Son

Having carefully explained the foundation of God's redemptive plan, Paul moves on to the drama of the cross that put it into effect. Jesus became the sacrificial Lamb for us, whose death freed us from the slavery to sin and the world that had been our fate since our rebellion against God in the Garden of Eden. Christ's death made peace possible between God and us. Whereas previously we had been under God's wrath and judgment, now God could graciously offer *forgiveness of sins* (1:7a). The cross of Christ gives forgiveness its legal and righteous basis in dealing with the sin problem. No wonder Paul speaks of *the riches of God's grace* (1:7b)! When it comes

to matters of redemption and forgiveness, God is never stingy. No matter how much we have sinned, he always has enough grace to redeem us and forgive us.

But while God's grace is given freely, it is not given recklessly. His actions are guided by *wisdom and understanding* (1:8). 'Wisdom' is knowledge of the true reality of a situation, rather than of superficial facts. 'Understanding' is the discernment required to distinguish between reality and falsehood. We are always uncertain and doubtful because we have to rely on guesses and assumptions. God knows all things as they really are. We need to pray that he will share his wisdom and understanding with us as we try to follow him and work to build up his church.

God has already given us some insight into his thinking, for he has revealed to us *the mystery of his will* (1:9a). This 'mystery' is God's plan of salvation that was revealed through Christ. This plan extends beyond the mere salvation of humanity to embrace all things in heaven and on earth—the entire universe (1:10). The entire universe needs salvation because the fall of humanity (Gen 3) produced a universal state of chaos and conflict (Rom 8:19–22). But at the climax of time, God will bring all things into unity and make them all subject to Christ. Jesus Christ will then be the ruler of the entire universe!

There is no way we could know that such a plan exists if God did not reveal it to us. This revelation is also a result of God's grace, here described as *his good pleasure* (1:9b). He was under no external obligation to reveal it.

The fact that the will of God is so closely tied to Christ's work of redemption and that he is the one who is to rule has important implications. All others who claim to be intermediaries between God and humanity

must be working outside of God's will. God has planned from eternity to make Jesus Christ the only means of obtaining salvation (John 14:6). Thus Christ should not be taken lightly or ignored. The same point is made by Paul's constant use of the phrase *in Christ* in this letter. It was 'in Christ' that God executed his plan of salvation, and it is only 'in Christ' that humanity obtains this salvation.

Paul says that *we were also chosen* (1:11). However, these words can also be translated 'we were heirs'. In the OT, Israel was God's chosen people. Now believers in Christ have also been chosen and they have Christ as their inheritance.

The first to believe Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah were Jews like the apostles (1:12). Although many Jews rejected Jesus, there were some who believed. The faith of these few Jewish believers brought great honour, glory and praise to God. What a delight to know that our faith in Jesus Christ does the same!

1:13–14 Sealed by the Spirit

In the previous verse, Paul spoke specifically about the first believing Jews, and now he speaks of the believing Gentiles to whom he is writing. Paul assures them that they have been fully incorporated into the community of believers, the body of Christ, and thus are equal to the believing Jews and are also heirs in Christ.

A distinction has to be made between merely hearing the gospel of Christ and the hearing of faith, which brings salvation. The Ephesians had truly *heard* the gospel (1:13a), which is here referred to as *the word of truth*. It is no falsehood, but the truth that leads to salvation and liberation from sin and bondage. Anyone who believes this word of truth has salvation and

is sealed by the Holy Spirit as a mark of identity or possession (1:13b–14). This mark is similar to the chalk mark that an Igbo host in Nigeria puts on the wrist of a visitor. Both the chalk mark and the *seal* indicate that this person is to enjoy the privileges and protection of the entire community.

Jesus Christ sent the Holy Spirit to apply the benefits of redemption in the lives of the believers, that is, to fulfil the promises made by the Father and the Son. Not only does the Holy Spirit mark us as *God's possession*, but he also guarantees that we will indeed receive the full inheritance that God has graciously promised us (1:13b). What the Holy Spirit does brings praise, honour and glory to God.

1:15–23 Thanksgiving and prayer

After this song of praise to the Triune God for his plan and work of salvation (1:3–14), Paul turns to thanksgiving and prayer for the believers at Ephesus. He has heard good news about their faith and responds with joy and thanksgiving (1:15–16a). We too should rejoice when we see and hear that God is at work, rather than being envious of the success of others. When we recognize that all that God gives is from his grace, we will respond graciously.

Paul also commits himself to praying for the believers (1:16b). He does not indulge in habits that destroy a community of believers, such as not caring for one another, gossiping, being critical and circulating petitions against others. Nor is he the sort of person who will forget old friends and stop praying for them.

The primary thing for which Paul prays is that God will do even more work in the believers. He prays that the truths he has been teaching in 1:3–14 will take root in the inmost hearts of the believers at Ephesus.

His prayer is addressed to the *glorious Father (1:17a)*. God is 'glorious' because of his exalted nature and his marvellous and gracious deeds. This is the God who planned our salvation from eternity and saw it implemented by Jesus Christ, his dear Son. This God is capable and gracious enough to give the Holy Spirit to help believers apply his spiritual blessings in their lives. The Holy Spirit is the *Spirit of wisdom and revelation (1:17b)* because he reveals the mind of God to us. Without him, it would be impossible for ordinary men and women to experience spiritual empowerment and exercise spiritual wisdom, insight and discernment (1 Cor 2:6–16).

The Holy Spirit is very different from the spirits that are worshipped in traditional religion. He is a person, not just an influence or a force. He cannot be manipulated or placated as spirits are in traditional religions. He is also holy and so cannot be associated with anything unholy or demonic. He helps us know God much more deeply (1:17c). Without his revelation and wisdom, our knowledge of who God is and what he does for us will be shallow and weak.

The second thing for which Paul prays is that *the eyes of your heart may be enlightened (1:18a)*. The heart was regarded as the seat of human emotions, the source of our thoughts, judgments and feelings. Sin has blinded it to the things of God, and only the divine light shed by the Holy Spirit can lighten its darkness and enable it to see clearly. Our natural spiritual blindness means that we are unaware of three things: the hope of our calling, the riches of our glorious inheritance, and the extent of the power of Jesus' resurrection (1:18b–19). We may have an intellectual knowledge of these things, but we need to

convert this 'head knowledge' into a 'heart knowledge' that excites us and moves us to love and action. The only way that this can be done is through prayer.

The enemies of Jesus thought that they could harness the power of death to silence him, but instead God used his death to demonstrate that his power is even greater than that of death and to glorify and exalt him (1:20a; Phil 2:8–11). What a contrast between his power and that of the ancestors, to whom some still pour libations!

Jesus is now seated at the *right hand of the Father*, in a place of honour, power and authority that far exceeds that of all other powers and titles, whether human, demonic or angelic, both present and future (1:20b–21). He has become the ruler of the universe!

Africans believe in the existence of many spirit beings and mysterious spiritual forces and powers, and fear them. But they can take courage from the fact that Christ's authority and power are far greater than that of any spirit being. All such beings are subject to him since God has made him their supreme ruler and sovereign Lord (Phil 2:9–11). They are so low compared to him that they can be said to be *under his feet (1:22a)*.

God has made Christ *head over everything for the church (1:22b)*. Jesus died to save people and call them into his church, and now God has given him all the power that is needed to build his church. Christ's supreme power was at work in the growth and expansion of the young church in the first century despite the hostility it faced and the opposition of human and spiritual authorities and powers. And it is still at work today to protect his church, empower it and ensure its success.

If Christ is the head, then the church is *his body* (1:23a). Individuals who come to faith in Christ join a new community, a new humanity, in which there is fellowship and communion with the Lord and with each other. Christ provides all the resources his body needs to sustain it. He knows how to construct a new humanity out of the one ruined by sin. He quickens that which was dead. He recreates that which was in ruins. He regenerates that which has been deadened by the power of the flesh. He restores that which has been exhausted and impoverished. He nourishes that which has been starved and withered. He pours his life into his church, so that the church becomes *the fullness of him who fills everything in every way* (1:23b). The church itself becomes transformed into his image, so that believers become more like Christ and represent him to the world.

But Christ's redemptive work does not manifest itself only in the formation and filling of his body, the church; it also fills the whole creation. His sustaining and preserving power is for both the church and the world.

2:1–10 Believers' Position: Made Alive with Christ

Paul has described Christ's position (1:20–23), and now he describes the position of those who believe in Christ. Whereas believers were once dead to God as a result of a life of sin (2:1–3), their salvation in Christ has made them alive to God (2:4–10).

2:1–3 Old Condition: Dead to God

Before they came to know Christ, the believers in Ephesus could be described as dead in their sins (2:1) because their lives were controlled by the power of sin. Their

behaviour and attitudes meant that they had as little ability to relate to God as they would have had if they were dead. Their lives were moulded by two forces: *this world* and *the ruler of the kingdom of the air* (2:2). The latter expression describes someone who exerts influence in the atmosphere as well as on earth, and who thus influences the whole world. This ruler is Satan, and it is his 'unholy spirit' that makes people disobedient to God. There is a strong spiritual correlation between disobedience to God and slavery and bondage to Satan. His aim is to make a sinful life seem so natural that when their behaviour is challenged, people will simply reply, 'but that is how the world works!'

Paul stresses that it was not just some of them who had been spiritually dead. Every single believer, whether a Jew or a Gentile, had been among those who were disobedient (2:3a). For proof of this, we need look no further than our former way of life, which was dominated by our sinful nature. We were once quite happy to do whatever it suggested, regardless of what God thought of our actions. At times, Satan or demons may have exerted a direct influence on us, but most of the time we were simply doing what our own sinful nature suggested. It is our own nature that condemns us. We inherited this nature from Adam, who sinned and brought God's judgment on all humanity (2:3b).

2:4–10 New Condition: Alive to God

What a contrast between God's character and ours! While human beings are disobedient and rebellious, God is gracious, merciful and loving (2:4). Instead of punishing our rebellion and disobedience with death, God responds with love, making us alive in Christ (2:5a). No wonder Paul

celebrates the *grace* of God in saving us when we had done nothing to deserve it **(2:5b)**!

God has done three important things for believers: he has made us alive with Christ (2:5a), raised us with him **(2:6a)**, and seated us with him **(2:6b)**. The resurrection of Jesus demonstrated God's power to give life to that which was dead, and he has used that power to bring us to life and give us victory over both physical and spiritual death (see also 1:9). Instead of being under the influence of sin and Satan, we are now under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Believers share not only in Christ's resurrection but also in his authority, power and rule over principalities and powers in the entire universe. We have become co-heirs with Christ! Like Christ, we are victors over sin, Satan, the world systems and death. This fact should give us a profound assurance of security and protection from menacing evil forces.

The reason why God has done these things for believers is to *reveal the incomparable riches of His grace* **(2:7)**. Believers have done nothing to deserve exaltation with Christ. But God has saved and exalted them to demonstrate his love, grace, mercy and kindness towards humanity now and in coming ages. Paul hammers this point home in **2:8a**: Our salvation is not the result of any human effort or thought. It was planned by God the Father, implemented by God the Son, and is applied to us by God the Holy Spirit. All that we have to do is to accept it by *faith*.

We cannot even take credit for that faith, for it too is *the gift of God* **(2:8b)**. We cannot generate faith on our own. It comes to us through hearing the gospel of salvation or the Word of God and responding to it through the power of the Holy Spirit. We receive grace before we are

saved! God does not give us his grace after we have believed; he extends it to us while we are still sinners and in rebellion against him, so that we can believe.

When we achieve something by ourselves, we like to boast about it. Such boasting is a mark of pride, which keeps us from acknowledging our dependence on God. But because God has taken responsibility for all aspects of our salvation, we are left with nothing to boast of **(2:9)**. In fact, we should be ashamed of our hopelessly sinful condition before God's grace reached us. Our salvation is a gift, and like all gifts it is to be received with humble gratitude that overflows in praise and worship.

When we are infected by God's grace, we are transformed into what God intended us to be. We are *his workmanship* because he first created us in his own image (Gen 1:26) and then recreated us to bear his image by doing what God has been doing throughout the ages: *good works* **(2:10)**; see also 2 Cor 5:17). We do not do such works before we are saved, and they are not a precondition for salvation. Rather, they are the fruits of salvation and show our gratitude for the grace we have been given. The more we receive the work of grace, the more fruit the Holy Spirit enables us to bear in terms of good works. These works will bring God glory, honour and praise.

2:11–22 Believers' Position: United in One Body

An African man from a rural village met an evangelist in the city and became a Christian. Going to church for the first time, he was amazed to see someone there from a tribe that his own people despised. He angrily demanded, 'What is this "dog" doing in the church? Don't you realise that this

“pig” has polluted the church? If you knew where he comes from, you would never have admitted him!’ His attitude to a fellow believer was similar to that of Jews towards Gentiles, and vice versa. That is why Paul finds it necessary to speak of the position of both Jews and Gentiles in the church and to remind them that although they had once been separated by religion, culture and race, Jesus Christ has now united them in a new community.

Most of the believers in Ephesus were Gentiles and not Jews. Paul reminds them that the Jews had dismissed them as the *uncircumcised* and had proudly called themselves *the circumcision (2:11a)*. Circumcision was the rite that God had instructed Abraham to perform on every male descendent to secure that child’s place in the nation God had chosen. The Jewish pride in being God’s chosen nation led them to be contemptuous of others, so that the adjective *uncircumcised* was an insult and not merely a reference to a physical state.

Paul knew the dangers posed by such pride and intolerance, so he reminds the Jews that circumcision is a human operation performed by other humans in contrast with the work that God himself does in believers **(2:11b)**. At the same time, he reminds the Gentile believers that before they became believers, they were a) *separate from Christ*, that is, they knew nothing about the promise of the Messiah; b) *excluded from citizenship in Israel*, that is, they had no part in the nation of Israel or in the coming kingdom of God; c) *foreigners to the covenants of the promise*, that is, they had no legal standing in regard to the covenants that God had made with the Jews and his promises to the Jews; and consequently they were d) *without hope and without God (2:12)*. Paul emphasizes

that the Gentiles had nothing to hope for in God as long as they were separated from Christ.

But whereas they had previously been ‘separate’ and ‘foreigners’, who were *far away* from God, now they have been brought *near (2:13)*. They had not gained this new position of privilege by birth or any human ritual, but through the grace of God, expressed in the blood of Christ. His blood had cleansed them of their transgressions and sins and had sealed a new covenant, far superior to the Jewish covenant because it was sealed by God himself, unlike the covenant that was sealed by circumcision done by men.

By bringing together the Jews and the Gentiles, Christ himself has reconciled them to each other, and at the same time has reconciled both of them to God **(2:14)**. He has created a new harmony, just as Isaiah prophesied when he called the coming Messiah ‘the Prince of Peace’ (Isa 9:6).

The *dividing wall* that separated the Jews from the Gentiles was very real. It was a barrier that kept Gentiles from entering the inner parts of the temple in Jerusalem. This was what Jesus Christ destroyed on the cross. In him there is no barrier or dividing wall between the Jews and Gentiles. In fact, in him all human differences, hostility and barriers are resolved. Jesus Christ has a cure for the evils of racism, tribalism and divided humanity.

Just as Jesus Christ abolished the enmity between Jews and Gentiles, so he abolished the Jewish ceremonial law *with its commandments and regulations* that had also been a barrier between them **(2:15a)**. The Mosaic law made strict demands that could not possibly be kept perfectly and emphasized the differences between Jews and Gentiles, but Jesus fulfilled it by

establishing the new covenant by his death on the cross (see Heb 7–10).

In Christ, both Jews and Gentiles are one. He has made them into *one body* in himself (2:15b–16). They have become a new community, the church. What made this possible was the atoning work of Christ on the cross, which destroyed their enmity and brought reconciliation and peace.

Jesus Christ's gospel of peace and reconciliation was preached both to Gentiles *who were far away* and to Jews *who were near* (2:17). Both groups needed to hear the message. The Jews were privileged to have had Jesus preach to them directly, while the Gentiles had received his message through his apostles.

Once again, we have all three persons of the Trinity working together to reconcile Jews and Gentiles to each other and to God: the atoning work of Christ made reconciliation possible, and the Holy Spirit now gives us access to the Father (2:18).

Paul now returns to his starting point in 2:12, reminding the Gentiles that before they became believers they were *foreigners and aliens* and not full citizens of the kingdom of God. Now in Christ, they have not only full rights of citizenship but also the privilege of being *members of God's household* (2:19). They are now brothers and sisters with the older citizens and family members. They can have confidence in this household because it is built on a solid foundation of a) *the prophets* who foretold the coming of the Messiah, b) *the apostles* who proclaimed the gospel of Christ and founded churches, and c) *Christ*, who fulfilled the prophecies and promises of the prophets through his work of redemption and so became the *chief cornerstone* (2:20).

In ancient buildings, the 'cornerstone' was highly valued because it tied the whole

building together. This is precisely what Jesus Christ does for his church, which Paul describes as a new temple (2:21). Jesus Christ is building his church so that it will become *a holy temple*, a dwelling place of God (2:22). In the OT, the temple represented the glory and presence of God; now it is the job of the church to do that. The church becomes God's symbol and testimony of salvation to the world. Individual believers, too, have this responsibility, for they are also referred to as the *temple of God*, because the Holy Spirit lives in them (1 Cor 6:19).

What Is the Church?

In the African world view, unity is strength. The larger the unit, the better. This applies not only to the individual family (traditionally polygamous, so as to increase the number of people in the unit) but also to the clan and to the tribe. Each group traces its origins to a particular hero and is united around certain beliefs and practices. The same is true of the church.

The English word 'church' comes to us from the German kirche and the Scottish kirk, but the word has even older roots in the Aramaic word kenishta and the Greek word kuriakon, both of which mean 'belonging to the Lord'. The church is thus 'the tribe of Jesus'—called out of all tribes and nations but without renouncing those groups. However, it may at times call for practices and beliefs that override those of one's earthly tribe.

In the OT the term used for such a group was qahal ('a people called together by Yahweh') which was translated into Greek as ekklesia ('those called out') and used in the NT to refer to the church. The caller is God, the means of unity is faith in his son Jesus Christ, and the governing constitution is the Bible as read and obeyed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The members are referred to as believers in Christ.

The church is both an organism and an organization. It is an organism in that it is united around the saving work of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit no matter where each member is located. It is an organization in that it gathers around a common purpose and doctrine and acknowledges particular officers as leaders. The organism aspect is more important than the organizational one, but the organization is necessary if the church is to accomplish the Great Commission. The organism aspect was, however, the focus when Jesus said, 'I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not overcome it' (Matt 16:18).

Metaphors used to describe the nature of church include

- The body of Christ. Jesus is the Head (the ultimate leader) who gives the church (as an organism) its life (Eph 1:22–23 and Col 1:18; 2:19).
- A temple/building/house of God. The focus of this metaphor is the unity of the church, for in the construction of a building each of the construction materials has a role to play. This metaphor also emphasizes the ownership of the church. It belongs to God, not to people. Jesus is both its foundation (1 Cor 3:9–17) and the chief cornerstone—the stone that controls the design of the whole building (Eph 2:20, 21). The prophets and apostles are also referred to as foundations in the sense that they were the church's first leaders and the people whom God used as the initial transmitters of its doctrine and practice (see 1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 2:4–8).
- The bride of Christ (Eph 5:31, 32; Rev 19:7; 21:9). Each individual believer is intimately related to Christ from the moment of justification until the marriage ceremony presented in Rev 19:5–9.
- A flock (John 10:16, 27). Through his servants (initially the apostles, but now pastors, priests, or any other title used to designate those dispensing his message),

Jesus gathers the members together, gives them direction, and looks after the needs of each member.

- A vine (John 15). The focus of this metaphor is the believer's need to be 'connected' with Christ if there is to be any nourishment for growth.

Those who belong to the church have been placed on Earth for a mission. Jesus referred to this mission using the terms 'salt' and 'light' (Matt 5:13–16). Just as salt preserves food from rotting, so believers are called upon to stop the world's moral decay. Just as light helps us see our path, so also believers are called to point all people to the true light (John 1:9) who changes lives—creating love where there is hatred, reconciliation where there is hostility, and hope where there is desperation. This is what the church in Africa, and worldwide, is called to do.

Samuel Ngewa

3:1–21 Believers' Position: Equal in the Body

Paul begins this chapter by making it clear to the Gentile believers that the reason for his imprisonment was that the Jews misunderstood his message of unity and equality (**3:1**). He had been arrested because he was incorrectly suspected of having brought Trophimus, a Gentile, into the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 21:29).

He also wanted the Gentile believers to know of the particular mission that he had been given as an apostle, namely to present the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles (**3:2**; Acts 9:15). His job was to tell the Gentiles about God's grace and to reveal what had previously been unknown, namely that Gentiles as well as Jews were to make up the church of Christ (3:6). Paul reminded them that he had previously sent them a brief written statement about how this

mystery, which he here calls *the mystery of Christ*, had been revealed to him, and asks them to read that statement again so that they can understand what he has to reveal (3:3–4). He calls the revelation a ‘mystery’ because it had been kept secret from people of past ages (3:5). The Jews had thought they were to remain separate from the Gentiles, which was why Paul’s association with Gentiles aroused such opposition. But God had revealed his true plan to his *holy apostles and prophets* by the Holy Spirit. The word ‘holy’ emphasizes that the apostles and prophets were set apart for God, and God’s specific revelation to them stresses their unique position as pioneers founding the church.

In 3:6 Paul clearly states the secret that has now been revealed: Gentile believers have been included in God’s universal plan of salvation with all its privileges and blessings and have been made equal with their Jewish counterparts. He had spoken of this in 2:11–22, and now lists the privileges that Gentiles have received, this time emphasizing the equality of Gentiles and Jews in God’s plan by stressing the word ‘together’. They are now a) *heirs* together with the Jews, meaning that they share the same inheritance, b) *members* together of *one body*, in an equal relationship, and c) *sharers* together in the promises of Christ Jesus, receiving the same promises and blessings.

In case some of his readers think he is arrogant because he claims to have received this special revelation, Paul quickly reminds them that he does not claim that this special knowledge has given him power. Rather, it has made him *a servant of this gospel* (3:7). He also acknowledges that he did not deserve the gift of this revelation, but that it was a gift of God’s grace, given and received through God’s

power (3:7; see Acts 9:1–15). This rules out any personal ambition or any personal qualification.

Paul does not even consider himself worthy to have been called to be God’s servant. He considered himself a nobody whom God had amazingly called to have the privilege of preaching Christ (3:8a). God’s call, a humble recognition of God’s grace, and the blessing of God’s power are the prerequisites for getting involved in service for Christ. So is an appreciation of the blessings, wealth and gifts to be obtained in Christ, which are beyond human imagination (3:8b), although Paul told us of some of them in the first three chapters of this letter

Paul’s calling was not only to preach the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles, but also to explain the mystery of God’s plan in such a way that it could be understood (3:9). He reminds his readers that this plan had been in God’s mind even before the world was created (1:3–4). God kept it hidden for so long because he wanted the church to be the instrument that reveals it. The church may not be highly esteemed by others, but God has chosen it to display the beauty of his wisdom to the rulers of this age (3:10). The church, as the centrepiece of God’s plan of salvation, reflects the wisdom of God. It came into being through Christ’s work of redemption on the cross, as God had planned. This work means that believers, who were formerly fearful strangers (2:12, 19), can now approach God with *freedom and confidence* (3:12). They need no longer fear him as a judge or as a king, but can come with a confidence that is not human self-confidence but is rooted in the knowledge of being in Christ and having faith in him.

Suspecting that his being a prisoner may dampen his readers’ spirits, Paul urges

them not to be discouraged by his suffering, which is normal for all believers (**3:13**; see also Phil 1:29). His suffering is to be expected because others will refuse to believe the glorious revelation God has given him for them.

His reflection on the amazing mystery of the equality of believing Jews and Gentiles in Christ prompts Paul to burst into prayer that they may have strength and power through the Holy Spirit, that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith, and that they may be granted the knowledge and fullness of God. His kneeling posture as he prays is a sign of great reverence, submission and adoration, for Jews normally prayed standing (**3:14**). The one before whom he kneels is *the Father*, an expression that indicates Paul's intimate relationship with God is grounded in the confidence he spoke of in 3:12. He is a member of God's family, as also are the Jews and Gentiles who make up the church (2:19). God's *whole family* in heaven and on earth consists of all who name him as their Lord (**3:15**).

Paul begins his request by acknowledging the bounty of God's grace and riches, some of which he had discussed in chapters 1 and 2. There he spoke of the power of God (1:19–20), and now he prays that the believers will be strengthened through the power of the Holy Spirit. He is not thinking of physical strength, but of strength of character and inner strength that comes as the Holy Spirit penetrates into the depth of their hearts, minds and wills (**3:16–17a**), so that it can be said that Christ lives within them. But Christ's residence there is sustained by *faith*. They received Jesus into their hearts by faith when they were saved, and now they must retain his presence in their lives by the

same faith, for 'the righteous will live by faith' (Rom 1:17).

Having first prayed that the believers will have power to have Christ governing their lives, Paul next prays that they will have power to know *the love of Christ* (**3:17b–18**). He speaks of love for Christ as being like a tree that has deep roots or like a building with a firm foundation. Such deep *rooted and established* love will empower them to comprehend the love of Christ.

Paul tries to explain the extent of Christ's love by using physical measurements (3:18) but he knows that these examples are inadequate since Christ's love is so wide that it covers the whole world and even beyond. It is so long that it has no limits; it is eternal. It is so high that there is no height that it cannot reach and even exceed. It is so deep that it can reach right down to hell to rescue those held in bondage to Satan. Paul prays that the believers will experience this type of boundless love both as individuals and as a community.

Paul prays that believers will understand this love of Christ even though it is beyond human knowledge (**3:19**), and that this understanding will lead to spiritual growth and maturity in Christ. The aim is not that we are to become gods, but that our character is to become like that of Christ.

The first half of Ephesians concludes with a song of praise to God that acknowledges his sovereignty over the entire universe and the church (**3:20–21**). God has the will and the power to do far more than the believers ask or expect from him, and that power is already at work within the lives of the believers.

Paul has been explaining God's eternal plan of salvation, and here he states the

purpose of the plan: to bring glory and honour to God. God's glory is made manifest in the church as those who have experienced salvation live together in unity, serve together in harmony and worship God together without discrimination. He concludes his prayer with an *Amen*, which simply means 'may it be so'.

4:1–6:20 Christlike Living

In the second half of his letter, Paul deals with the practical implications of what he has been teaching in the first half. He exhorts the believers to live in a way that fulfils the purpose for which they were called. They are to make every effort to live in unity, love and peace both in the world and at home. However, they are also to be prepared to face spiritual conflict.

4:1–6 Saved to Walk in Unity

Paul has been speaking of the amazing power of God (3:20)—but he himself is still a prisoner! Instead of demanding his freedom, he uses his status as one who suffers for the Lord to add weight to his call to the Christians in Ephesus to live a life that will glorify the Lord (4:1). This is what they were called to do, as was explained in chapters 1–3. What we believe must manifest itself in the way we live.

The characteristics that the believers are to display include humility, not because we are inferior to other people but because we do not regard ourselves as better than others. Christ demonstrated that humility is the basis of service, honour, respect and love for others. We are also to be *gentle*, that is, considerate of others and not seeking to dominate them. This calls for patience to restrain the desire to seek revenge or to escape when others annoy us.

Our forbearance is what enables us to put up with the attitudes, manners and faults of others (4:2). All of these virtues make for unity and love among believers, as Paul reminds them (4:3).

The believers' unity is based on the Trinity. The Holy *Spirit* is the one who has called both Jews and Gentiles into the *one body* of Christ, the church, and has given them all a shared *hope* in Christ (4:4; see also 1:13–14). Christ is the Head of the church and its only *Lord* and Master, and the believers are also united by their shared *faith* in him (4:5). This faith has led them to identify with his death and resurrection by being baptized as a physical sign that they are part of the one body of Christ. Ultimately, however, our unity and oneness are rooted in the sovereignty of God, who is the only creator of the entire universe and thus has absolute authority over all of creation (4:6).

4:7–16 Gifted to Operate in Diversity

Unity does not mean uniformity. Christ gives different spiritual gifts to individuals. Because these are gifts, they cannot be earned (4:7). Paul quotes Psalm 68:18, implying that these gifts are like the rewards that a victorious general distributes to his supporters, who may not even have been present at the battle (4:8). They are a proof of Christ's victory over his enemies.

Victory implies a battle, and so in an aside Paul stresses that Jesus could not have been victorious over Satan, sin, death and the world if he had not been prepared to endure humiliation, death and the cross (4:9). The reference to the *lower, earthly regions* implies that Jesus descended as far as hell (see also 1 Pet 3:19–20, 4:6; Matt 27:52–53). Having descended so low, it is appropriate that he be exalted higher than

all others, as the resurrected Lord of the universe (**4:10**; see also 1:20–23).

Paul lists some of the spiritual gifts that have been given for leadership in the church (**4:11**). *Apostles and prophets* were mentioned in 2:20 as laying the foundation for God's church. *Evangelists* travel carrying the message of the gospel of Christ to places it has not reached. *Pastors and teachers* work in local churches, where one person is sometimes both a pastor and a teacher. This cluster of five gifts is often referred to as the fivefold ministry of the church. It is basic and fundamental to the planting and growth of the church. All other gifts are supportive.

Spiritual gifts are given to church leaders for the particular purpose of equipping other believers for works of service that will build up the church until it is mature and complete in Christ (**4:12–13**). Thus spiritual gifts are not given for the benefit of the leaders but are intended to be used to help the church to grow physically and spiritually until it reaches maturity.

The path to maturity involves all the believers being united in their faith and having a common *knowledge of the Son of God*. To achieve this, leaders must nurture and protect the church and teach sound doctrine and faith. The ultimate goal is to have all members and the church as a whole become complete in Christ.

Lack of maturity leads to stunted growth, with believers remaining like infants, dependent on others and open to every influence (**4:14**). A lack of sound doctrine and teaching will result in a fragmented church with a weak faith and inadequate knowledge of Christ. Such a church is vulnerable to the influence of false teachers. Immature Christians accept whatever they are told by teachers who

may be motivated by greed or who rely on purely human wisdom. With no stable rock to stand on, weak Christians are tossed around and become unstable.

The mature, however, have grown in their faith and knowledge of Christ and see all things from Christ's perspective. Thus unlike the false teachers they speak *the truth*, and because they are like Christ, they speak it *in love* (**4:15**). The best commentary on what it means to speak 'the truth in love' is found in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. When we practise and speak the truth, we are in a process of growing up into Christ *who is the Head of the body* (church). Our ultimate goal must be to attain Christlikeness in all things.

As the head of the church, Jesus Christ connects all the parts of the body together, helps the body to grow, helps it to build itself up in love, and enables each part of the body to do its work. He is the one who enables the church to grow into maturity, united in love and service (**4:16**).

Prophets and Apostles

The word 'prophet' comes from the Greek *prophētēs*, which means 'one who speaks forth' or who 'speaks for' someone. It refers to someone whom God clothes with his authority and his power to communicate his will to people and to teach them (Jer 1:9–10). The word 'apostle' comes from the Greek *apostolos*, meaning 'one who is sent'. An apostle is an ambassador for Christ (2 Cor 5:20). Apostles and prophets are often mentioned together in the nt (Luke 11:49; 2 Pet 3:2; Rev 18:20).

Many Africans have been hailed as prophets or apostles or have claimed these titles for themselves. Among the best known are the nineteenth-century Xhosa prophets Ntsikana and Molageni in South Africa. Another was William Wade Harris, who was born in Liberia and preached in the area around the Gulf of

Guinea, especially in Ivory Coast. His message emphasized abandonment of fetishes and idols, and his fame gave concern to French colonial authorities.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Simon Kimbangu was a prophet in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo. Despite persecution by the Belgian colonial authorities, the Kimbanguist church developed into a great religious movement in Central Africa. In 1947 Samuel Oschoffa founded the Celestial Church of Christ in Dahomey, now known as the Republic of Benin.

Today, numerous Africans are following such illustrious predecessors and proclaiming themselves prophets or apostles and creating their own religious movements.

The emergence of African prophets and apostles allowed for the proclamation of the equality of blacks and whites in faith and ministry (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). It also established the principle of the separation of the Christian faith from all colonial political connections. These positive effects justify the reputation these men enjoy.

However, there are also some more negative aspects associated with the emergence of African prophets and apostles. Many of them lack biblical and theological training and rely solely on their own gifts. But the growth of the church depends on the exercise of a variety of complementary gifts. An apostle or prophet cannot go it alone without the help of teachers (Eph 4:11–14). Those who want to preach the word of God must therefore study it seriously or surround themselves with those who have done so.

Despite their claim to be promoting mainstream Christianity, many African prophets and apostles do not take the Bible as the basis for their faith and conduct. Instead their teaching is based on direct revelation that they receive from God for their prophetic and messianic mission. They regard these teachings as additions to the Bible. However, the Bible warns against making the slightest addition to the word (Rev 22:18–19).

Many African prophets and apostles also indulge in a personality cult. They cloak the events of their lives, including the circumstances of their call, in mystery, sometimes citing biblical allusions to the Messiah. They give the impression that they have come down from heaven like Jesus or that they have as much power as he does. Some even claim to be Christ's successors or even another Christ. Such claims make them objects of worship. Sadly, many of them gain almost total control of the minds of their followers. The Bible warns us against such people (Matt 24:11, 24; Jude 4–16).

By contrast, the prophets and apostles in the Bible are no different from other human beings. Their family origins are often clearly stated (Isa 1:1; Jer 1:1). They do not hesitate to admit their own weaknesses and they refuse all worship (Jer 1:6; Acts 14:13–15). Those who wish to announce the word of God should not seek titles of honour but should be servants of all (Matt 23:8–12).

While the negative side to the African prophets and apostles is a sad reality, we should not forget to express our gratitude to God for the true prophets and apostles who have exercised and continue to exercise an honourable ministry to the glory of God. This group includes men such as Samuel Ajayi Crowther of Nigeria, who is considered to be truly a father of the African church.

Adama Ouedraogo

4:17–22 Put Off the Old Life

To achieve the goal of becoming united and like Christ, believers have to get rid of the things that belong to their old life. They must abandon the evil practices of their former Gentile life that was aimless and meaningless (**4:17**). They had been wandering in the dark, separated from the life of God by their ignorance (**4:18**).

However, this was not innocent ignorance but was the result of their hardening their

hearts against God, which had resulted in their becoming insensitive to God's light, truth and decency. Consequently they had developed an appetite for lust, sensuality and all kinds of immorality (4:19; see also Rom 1:24–28).

What a contrast with the holy life of Jesus! (4:20–21). They had come to know Christ as Saviour, and now they needed to learn to live life the way he taught. Believers need to be taught to follow the way of Jesus if they are to be truly his followers or disciples. It is like putting on new clothes. They must *put off* the garment of the old life so that they are ready to *put on* the new garment of Christ (4:24). But while clothing affects only our outward appearance, what Paul is calling for is a far deeper transformation of the inner person.

4:23–32 Put On the New Life

Our thoughts, attitudes and deeds are controlled by our minds, and thus it is important that a new *mind* created in Christ Jesus replaces the deceitful *old mind* that corrupted us (4:23; see also Rom 12:2). However, we do not achieve this new self simply by trying hard to be different. It is 'a new creation' as a result of the work of Christ on the cross (4:24; 2 Cor 5:17). This new self is to be like God in *true righteousness and holiness*. This was our original position before the fall in the Garden of Eden, and is the goal Paul held up in 4:13.

Paul next discusses specific aspects of the old self that must be 'put off' so that a new self can be 'put on' (4:25–31). The first thing to be put off is *falsehood* or lying, which must be replaced by *speaking truthfully* to one's neighbours (see Ps 15:2–3). If the family of believers is truly united, they must be able to trust one another.

Anger is sometimes justified, but brooding on anger and being preoccupied by it is sinful. It can easily provide a *foothold for the devil* to use to promote evil. That is why it should not be allowed to linger overnight (4:26–27).

Stealing involves taking away from others to benefit oneself. That is why Paul condemns it and calls instead for gainful labour that shares with others, rather than cheating them (4:28). And in the same way as our work should help others, so should our speech. Gossip and slander must be replaced by speech that is *helpful for building others up* (4:29).

The Holy Spirit does the work of spiritual transformation or change in us, leading us to put off the thoughts and deeds of the old self and put on those of the new self. When we act in a way that shows we are not willing to put off the old self, the Holy Spirit is grieved and disappointed. Even though the Spirit has sealed us for the day of redemption, that redemption has still to be consummated (4:30). In the intervening period, we are not to do anything that will grieve the Spirit (4:31). Consequently we must avoid bitterness, rage, anger and malice that will lead to such things as brawling, slander and other forms of unwholesome talk and behaviour. These vices must be replaced by the virtues of kindness, compassion and forgiveness (4:32). Because they have been forgiven by God, believers are to forgive one another.

5:1–7 Imitate God

True Christian fellowship is rooted in this example of Christ, and so we are to take the behaviour of Jesus Christ as our model. Rather than being bitter, he freely forgave us for the wrong things we had done (4:32).

His kindness, compassion and love led him to sacrifice himself for others (5:2).

We should imitate God's example in the same way that a young child responds to a parent's love by imitating the parent (5:1). God has showered his love upon the believers through Christ's love and forgiveness, and we should respond by living a Christlike life of love and sacrifice.

We should imitate God not only in his love, but also in his holiness (1 Pet 1:15–16). Thus believers cannot indulge in *sexual immorality, impurity and greed* (5:3). We should also avoid these vices in our talk, and thus should not be guilty of *obscenity, foolish talk or coarse jokes* (5:4). The transformation of our hearts and minds should lead us rather to talk of our gratitude to God and to others.

In fact, Paul warns, immorality, impurity and greed are a sign that one is still practising idolatry, giving the first place in one's life to something other than God. Thus people who practise these things do not belong in the kingdom of Christ (5:5). He is not speaking of believers who fall into sin and repent of it, but of those who continually practise these vices.

God's standards cannot be replaced by permissive teachings. Those who teach otherwise are deceivers, and both they and those who accept their false teachings will be subject to God's wrath (5:6–7).

5:8–14 Walk as Children of Light

Paul had earlier told the believers to imitate God 'like dearly loved children' (5:1) and now he returns to that image, reminding the Gentile believers that they have become *the children of light*. God is holy and God is also light (1 John 1:5). The light of God that is in the believers should show in their *goodness, righteousness and truth*,

which contrast with the evil deeds that had once dominated their lives (5:8–9). Rather than simply acting impulsively, they should test their behaviour to check that what they are doing *pleases the Lord* (5:10). Just as light shows what something really looks like, so the believers who are children of light should *expose deeds of darkness* (5:11). Such deeds are *fruitless*, meaning that they serve no purpose.

It is important to note that it is the light of Jesus that exposes sin for what it is, not our conversation or talk about sin. Thus what is shameful and done secretly should not be a topic for discussion and gossip (5:12).

Paul repeats that light is what enables people to see things clearly and to recognize evil for what it is (5:13–14a). To drive the point home, he cites what may have been an early hymn associated with Easter or baptism (5:14b). The hymn calls those who are asleep in death and darkness to wake up. Christ will raise them from the dead and shine his light upon them. This hymn may have been sung when the Ephesian believers were baptized, and if so Paul is reminding them that at their baptism they turned their back on the world with all its darkness, desires and attractions and embraced Christ who now shines on them.

5:15–20 Live Wisely

If we are to live lives of holiness and light, we must think carefully about our conduct and behaviour (5:15). The evil in society affords us opportunities to shine as lights for our Lord (5:16). We need to learn to recognize these opportunities that God gives us to witness to him and must seek to understand God's will in all situations and circumstances (5:17).

Drunkenness does not make for wisdom and discernment. It also often leads to a careless and aimless life dominated by wild living, squandering of money and resources, and an excessive appetite for pleasures. Thus believers should avoid it. Instead of being under the influence of alcohol, believers are to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit (5:18).

The filling with the Holy Spirit can even be mistaken for drunkenness at times (see Acts 2:13). But where drunkenness leads to raucous singing and shouting, being filled with the Holy Spirit leads to praise expressed in *psalms, hymns and spiritual songs* (5:19). The instruction to *make music* implies that a variety of musical instruments and rhythms can be used. God is not concerned with the type of music but with its content, which is worship, thanksgiving and praise to God and Jesus Christ. The ultimate goal of the Spirit is to bring honour to God and Jesus Christ, and that is why *always giving thanks* is one of the signs that we are filled with the Holy Spirit (5:20). Whatever happens to us, we can still give thanks for God's love and mercy that have given us salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Our songs and thanksgiving are directed to God the Father *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* because he is the only one through whom we can come to God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

5:21–6:9 Live Responsibly

Submission and obedience to Christ should govern all our relationships and responsibilities at home and at work. A consequence of this is that we are also to submit to one another, that is, to show respect for each other (5:21; see also John 13:13–15).

5:22–33 In marriage

The biblical model for marriage presented here applies to marriages across all cultures and ages, including African marriages.

A wife is told to *submit* to her husband because of her reverence for Christ (5:22). Her submission signals her acceptance of God's institutional order in the family and the church. God has made the husband the head of a family, just as Jesus Christ is the Head of the church (5:23). She is to follow the example set by the church (5:24). The church's submission to Christ is total, and wives must imitate this as they submit to their husbands *in everything*.

This divine arrangement does not imply that women are in any way inferior to men or men superior to women. Both wives and husbands have been assigned roles in the home and in the church. In 1 Corinthians 11:12, Paul explains the hierarchy: God is the head of Christ (though both are essentially equal as we saw earlier in 1:3), Christ is the head of the man, and the man is the head of the woman.

If wives are to model their behaviour on the relationship between the church and Christ, then husbands are to model their behaviour on the way Christ loved the church and demonstrated his love by dying for it on the cross (5:25). Such divine love goes far beyond sexual love or even friendship love. It sacrifices itself for the one it loves.

The reason why Christ sacrifices himself for the church is so that she can become pure and holy, *without stain, or wrinkle, or any other blemish* (5:27) and be fit to be his bride. Coming out of a sinful world, the church needs cleansing by *washing with water through the word* (5:26). Baptism alone is not enough, but must be accompanied by the preaching and

profession of the gospel of Christ. While a husband cannot be like Christ and save his wife from sin, he can love her sacrificially despite her imperfections, just as Christ did the church, and he can honour and teach the gospel in his home so that the wife becomes more Christlike through her husband's love.

Not only are husbands to love their wives like Christ does, but they are also to love them and treat them with the same care that they would their own bodies (5:28–29). Christ feeds and cares for his church because *we are members of his body* (5:30), and a husband is to show the same care for his wife.

Wives are neither possessions nor totally separate individuals. Rather, marriage brings about a *union* between a husband and a wife, who leave all other relationships and become *one flesh* (5:31; Gen 2:24). The husband and the wife are no longer two, but one. What exactly this means was a mystery until it was explained in the relationship between Christ and the church. Marriage, then, can fully be understood in the light of what Christ does and is to the church and what the church does and is to Christ.

African husbands and wives need to dig deeper into this revealed mystery in Christ and use it as a model for their relationship. Believers should not appeal to traditions or customs as the basis for their relationship and roles in the family and marriage, but to Christ's example. We are to place a higher value on our husbands and wives than we may have in the past as we work towards a complementary relationship characterized by love and respect.

6:1–4 *In the family*

Like the husband-wife relationship, the parent-child relationship is rooted in love and reverence for Christ. All members of the family must recognize the Lordship of Christ.

Children are commanded to obey their parents, meaning both fathers and mothers (6:1). They are also to *honour* them, that is, to show them respect, as instructed in the Ten Commandments (6:2; Deut 5:16). Such behaviour comes with a promise that the child will do well and enjoy a long life (6:3). There is a reward for a child who obeys and honours his or her parents.

However, parents are not to make unreasonable demands of their children; hence the command not to *exasperate* them (6:4). Children who are exasperated by such demands may rebel, and rebellion leads to godlessness. A child who has experienced this is very difficult to win back to the Lord. Thus *fathers*, a term used here as representative of both parents, are to be tenderhearted and considerate in dealing with their children. Their primary task is to train their children in righteousness and to exercise discipline. They must be concerned not just for their children's physical health, but also that they grow into mature people in the home and in the church.

6:5–9 *At work*

Although Paul's instructions are directed to slaves and their owners, the underlying principles still apply to any relationship in which one person is working for another. He sees all service or work as having a divine meaning and purpose, so that it is possible to say, 'whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord, giving thanks to God the Father through him' (Col 3:17).

Slaves are commanded to obey their earthly masters and to serve them wholeheartedly. They must do this with *respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart (6:5)*. They are to respect them just as wives respect their husbands, not necessarily because they deserve it but as a sign of their respect for and obedience to Christ. It is fear of God that must be the spur to obedience, not fear of a human master. If they are *doing the will of God from your heart*, their service will be sincere. They will not be attempting to win favour, or working only when their work will be noticed (6:6). They will know that their true master is the Lord and that his eye is always on them, and will serve their human masters wholeheartedly (6:7).

The real reward for such service will not come from earthly masters but from their heavenly Lord (6:8). All those who do good will receive a rich reward, regardless of their social status. The slaves and the free have equal standing before the Lord.

This equality also has implications for masters (or employers today). Their attitude towards those who work for them must be governed by their own loyalty to Christ. Just as they are masters over the slaves, so the Lord is a master over them (6:9). Like their master in heaven, they are to be loving, not threatening and cruel. They must treat their slaves as God has treated them.

God is the judge for both the free and the slave, and he will not favour one group over the other. He will judge each person by how they have obeyed him and how this has been revealed in their attitudes to and treatment of others. Christ gives worth and dignity to every human being, so that 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28). The logical result of

adopting such a Christlike attitude is the abolition of slavery.

6:10–20 Into Battle: The Armour of God

Paul concludes his instructions by reminding the believers that they are engaged in a war, and need both power and armour to protect them. The source of their power is the Lord, whose *mighty power* will enable them to resist the enemy (6:10; see 1:19–20).

God has also provided *the full armour* the believers need, but before they can use it effectively, they need to put it on. Without it they will not be able to stand firm and oppose *the devil's schemes (6:11)*. They need this spiritual armour because they are not going into a physical battle but a spiritual one, and because their enemies are many, powerful, evil and everywhere. The enemy is described as *rulers*, or cosmic powers in the universe; *authorities*, or demonic forces that exercise limited authority in opposition to God; *the powers of this dark world*; and *spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (6:12)*. These enemies are the spiritual forces behind the world systems that oppose God. It is important that believers recognize the spiritual nature of their opponents and thus understand the need to use spiritual weapons to fight them.

Believers will not know when or where the next assault will come, and so they need to have their armour on before the battle starts (6:13). Then they will be able *to stand your ground*, alert, fearless and resolute. Because the battle is fierce and may be prolonged, it is important that they persevere and are not swept away or pushed aside.

God has provided both what we need for our protection (armour) and what we need for our attack (a weapon). Paul describes what God has supplied in terms of the equipment of a Roman soldier.

First, he speaks of the things the soldier of Christ is to put on and wear:

- *The belt of truth (6:14a)*. A belt tied up one's robes, so that they did not get in the way, and was what one tied one's sword to. Wearing a belt thus signals that one is ready for action. Knowledge of the truth (that is, of Jesus Christ, the gospel, and the Bible) prepares us for the battle that lies ahead.
- *The breastplate of righteousness (6:14b)*. The breastplate protected the heart and the vital organs. Our integrity and character need to be safe from attack by the enemy. But self-righteousness offers no protection. We need the official breastplate that Christ gives when he supplies us with his righteousness.
- *The sandals of the gospel of peace (6:15)*. With our shoes on, we are ready to move out. We must be prepared to walk long distances in order to spread the good news of the gospel of Christ that brings ultimate peace to the world (Luke 2:14; Rom 10:15).

Next, Paul speaks of the things the soldier of Christ is to take up and carry:

- *The shield of faith (6:16)*. The shield was used to stop things like *flaming arrows* hurled by the enemy. If our faith is firmly rooted in Christ, there is nothing the enemy can do to us as our strong faith will block all his assaults. Our faith is anchored in the foundational truths of our salvation (Rom 10:9–13).
- *The helmet of salvation (6:17a)*. The helmet protected a soldier's head. Our

salvation means the forgiveness of our sins, reconciliation with God, and the gift of grace and eternal life. This salvation protects us and gives us a sure hope of final deliverance from this body of sin and from this wicked world.

- *The sword of the Spirit (6:17b)*. The only offensive weapon that a believer carries is the word of God—and that weapon has more than enough power to wound and defeat the enemy.

Finally, as the climax of their preparation, those who are preparing for spiritual warfare must *pray in the Spirit (6:18)*, not only for their own protection but for *all the saints*, for the battle is one we fight together. Not only that, but the prayers must not be routine mumblings, for the soldier of Christ is to be alert while praying. Soldiers receive their discipline through drills and exercises, but soldiers of Christ derive strength, power and discipline through prayers and supplications.

Praying in the Spirit means far more than praying in tongues. It means praying in communion with the Holy Spirit, that is, in the presence of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26–27; 1 Cor 2:6–16). Our wisdom and power come from the Holy Spirit, and to obtain them we must be in constant communion with him, which is why we are told to pray *on all occasions* and all the time (1 Thess 5:17).

Paul requests that the believers pray for him. They might suspect that such a great leader does not need prayer and does not know fear, but Paul knows otherwise and specifically asks them to pray that he may know what to say and will have courage to present the gospel of Christ (6:19–20). Paul knows that spiritual battles are won only through prayer. If even the Apostle Paul

needed prayer, how much more do our church leaders today!

6:21–24 Conclusion

Tychicus was a true servant of the Lord, whom Paul can refer to as a *dear brother and faithful servant*. It seems that he was entrusted with delivering the letters to the churches in Colosse and Ephesus and giving them all the news about Paul (6:21; see also Col 4:7–8). If the churches were worried about Paul's being in prison or other matters, Tychicus would encourage them with his reports on the progress of the gospel.

Paul ends the letter with a blessing that wishes the Ephesians peace, love, faith and grace. These virtues, which have been discussed throughout this letter, should characterize the life of a Christian community.

Yusufu Turaki

Further Reading

Keener, C. S. *The IVP Biblical Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993.

Wood, A.S. *Ephesians*. EBC. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978.¹

¹ Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi, Kenya; Grand Rapids, MI: WordAlive Publishers; Zondervan, 2006), 1451–1464.