Paul ends his exhortation with general encouragement to persist *in doing good* (**6:9**). In light of the promise that we will reap eternal life, he urges the Galatians not to *become weary* or *give up*, even in the face of opposition, but to endure faithfully to the end. He may have been reminding himself of this, as he thinks about his frustrating labours on behalf of the Galatian believers.

Christians are called to do good to all people, regardless of their culture, nation or sex, but are to be particularly attuned to the needs of their fellow believers (**6:10**).

6:11-18 Final Exhortation

Paul usually ends his letters with a general greeting and good wishes to various individuals. The absence of such friendly words in this letter corresponds to the absence of a thanksgiving in the letter's opening. Both are signs of a strained relationship.

Paul ends this letter with a postscript written in his own hand (**6:11**). This was common practice at the time. A scribe would write out the body of the text, and the sender would add a final word of greeting or a summary. Paul writes in *large letters*, either because he may have had problems with his eyesight (see 4:15) or because he was writing in a bold hand to make sure his readers paid attention to his closing words. The latter is more likely given that his postscript is far more than just a sign-off; it is carefully crafted to drive home the central message of the letter.

He begins the postscript with a final attack on the agitators. Paul insists that they are urging the Galatians to be circumcised only in order to make themselves look good and enhance their own standing. The better they look, the less likely they are to be persecuted by the people who have been persecuting Paul or by zealous Jews resisting Jewish acculturation to the Greco-Roman world (**6:12**). By challenging Paul's teaching, the agitators hope to distance themselves from him and the teaching that Gentile Christians have equal standing with Jews even if they do not observe the Jewish law.

Paul claims that the agitators themselves do not actually obey the law (**6:13**). It seems that they rely on Jewish practices rather than on God, and have become full of pride. Only those who recognise that the law teaches that faith is the basis of our relationship to God obey the law. The agitators simply want to be able to boast about having persuaded the Galatians to be circumcised.

By contrast, the only thing Paul wants to boast about is *the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*, which had so transformed him that he can now say, *the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world* (**6:14**; see also 1 Cor 2:2).

Neither belonging to the Jewish nation (being circumcised) nor being a Gentile (uncircumcised) matters. Nationalism is no longer important. What is important is that God had formed a new people, the church, and that this new people constitute an entirely *new creation* (**6:15**). In light of this, pressing for circumcision makes no sense. Nor do any of the other human criteria that are used to include or exclude others, including sex, caste and class.

Having begun the letter with a curse on those who pervert the gospel (1:8-9), Paul ends it with a blessing. He wants the Galatians to experience *peace and mercy*, qualities that flow from God's blessing and grace (**6:16a**).

Paul does not know how his letter will be received, and so he formulates his blessings carefully. It is not pronounced on the Galatian churches as a whole, but specifically on those who will *follow this rule* and renounce circumcision and continue to live as Gentiles under the direction of the Spirit. He describes such people as *the Israel of God* (**6:16b**; see also 4:26). This way of referring to those who constitute the family of believers does not occur anywhere else in Paul's letters.

In demonstration of his commitment to the truth of his message, Paul points to the scars on his own body. These scars are like signs of ownership, such as were branded on slaves and cattle. They are the result of the persecution he has endured for Christ's sake (**6:17**; 1 Cor 4:11; 2 Cor 4:10-11; 6:5, 9; 11:24-25). Unlike the agitators who seek to dodge persecution (6:12), Paul had undergone it gladly and repeatedly for the sake of the gospel. Therefore, the Galatians should listen to him and not to a group who have not paid the price of following a crucified Lord.

After all the distress and anger in this letter, Paul pronounces a simple benediction on the readers (**6:18**). It is his heartfelt desire that the grace of God be their abiding portion. And uniquely among all of Paul's epistles, he ends with a reminder of his love for them, calling them his *brothers and sisters*. How could the Galatians fail to respond in obedience to the persuasive and ultimately tender appeal found in this letter?

Finny Philip

Further Reading

F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*. NIGTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.

Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2003.

John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*. BST. Downers Grove: IVP, 1993.

EPHESIANS

The cosmopolitan port city of Ephesus was a major trading centre for the richest province of the Roman Empire. It was also the site of the Temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and derived considerable revenue from pilgrims visiting that temple. Others came to visit the famous theatre, which could seat 24,000 spectators. Just as that theatre was the stage for numerous power games and conflicts, so the city's religious atmosphere provided an arena for a "power encounter" between religious claims to truth and supernatural power.

The city's strategic position may have been what prompted Paul to stay there for more than two years in the course of his third missionary journey (Acts 19:1, 10). In all likelihood he stayed with Aquila and Priscilla while his associates took the gospel to nearby cities such as Hierapolis, Laodicea and Colossae. Later, Luke records Paul's emotional parting with the elders of the church in Ephesus when he was on his final journey to Jerusalem (Acts 20:17-36).

Authorship, Date and Recipients

It has long been accepted that Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison in Rome, after writing his letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Some modern scholars dispute Paul's authorship, claiming that this letter gives no indication the author knew his readers and their particular problems (see 1:15; 3:2; 4:21), which is strange as Paul had lived in Ephesus for two years. However, it is worth noting that some early manuscripts do not include the word "Ephesians" in 1:1. It is thus likely that this was actually a circular letter, not addressed to one specific church (like the letters to the Corinthians) but intended to be copied and circulated among a group of churches in the region, some of which were not personally known to Paul.

Themes

In this letter, Paul celebrates the formation of the church as part of the unfolding of God's sovereign plan of salvation from eternity to eternity, and is executed decisively in the mission of the Messiah. Its goal is to integrate the entire creation with Christ as its hub or midpoint, and the church is God's new humanity that participates in this megaplan.

The church is formed to reveal God's wisdom, grace, love and power as it is shaped into the image of Christ, its creator. This new social entity is expected to be the light as it demonstrates a new humanity that shares God's moral fibre and restructures human connections through a set of radical moral standards and loving social integration.

The church is to demonstrate loving acceptance and humble service of each other, transcending the hierarchies of age, gender, class and ethnicity. As the bearer of love and truth, its mandate is to engage in spiritually empowered resistance to evil, combating all challenges to the truth of God in the power of the Spirit and prayer.

In the OT, the creator God chose Abraham and his descendants as his means to bless the whole world. They were to reveal God's character by reflecting the invisible God in their transformed relationships and virtues, and so attract those in darkness to the light of God.

However Israel failed to fulfil its destiny, bringing the plan of God into disrepute. In consequence the nation endured the shame of being subject to Assyria, Babylonia, Greece and Rome. People longed for the day when their legitimate king, the son of David, would come as the Messiah, to change the situation. As the true representative of God's kingdom with a human face (the Son of Man) he would receive kingship and authority to vindicate the oppressed. His reign of righteousness would be like the resurrection of the dead, when God's life-giving Spirit would blow over a valley of dead bones to infuse new life in a new covenant and new order of existence.

In Ephesians Paul explains how Christ has fulfilled this hope. He presents Jesus as the crucified and risen Messiah of Israel in whom God's eternal plan is centred. The hope of a messianic integration of all things in heaven and earth is illustrated in the church, the body of Christ. Those who believe in God's plan of salvation, which is the gospel, are raised from the dead and woven into the destiny of the crucified and risen Messiah. The scattered and diverse human families are made one new family that has God as its father; a body that has Christ as its head; a temple, which is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ as the chief cornerstone in which God makes his permanent residence in the person of the Holy Spirit. As a body it grows into the maturity of Christ, in knowledge, love, unity and interdependence.

The church is being progressively transformed and shaped into the image of God. Its transcultural unity bears testimony to the wisdom, plan, power, grace and love of God that is immeasurably beyond human comprehension. This new community indwelt and directed by the Spirit is called to prayerful mission and witness to the truth as it is pitted against dark spiritual forces. God's hidden wisdom, which is now revealed through the gospel, has outsmarted the dark powers, which will ultimately be

subdued by the Messiah. The power of God that worked in the Messiah is currently active in the church to reproduce his life and victory in the community that is created by faith in the gospel.

Relevance to South Asia

The gospel of a sovereign God who has a plan to save humanity that is fragmented by religion, ethnicity, gender, wealth and ideology has tremendous relevance for South Asia today. The person of Jesus as the agent and integration point of that plan is indispensable for the salvation of South Asia from an increasing culture of stratification, hatred and culture conflicts.

The vision of one united, intercultural social entity, led by God's ideal, model, example and very essence, Jesus the Son of God, challenges the church to demonstrate this reality. But what the church currently reflects is only a distorted image. We need to come back to God's healing influence through the shed blood of the Messiah. So let us read this letter with humility and prayer, allowing the Spirit to whisper into our ears and impart into our essential beings God's tremendous and unlimited power, facilitating demonstrable changes in our values, virtue, attitudes, action and lifestyle as individually and collectively we are united with God's wisdom and love.

Outline

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6:21-24 Concluding Remarks

COMMENTARY

1:1-23 Opening Words

Ancient letters usually began with greetings and praise of the recipients, followed by prayer for their well-being. But in this letter, Paul modifies the praise section. Instead of praising his readers, he praises God for blessing them (1:3-14). And he prays for far more than simply their health and well-being (1:15-23).

1:1-2 Greetings

Paul introduces himself as *an apostle* – an authorised emissary or herald of Jesus the Messiah (for that is what the title *Christ* means). He has been appointed to this position by God himself, as he explains elsewhere (**1:1a**; see also Gal 1:1, 11-17; 2:7-10).

Those he is writing to are described as *God's holy people* (**1:1b**). They are "holy" not because they live particularly moral lives but because they belong to God (in the same way Israel was considered a holy nation because of its covenant relationship to God). And they are *faithful in Christ Jesus*, not because of anything they have done, but because of their association with Christ (**1:1d**).

The people Paul is writing to are *in Ephesus* (**1:1c**). These words are not found in all the ancient copies of this book. It is thus possible that this letter was written to several churches, one of which was in Ephesus. That may explain why this letter deals more with the universal church than with details specific to the church in Ephesus. But regardless of the recipient's geographic location, spiritually they are located "in Christ Jesus". That second location is their true source of security.

Paul's greeting, *Grace* and *peace*, is a combination of the Greek greeting (grace) and the Jewish greeting (peace), which is similar to the Arabic *salaam alaikum* (**1:2a**). Paul will show how these blessings flow from the nature of Israel's God and his readers' relationship with him (1:6-8; 2:14-17). Paul and his readers can dare to call him *our Father*, for that is the way Jesus taught his disciples to address God (1:3; 3:14; see also Matt 6:9).

It is striking that Jesus the Messiah is mentioned in the same breath as God the Father, and as equally the source of divine blessings. Clearly, Jesus is far greater than any human leader of Israel. He can be given the title *Lord*, using the same Greek word that Jews used when translating the Hebrew form of God's covenant name (**1:2b**; see also 1 Cor 8:4-6; Phil 2:6-11).

1:3-14 Praise of God's Glorious Grace

Paul's great hymn of praise is all one long sentence in the original. It is similar in style to the prayers of praise that were used in Jewish synagogues at that time, except that it praises not only God the Father (1:3-6) but also the Son (1:7-12) and the Spirit (1:13-14). Each subsection ends with a doxology in which Paul speaks of the praise of God's glory (1:6, 12, 14). God is the main actor, and Jesus is the one through whom he acts.

Paul lists a rainbow of blessings:

- God lovingly chose us long before the creation of the world (1:4).
- God's plan is to adopt us as his sons (1:5).
- God has given us a lavish outpouring of grace (1:6).
- God has redeemed us, forgiving our sins (1:7).
- God has revealed to us his ultimate purpose (1:9-10).
- God has given us the Spirit as a guarantee of our inheritance (1:14).
- We can be confident of our future redemption (1:14).

Together, these blessings highlight God's eternal plan of salvation of which Christ is the chief mediator. The lives of those who have received these blessings must overflow with praise to God (1:6, 12, 14).

1:3-6 The Father's blessings

The attribute of God that Paul focuses on first is that he is the *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (**1:3a**). Jesus, the Messiah-King of Israel, is the Son of God. The gospels testify to the unique and intimate relationship between Jesus and the one he often spoke to or spoke of as "my Father".

Paul celebrates the generosity of God and his kindness in giving *every spiritual blessing in Christ* to those who depend on him (**1:3b**). All blessings come from God, and in that sense even material blessings can be described as "spiritual". But the blessings listed in this section are spiritual because they refer to what God has done to restore the relationship between humanity and himself. The blessings are in *the heavenly realms* because that is the place where God acts, and from where he gives them to us. The blessings are experienced "in Christ" because it is in Jesus the Messiah that all the promises of God find their fulfilment. With the salvation God has made available through the Messiah, God's people now have "every spiritual blessing". Such comprehensive benevolence calls for praise!

We cannot boast that we have earned these blessings. The only reason we enjoy them is because God *chose us* (1:4a). Many centuries earlier, God chose Israel to be his people and bound himself to them with a promise of everlasting faithfulness. Now that same status has been granted to all who are "in Christ" (see also 2:11-3:6).

God choosing us is not just a random act of benevolence, done on a whim, but a considered decision, motivated by *love*, and made *before the creation of the world* (**1:4a**). It was predetermined or predestined that it would be the Messiah (*him*) who would be the mediator between God and humanity.

In the OT God told his chosen people that they must be holy because he is holy (Lev 11:44). The same is true of the Ephesians. They were chosen *to be holy*, that is, set apart in a special relationship to God and dedicated to his service (**1:4b**). Being *blameless* is closely allied with being "holy", but also links up with the OT system of animal sacrifice in which only perfect animals, those without any defect, were acceptable offerings. None of us is truly blameless, but God's purpose in choosing us is to make us blameless, people whose lives are acceptable to God.

God's first blessing of us is sometimes spoken of as "election". His second blessing is called "adoption". God is uniquely the Father of Jesus Christ, but he is willing to extend a similar relationship to believers, granting them *adoption to sonship* (**1:5a**). Such an intimate relationship with God was not normal in Jewish thinking. True, the prophet Hosea spoke as if Israel were God's wife (Hos 1–4), and Israel's kings were called his "sons" (2 Sam 7:14; Pss 2:7; 89:4). This was Israel's status before God by virtue of her election (Hos 11:1) and restoration (Hos 2:10). But such status was not an option for ordinary believers. Now, however, family status is extended to all through Christ. As

adopted children, they can enjoy the same status and rights as natural children.

Why were we adopted? The only answer we are given is that it was *in accordance with his pleasure and will* (**1:5b**). As with God's choosing or election, this was not done on a whim. Both our election and our adoption are *predestined*. The triple emphasis on predestination in this section (1:4, 5, 11) drives home the point that from the perspective of eternity, salvation is not something we have earned or deserve. It comes entirely as the gracious gift of God (John 15:16). (Note that to say this is not to deny the role of faith – see 2:1-10.)

The third blessing believers enjoy is the *grace which he has freely given us*, or, in a more literal translation, "the grace with which he has graced us" (**1:6a**). The repetition of the word emphasises that grace is at the core of God's relationship with us. It is he who takes the initiative to choose, pardon, restore and bless sinful men and women with something they do not deserve.

Many of Paul's Jewish contemporaries thought that God's blessings were only for their race. But God's grace extends to all nations. It is the logical fulfilment of God's plan of salvation conceived before the beginning of time, promised to Abraham in Genesis (Gen 22:18) and now channelled to us *in the One he loves*, that is, his Son (**1:6b**; Mark 1:9-11).

The word *glorious* is usually used to describe the character of God, but his acts of grace, choosing and predestining his people, are also glorious. To celebrate them in words, songs and obedience of life is to glorify him. The worship of God is the celebration of his grace!

The Christian doctrine of predestination is not the same as the South Asian concept of *vidhi* or fatalistic determinism. Fate is impersonal. The person who believes in it is trapped in the cycle of *karma and samsara*, birth and rebirth, cause and effect. Nothing one can do can change the fate allotted on the basis of deeds in a previous life, astral forces or the gods. This type of predestination is negative and traumatic. But when Paul talks about predestination, he sets it in the context of a kind and gracious God of love who is determined to bless his people. God is not a capricious being who has willed that the majority will perish while a few alone will benefit from grace. Rather, he is generous and determined to bless his people and grant them eternal salvation.

1:7-12 The Son's blessings

The second section of the list of blessings focuses on what Christ has done in terms of redemption and revelation and on the final integration of all things in and under him. In presenting these blessings, Paul follows a similar sequence to the one found in the OT account of the exodus. First there is redemption (equivalent to deliverance from Egypt), then the revelation of God's will (as it was at Sinai), and then there is the restoration of God's people who are set apart as his prized possession or inheritance (as when Israel took possession of Canaan).

1:7-8A REDEMPTION. The word translated "redemption" was commonly used to refer to buying the freedom of a slave or paying a price to repossess pawned or lost property. So God's action in freeing Israel from slavery in Egypt and his restoration of the nation after its Babylonian captivity were both acts of redemption. But when it comes to Christ, the oppressive tyrant or slave master from whom he offers redemption is neither a Pharaoh nor the Roman emperor. It is the much worse cosmic oppressor, *sin*. That is why Paul parallels the words *redemption through his blood* with the *forgiveness of sins* (**1:7**). Each of us has a long list of sin debts that we have accumulated and have no hope of ever paying. But Christ, drawing on *the riches of God's grace*, has paid off our debt for us! This wholesale remission of debt is an example of the generosity of God and the riches of his grace.

History has seen people like Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela who have been willing to give their lives in order to right wrongs. Their suffering can be interpreted as a tragedy explained by the *dharma yudha*, that is, the war between good and evil. But Christ's death was different. It was not a side-effect of a larger struggle. It was part of the plan and purpose of God. His death was redemptive in that he died for others as their true representative and substitute. His death made it possible for us to have our sins forgiven and to become adopted children of God. It is an unparalleled demonstration of the grace of God that is *lavished* upon undeserving humanity (**1:8a**).

1:8B-10 REVELATION. Because of his unique relationship to the Father, Jesus had a particular knowledge of God's will (Matt 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 5:20-22; 10:15; 17:25-26). Those who have been adopted into God's family share that privilege. God's once hidden plans have now been made known with *all wisdom and understanding* to his children (**1:8b**; Heb 1:1-2). The days of partial knowledge are over.

Grace unravels the *mystery of his will* that would otherwise be hidden from human understanding (**1:9**). It is as if we have been given the script of a play, so that we know what God's plans are. We know that the grand finale will involve all of creation, *all things in heaven and on earth*, coming together in Christ (**1:10b**). This will be a scene of cosmic reconciliation and the triumph of God, whose redemptive plan was set in place before the world began.

We do not know exactly when this scene will unfold, but it will happen *when the times reach their fulfilment* (**1:10a**; compare Gal 4:4). The mystery that was once hidden and is now revealed is not just about the restoration of Israel to God, or even of all peoples to God, but stretches to the reconciliation of heaven and earth, that is, of God and all his creation. On that day we will indeed celebrate the kingdom of God in all its fullness!

1:11 RESTORATION. In **1:11** Paul again combines the ideas of being *chosen* and *predestined*. However, the word here translated as "chosen" literally means "chosen by casting lots", as when the land was divided between the various tribes in the days of Joshua. Thus a strong case can be made for the alternative translation that is suggested in the marginal note in the NIV, namely, *in him, we also were made heirs*. This translation brings out the sequence of redemption, revelation and restoration to the promised land (Ps 16:5-6).

In Deuteronomy 32:11 Israel is spoken of as God's prized inheritance. This special status of the covenant people is now transferred to those who follow Jesus. Such blessings come through God's own initiative, his *plan* and *will*, and not through human achievement.

1:12 RESPONSE TO THESE BLESSINGS. The second set of blessings also concludes with a purpose statement. This time, however, Paul frames the purpose in terms of *we who were the first to put our hope in Christ* (**1:12**). He seems to be referring either to the apostles or to the Jewish followers of Christ, who were historically the first to believe (Rom 1:16; 2:9-10). They had recognised that Christ was the hope of Israel, which is yet to be fully realised in terms of the cosmic reconciliation of all things to God in the messianic kingdom (1:10). They too *praise ... his glory*. God's redemptive grace in Christ results in worship or the celebration of God's character.

1:13-14 The Spirit's blessings

Paul included himself in the "we" referring to Jewish believers (1:12). But he does not want to give the impression that the Jews are superior to the non-Jews in Ephesus. It is simply that the Jews had the first opportunity to hear the gospel. And so he quickly adds, *and you also were included in Christ* (1:13).

The fundamental proof that both Jews and non-Jews are accepted by God is that both have received *the promised Holy Spirit* (**1:13a**; Acts 10:44-47). God had promised that this universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit would be one of the blessings that would flow in the end-time when God would renew his covenant with his people (Joel 2:28). John the Baptist had foretold that Jesus would baptise with the Spirit (Mark 1:8). The prophecies of both Joel and John had been fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2:16-17).

The NIV says that the Ephesians had both *heard* and *believed* the gospel. The two verbs create the impression that these were separate acts. But in the original Greek, the two actions are inextricably linked. Together they are a response to *the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation* (**1:13b**; see also Rom 10:14-15).

A response of faith on hearing the gospel is given God's seal of approval by the blessing of being *marked ... with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit* (**1:13c**). A seal is a symbol of ownership as well as a guarantee that a document is authentic and has not been tampered with. Similarly, the Holy Spirit is a symbol that a person belongs to God and a guarantee that he or she a) has a future *redemption*, b) has a future *inheritance* and c) is *God's possession* (**1:14**).

The Spirit is also a down payment, the *deposit*, guaranteeing a greater measure of blessing to come. These blessings too are spiritual and in the heavenly realms (1:3).

The Holy Spirit's role is to bring all the blessings of the Father and the Son to completion under one head, Christ (1:10). The completion of this work will result in *the praise of his glory* on earth and in eternity as we celebrate God's grace, love, wisdom and power.

1:15-23 Prayer for the Recipients

Paul's opening blessing in this letter was one long sentence in the Greek, and so is his prayer for those he is writing to.

1:15-17a Paul's style of prayer

Paul's prayer represents his response to hearing that the Ephesians (and the other churches to which he was writing) have not only inherited God's blessings in Jesus the Messiah but are also showing the truth of their faith by their *love for all God's people* (**1:15**). These two things, faith and love, should always be present in our response to the gospel (1 Thess 1:3-5). (Paul often also adds a third element, one which he discussed in 1:12, namely hope – see Rom 5:2-5; 1 Cor 13:13.) Faith engages the whole person: mind, heart and body. If we believe God's truths with our minds, then this will result in a desire to lovingly surrender to how God wishes us to act. And he commands us to love our neighbours (Deut 6:4-6; John 15:12).

The fact that the Ephesians are showing love for "***all*** God's people" suggests that their love goes far beyond their normal boundaries. They are showing love without regard to race, language, nationality and proximity (and if they had been in South Asia, it would also have been without regard to caste).

Paul's prayers for the Ephesians are characterised by thanksgiving and constancy. He can say, *I have not stopped giving thanks for you* (**1:16**). This could mean either that he gives thanks every time he prays for them or that he constantly prays for them, repeatedly *remembering* them and asking for blessings on them.

His prayers are addressed to *the God of our Lord Jesus Christ* (**1:17a**). How can Jesus have a God if he himself is God? Are there two gods? No. The NT insists that there is only one God (Rom 3:29-30; 1 Cor 8:4-6), while at the same time asserting Jesus' equality with God. Paul indicated this equality in the opening words of this letter (1:2). Jesus

spoke of God as his Father and of himself as God's unique Son and revealer, who shares in the unique functions of God in creation, salvation and judgement. This God is the *glorious Father* who does not age or change and lives in inaccessible light (1 Tim 6:16).

1:17b-19a The content of Paul's prayer

Paul's main request, which underlies all his other requests, is that his readers be given *the Spirit of wisdom and revelation* (**1:17b**). Isaiah had prophesied that the coming Messiah would be full of the Spirit of the Lord, which he defined as a Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge and fear of the Lord (Isa 11:2). This Spirit that rested on the Messiah is also present in the people of God (just as the sonship of the Messiah is also extended to all who are adopted into God's family – 1:6).

The Spirit's role is not just to guarantee our salvation (1:14) but also to bring us revelation, illumination and insight into the will of God so that we can *know him [God] better* (**1:17c**; see also John 16:12-14). Such knowledge was part of the end-time hopes of Israel (Jer 31:31-34). Increasing knowledge of God means a growing intimacy and understanding of God and his Son and leads to unity in the church (see 4:13). Encouraging such growth is the goal of Christian ministry.

Paul also describes the Spirit's ministry in terms of enlightening *the eyes of your heart* (**1:18a**). When we were saved, we were brought from the darkness of ignorance into God's wonderful light (Col 1:13; 1 Pet 2:9). But that does not mean that we see all things clearly as soon as we are saved. We still need more enlightenment and a greater understanding of our wonderful God and of how he wants us to live. So Paul prays that the Spirit will educate the Ephesians more and more and make things plain to their hearts. The "heart" in this context is not the seat of emotions but rather the genuine person, the naked self without any pretentious concealment or camouflage.

Paul identifies three things about which the Ephesians need more knowledge:

- ***The hope* to which they have been called (1:18b)**. Many centuries earlier, God had called Abraham to follow him, and later he had called Israel out of Egypt. In both cases, the recipients of the call had to step out on a journey of faith, hoping for a future that was not yet in their possession. Through the gospel the Ephesians have received a similar call to be part of God's purposes by belonging to his family.
- ***The riches of his glorious inheritance* (1:18c)**. Abraham and the Israelites followed God to a promised land, a tangible inheritance. Believers in Christ are promised a glorious destiny. But Paul also speaks as if believers and the church itself are God's inheritance. God values them as his own inheritance!
- **God's *great power* (1:19a)**. Paul describes this power as *incomparably great*. No other power can do what God's power has done. This power works for the benefit of *us who believe*. It is manifested in Christ (1:20-23) and in the salvation of all who believe (2:1-10).

1:19b-23 God's power over all

The power of God is demonstrated in *the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand* (**1:19b-20a**). The resurrection involved far more than just the resuscitation of a corpse! It marked the inauguration of a new era in the history of God's saving interventions, the climax of God's covenant with Abraham and the beginning of a new creation. The resurrected Messiah is now exalted to a seat at the right hand of God *in the heavenly realms*, where he now reigns over all (**1:20b**).

Paul tries to convey an impression of Christ's status in heaven by speaking in terms of a royal court. The seat Christ occupies is the place of honour that would have been occupied by a co-regent who governed with the same authority as the king. This throne is on a dais, where the king sits raised above the nobles and other ranks who await his orders. He is *far above all rule and authority, power and dominion and every name that is invoked* (**1:21a**; see also 3:10; 6:12; Phil 2:10).

Christ outranks all others in both *the present age* and in *the one to come* (**1:21b**). The Jews thought of the "present age" as a period characterised by the dominion of sin, evil and death, and longed for it to end and be replaced by the "age to come", which would be characterised by righteousness and peace. Paul recognises that the transition between these two ages is already taking place but is not yet complete. The grand finale is still awaited (1:10). But the most important element is in place. The Messiah has come and his enemies have been overcome as *God placed all things under his feet* (**1:22**; Ps 110:1; 1 Cor 15:25-27).

The messianic reign has already begun, but for the present his kingship is manifested in *the church*, which is defined as *his body* (**1:23a**). The relationship between Christ and the church is as close as that between your body and your head. To belong to Christ is to be incorporated into him. He fills his community as his power, purpose and presence reside in the body, bringing it to completion. He fills *everything in every way* (**1:23b**). His church's task is to make that apparent by making disciples of all nations.

2:1-10 God's Power in Salvation

God's power has been revealed in Jesus' resurrection and exaltation, and in his formation of the church and its worldwide mission. It is also shown in the salvation of those who believe.

2:1-3 Before Christ

A body cannot live without a head. Thus those who are not part of Christ's body can be described as *dead* (**2:1**). They live in a culture of sin, transgressing the boundaries God has set for human behaviour and wandering away from his paths. In referring to this lifestyle as *the ways of this world* Paul is not implying that the physical world is inherently evil. It is the sinful lifestyle the world favours that is evil.

Yet those who do not follow Christ do have a head of sorts, for they follow *the ruler of the kingdom of the air*, Satan (**2:2**). They do not have the Spirit of Christ, but instead are moved by *the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient*. He is the leader of all who live in rebellion against God.

Those who are in rebellion are eager to gratify their *cravings ... desires and thoughts* (**2:3a**). Doing whatever we want may seem like a wonderful freedom, but this freedom is an illusion. There is no such thing as a completely independent human being. We all serve either God or his enemy.

The shift to "we" in the previous paragraph matches Paul's shift in **2:3b**. In 2:1-3a, he may have been speaking to Gentiles, but the "we" makes it clear that he is also referring to the Jews. There is worldwide solidarity in this rebellion. Just like the Gentiles, the Jews were *by nature deserving of wrath* (see also Rom 3:22-23). This "wrath" is not an irritable anger; it is the just response of a holy and righteous God to mutiny and subversive behaviour.

Understanding that sin is an offence against God is very different from regarding sin as mere ignorance, a misguided entanglement in the material order, which is considered an illusion. The Bible teaches that God created the physical and material world, and that it is neither evil nor illusory. Evil lies in how we relate to it. We can either glorify God for his goodness and love, or we can ignore him, which is equivalent to refusing to acknowledge his rule.

2:4-7 God's Initiative

Rulers traditionally show little sympathy for rebels. But God is different. The king against whom a rebellion is in progress responds with abnormal favour. Instead of condemning humanity, God loves them with a *great love* and pours out his mercy and grace (**2:4**). This aspect of God's character is celebrated time and again in the old covenant (Exod 33:19; 34:5-7; Pss 89; 103), and God shows the same grace when he acts through the Messiah.

Through God's mercy and kindness, those who were living a life which was in effect "dead", now experience a "resurrection". They are *made ... alive* (**2:5**), and *raised ... up with Christ* (**2:6**). Where they were once Christ's enemies, they are now *seated ... with him*. Their situation has been utterly transformed. The tense Paul uses makes it clear that this has already happened, even though believers continue to live in their mortal bodies. We may not always feel transformed, but our status is utterly different from what it used to be.

To put this in terms that may be familiar to some in South Asia, we could say that Christ has opened the status of twice-born *dvija* to all. In Hinduism, only those in the upper castes could become *dvijas* and only they were entitled to study the Vedas. But all who believe in Christ becomes dvijas (John 3:3). We share in the reign of Christ as a true royal priesthood!

The culmination of our salvation will come in the future, *in the coming ages* (1:10, 14; 4:30; 5:5-7). God's ultimate intention is to reveal his covenant character as the immeasurably gracious one as he touches the world through the Messiah (**2:7**).

2:8-10 New Creation in Christ

God's character is the foundation of the new age of salvation, and thus Paul can repeatedly assert that salvation is God's work: *It is by grace you have been saved.* We had done nothing to deserve salvation. *It is the gift of God* (**2:8**). It is "by grace" because God extends mercy, and kindness to those who deserved punishment. The victory of the kingdom of God over the kingdom of Satan releases captives, and the conqueror pours out mercy and kindness on them. He is even prepared to suffer in order to bless those who should receive his wrath. God is the covenant-making, promise-keeping God of mercy, kindness, and love.

This gift of salvation is received by faith. We have to decide to take shelter under God's protection, lovingly surrendering to him, understanding that this is not a right we have earned, or an achievement of our own, but his gift. We have absolutely nothing that we can *boast* about (**2:9**). We are God's *handiwork*, the Messiah's masterpieces (**2:10a**).

We do not earn our salvation by good conduct, but salvation in Christ leads to good conduct (**2:10b**). The lifestyle and the good works we will do as a result of our salvation were already in the mind of God before we were even saved! This implies that rather than blindly following cultural rules of moral behaviour, we need to live in such a close relationship with God that our lives are characterised by the *good works* that flow from our imitating his character (Matt 5:16; Titus 2:11-14; 3:1-4).

A salvation to which the one being saved has nothing to contribute does not appeal to a culture that worships achievement, talent, shrewdness and hard work. Self-effort is applauded, and to be given a hand-out like a beggar hurts our pride. But no matter how outwardly successful people may appear, they are in desperate need if they are living apart from God.

2:11-22 God's People – God's Residence

In 2:11-22 Paul shows how the church through the Messiah becomes the unified people of God, among whom the Holy Trinity dwells. They become a temple that will last for all

eternity. Once again, he begins by presenting the human predicament and then describes the divine response of grace and the benefits that flow from it.

2:11-12 Before: A Divided Humanity

Paul reminds his readers of their previous status. They were *Gentiles by birth* (**2:11a**) and *without God in the world* (**2:12b**). He does not mean they were atheists or not religious, but they worshipped gods other than Israel's God. Israel's faith is that there is only one God, and that they are his uniquely chosen people, bound to him by a covenant marked in their flesh by *circumcision* (Gen 17:9-13). Non-Jews were not eligible to receive the benefits of the covenant unless they converted (Ruth 1:16).

The uncircumcised were *excluded from citizenship in Israel* (**2:12a**). As *foreigners to the covenants of the promise* there was no way they could ever share in the promises or hope of Israel, especially the promise of a Messiah.

We can judge Paul's views on this topic by the way he refers to circumcision as being done *in the body by human hands* (**2:11b**). Far more important is the circumcision of the heart done by the Spirit, which is the sign of the new covenant (Rom 2:29).

2:13-18 After: God's New Family

As he did in 2:4, Paul introduces a powerful contrast with the word *but*. Those who had previously been *far away* (non-Jews) have been brought *near* to God and his people (**2:13, 17**). Some of Paul's readers may also have remembered times in Israel's history when even the Jews found themselves in exile, far from God (Isa 57:19). Others may have remembered Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, who strayed far away but was welcomed back by his father (Luke 15:11-32).

What is it that has brought them near? It is God, acting through *the blood of Christ*, that is, by the costly death and resurrection of the Messiah.

CHRISTIAN UNITY

Throughout history Christians have allowed themselves to be divided by many issues, some of which are theological and some of which are not. It has come to be recognised that these divisions have often been a hindrance to the propagation of the gospel, leading Christians to long for unity. In many Asian countries, political persecution and nationalism have also drawn Christians together.

Ultimately, however, our union should not be rooted in socio-political realities but simply in the work of God, the Holy Spirit. Jesus prayed for unity among his disciples, asking "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). Why did he ask this? Because he knew the frailty of human beings and understood that our diversity in character, perceptions, views and thinking was bound to cause division. The unity he prayed for was both vertical (spiritual unity between us and God) and horizontal (unity among ourselves). The psalmist was referring to this horizontal unity when he wrote, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity" (Ps 133:1). Such unity bears witness to the faith.

Unity between Christians can be expressed in many ways and at many levels. The ecumenical movements of the twentieth century pressed for organic unity and encouraged denominations in India to come together to form the Church of North India (CNI) and the Church of South India (CSI). This unity was extended to the conciliar level with the formation of the Joint Council of the CSI, CNI and Mar Thoma Church, which is today known as the Communion of Churches in India. On the regional level, the councils of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have formed the South Asia Council of Churches (SACC), while on the worldwide level these groups form part of the World Council of Churches, a federation that aims to bring different Christian groups together to exchange ideas and share resources.

Organic unity is not the only way in which we can express Christian unity. Our unity is also shown when Christian leaders from different denominations gather for theological discussion of issues affecting this region. Such discussions can lead to joint action on issues related to human rights and religious freedom. They can also lead to different groups working together to produce Christian literature (such as this commentary) or cooperating in running orphanages, widow-rehabilitation centres, old-age homes, hospices for the terminally ill and those affected by HIV/AIDS, and so on.

But it is not only leaders who can act to demonstrate Christian unity. On the local level, churches can encourage Christians to form prayer networks to pray for their community. They can also combine to organise Christian festivals, where Christians from different churches can come together and discover how they can worship together, participate in mission together and serve the community together.

Such expressions of unity help us to understand what Paul means in 1 Corinthians 12 when he uses the body to illustrate unity in diversity within the church. The basis for our unity is not that we are alike in all respects, but that we form one body, united in one Spirit, called to one hope, having professed in baptism our one faith in the one Lord, and we worship our one God and Father (Eph 4:4-6). This concept of unity is both spiritual and organic.

Arthur Jeyakumar

The Messiah is the "prince of peace" (Isa 9:6) who establishes peace by destroying the barrier between Jews and Gentiles and reconciling human beings to God and to each other. Thus Paul can say that the Messiah *himself is our peace* (**2:14**). *The dividing wall of hostility* that he has broken down is a metaphor for the separation between the Jews and all others brought about by *the law with its commands and regulations* (**2:15**). This law was like a fence around the Jewish nation. It barred others from entering it.

The metaphor even had a literal equivalent in the temple in Jerusalem. There a barrier or dividing wall prevented Gentiles from entering. The Jews expected that the Messiah would favour the Jews and reinforce that barrier, but when he came he did not raise the height of that wall; instead, he destroyed it.

Christ's *setting aside* of "the law with its commands and regulations" does not mean that God's laws no longer apply. In fact, in chapters 4 and 5 of this letter Paul describes how God's people are to conduct their lives. Paul's point here is that the Jewish law is no longer used to decide who is eligible to be a member of God's covenant family.

Christ's demolition of the barrier integrates Jews and Gentiles into one new group, the church, with a totally new identity. This reconciliation of God and people, and of people with each other, is brought about by his death (**2:16**). The Messiah not only died on the cross to bring about this peace, but he also became the herald of the new order of peace. As the church proclaims him, the risen Christ continues to preach peace (**2:17**). The restored community, the church, has *access to the Father* in the Messiah and in the *one Spirit* (**2:18**). There is no separate way of approach for Israel. It is in one body, in the Messiah, through the Spirit that both Jews and Gentiles can enter directly into the presence of God. There is no longer any privilege for those who belong to a particular race or go to the temple in Jerusalem. There is no longer any discrimination against women, children or the disabled. All members of the new community created by the Messiah may enter by the Spirit into God's throne room.

In passing, it is worth noting that 2:18 is further evidence for the Trinity. Father, Son and Spirit work together for peace and reconciliation.

2:19-22 God's Family Is God's Home

The death of Christ has brought about a radical social transformation. The creation of one new humanity (2:14), integrated as one body (2:16) means the Gentile believers are no longer *foreigners and strangers*, left in the hopeless state described in 2:11-12. God is now their Father (2:18; see also 1:5), and they are *members of his household*, part of the human family of God (**2:19**; see also 1:5). As adopted children, they share all the rights of a naturally born child. As *fellow citizens with God's people* they have the same rights as the original members of the covenant people (Hos 1:10; 2:23; Rom 9:25-26).

Paul now changes the metaphor. Where he has been speaking of family and citizenship, he now speaks in terms of a building, describing the church as *a holy temple in the Lord* that is still in the process of being built (2:21). Construction takes time. Even the temple renovation begun by Herod the Great in 19 BC was completed only in AD 63.

The foundation of the metaphorical temple that Paul is speaking of is laid by the OT *prophets* and the NT *apostles* (**2:20**). The authority of their testimony is guaranteed by the fact that Christ himself is the *chief cornerstone* of the message, the one who holds the foundation together (**2:21**). He is at the heart of the church's message. With Christ at its core and building on the foundations laid in Scripture, the believers joined together in the church rise or grow to become a *holy temple* in the Lord. Paul stresses that the Gentiles (*you too*) are also stones in the walls of this new temple (**2:22a**).

The temple in Jerusalem was referred to as God's dwelling place (even though the Jews knew he was too great to be contained by it –1 Chr 6:18-21; 2 Chr 36:15). In the same way, this new living temple of which Christ is the cornerstone is to become *a dwelling in which God lives* not as a visible idol, but *by his Spirit* (**2:22b**).

We have been seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (2:6) and God had deigned to become resident among us. What an overlap of heaven and earth!

Given that the living stones being used to construct this new temple are Jews and Gentiles around the world, Christ's temple cannot be restricted to any locality or any physical structure. It is universal and everywhere! Access to it is not restricted on the basis of caste or ethnic identity, for all who come to Christ are equally parts of the structure. Nor is it necessary to make a pilgrimage to reach this temple. It is present wherever God's people meet.

3:1-13 The Mystery of the Church and Christ

Thinking about what God is doing and has done moves Paul to heartfelt prayer (3:1). But as he begins, he is distracted by further thoughts about the insight he has been given into the revolutionary nature of this covenant family of God. So he breaks off to explain this and does not resume his prayer until 3:14.

3:1-6 The Mystery of Christ

Unusually, Paul once again identifies himself as the author of this letter, but this time he describes himself as *the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles* (**3:1**; 1:1). This imprisonment was literal, not metaphorical. Paul was in prison (4:1). He had been arrested because of the hostility of the Jews to his message that Gentiles were now also welcome in the covenant people of God (Acts 21:27-36).

Paul realises that not all those he is writing to may understand what he is talking about. Some of those reading the letter might never have heard him explain how he had been called to his ministry to the Gentiles. But he assumes that they will have been told about it by others (3:2). He was charged with *the administration of God's grace* to the Gentiles when the apostles agreed that he was called to take the gospel to them (**3:2**; Gal 2:1-10). It was his task to help Jews and Gentiles understand God's plan, which he has just explained, and come together in the church.

Paul speaks of his message as a *mystery*, not in the sense of something unknown but in the sense of something that was once hidden but has now been revealed to him and to others (**3:3-5a**). This open "mystery" is the fact that *the Gentiles* who receive the gospel have now become part of God's covenant family. They can be *heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ* (**3:6**; see 2:14-18). The Gentiles can come to share this special status and the accompanying blessings through a door other than conversion to Judaism and following the law of Moses. God's secret plan has been to accomplish this through Christ the Messiah – Israel's Messiah. So God's great plan of bringing the whole universe to himself is fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah. The basis for membership of God's family has nothing to do with race, caste, colour or gender.

God's radical vision of a unified human society on earth linked with heaven was once unknown (3:3). So earlier Jewish interpreters, and even some of Paul's opponents, cannot entirely be faulted for not recognising it. The only way humans could know this eternal secret was for God himself to make it known. He revealed it by the Spirit to the *holy apostles and prophets* so that they could tell it to others (**3:5b**). The gospel is a mystery, but it is not a secret. There are no secretive rituals surrounding it.

3:7-13 Paul's Commission

The fact that this mystery was revealed to Paul does not give him superhuman status. He is simply *a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power* (**3:7**). He may be imitating Christ's humility when he describes himself as *less than the least of all the Lord's people* (**3:8a**). He is acutely aware that he had done nothing to deserve his position as an apostle and that his "privileges" have made him a servant of the gospel and a prisoner. Those who lead God's people are not elevated high above them.

Yet despite his sufferings, Paul rejoices that he has been given the responsibility of explaining the "mystery" so clearly that it can be understood by everyone (3:8-9). He joyfully proclaims the *boundless riches of Christ*, the Messiah (**3:8b**) who offers peace (2:17) and social harmony (3:6).

The plan to unite Jews and Gentiles in one community, as well as its timing, was *kept hidden in God who created all things* (**3:9**). In God's *manifold wisdom* he planned to bring Christ as saviour and Lord of all (**3:10a**). God demonstrates this once hidden, now revealed, wisdom to the *rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms* by forming the church, which is his new social order (**3:10b**).

Christ Jesus our Lord is the one in whom God's eternal secret is brought to light and his plan accomplished (**3:11**). Once again Paul celebrates the wisdom, knowledge and purpose of God (see also 1:5, 8, 9, 11). The disclosed secrets of God provide all who believe in the gospel of Jesus with direct access to God himself (**3:12a**; see 2:18). The path to heaven is not controlled by ritual purity, moral perfection, racial privilege, or special religious rituals. It is open to all who have faith in Jesus, who enables all, male and female, Jew and Gentile, to enter the divine presence with *freedom and confidence* (**3:12b**).

In the light of such an amazing plan, Paul's own *sufferings* should not dishearten his readers. His sufferings have contributed to their becoming believers who participate in God's *glory* (**3:13**).

3:14-19 Paul's Vision for the Church

Paul now resumes the prayer he began, but did not complete, in 3:1. There he had been moved to pray as he wrote about the divine plan to bless human beings, and his continued reflections on that plan now result in one of the greatest prayers recorded in the NT.

He offers this prayer on his knees (**3:14**). This posture is not required by Scripture, but we know that people such as Jesus and Daniel knelt in prayer, especially in contexts of extreme fear and brokenness. Kneeling signifies surrender to a superior. It is equivalent to removing one's footwear and prostrating oneself at the feet of a deity.

Paul has already prayed for the readers of this letter in 1:17-19. There he was praying for them as individuals. Now, however, he prays for them as a community, a body, the eternal family of God. Thus he addresses his prayer to the Father of all, *from whom every family ... derives its name* (**3:15**).

Children carry the name of their father. Networks of families are linked through the names of ancestral leaders or clan/family names. And all humanity are linked by their creator, who gives credence, authenticity and authority to everything that is called a family. It is from him that all families come.

Paul speaks of families as being both *in heaven and on earth*. The heavenly families may be the angelic hosts, who were thought to be divided into groups and were sometimes referred to as the "sons of God" (Gen 6:1-4; Job 1:6; Pss 29:1; 89:7). However, the main focus here is on the redeemed family of God. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (1:17) becomes the Father of us all, through the new covenant. Family status is conferred upon all who believe the gospel (1:6).

Paul prays for four great blessings to be given to the church from the Father's *glorious riches*:

- **Empowerment in the Spirit (3:16)**. The Spirit is already at work in the believers and in God's plan of salvation (1:13-14; 2:18, 21-22; 3:7). But, just as in 1:17, Paul prays for the continued work of the Spirit to *strengthen you with power.* The power he prays for is not the ability to perform miracles or demonstrate supernatural gifts, but rather an unshakeable conviction of the presence of Christ.
- **Communion with Christ (3:17a)**. The reason he desires the Spirit's empowering of the inner person is so that Christ may dwell permanently in their hearts (3:17). He is not speaking simply of an emotional closeness to God, for the "heart" also involved the mind and the will in Paul's day. His praying is that they will be strengthened in their faith, which will give them the boldness to endure hardship.
- **Flooding with divine love (3:17b)**. When Christ *dwells* in a person's heart, the person is *rooted* and built up in love. A root collects nourishment, and a building's foundation is the base for further construction. Self-effacing, serving love is like the root that keeps the believer firmly in touch with the Spirit. Empowerment by the Spirit leads to the church, *all the Lord's holy people*, experiencing such love from Christ and from one another that they begin to appreciate the greatness of this love. It is too great to be measured and its extent cannot be fathomed for it *surpasses knowledge* (**3:18-19a**). The love of the Messiah is beyond human comprehension. Yet Paul prays for the church to be collectively blessed with it. What this means in terms of practical Christian conduct will be explained in chapter 5 of this letter.
- **Filling with all the fullness of God (3:19b)**. It is humanly impossible to love like Christ, but the Spirit can enable this to happen. Paul prays that their characters will be transformed so that they reflect the love, wisdom, mercy, grace and compassion of God.

3:20-21 Glory in Christ and the Church

At the start of his prayer, Paul asked for blessings to be given from God's glorious store of riches, and at the end of his prayer he again refers to those riches, saying that God is able *to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine* (**3:20**). God's *power* is already *at work within us* (1:19; 3:7). Dependence on his wealth, his power and his ability to deliver on behalf of his people gives assurance that God will answer our prayers.

God's purposes for the world will not be completed until all things in heaven and earth are brought to perfect integration in the Messiah (1:10). Until that time, with the help of the Spirit living in them, believers are to bear witness by being the kind of people described in Paul's prayer. They are to be a loving, godly community that will prompt all members of the church and those around them to give God honour and glory (**3:21**).

Just as Christ is the person in whom God's glory is revealed, and he himself participates in the glory of God, so also the body of Christ is to be the embodiment of the glory of God. The head and the body will then be a glorified whole.

4:1-6:20 Living as God's Family

After praying that the church will demonstrate the glory of God, Paul explains what this means in everyday life and in family relationships. This will not be accomplished without spiritual struggle.

4:1-16 Maintaining Unity and Attaining Maturity

4:1-3 Maintaining peace

Paul's status as a *prisoner for the Lord* gives the words *I urge you* the force of a command. Since the new life the believers now enjoy is a gift of grace, they are to live a life *worthy of the calling* they *have received* (**4:1**). They are to reflect the nature of the God who has called them.

Paul recommends five virtues – humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, and love (**4:2**; see also Matt 11:29; 1 Cor 13:4-8; Gal 5:22; Col 3:12-14; Jas 3:17-18). Being *completely humble and gentle* is not the same as being oppressed and powerless. It is a reflection of the character, and therefore the power of Jesus (2 Cor 10; 1Phil 2:6-10). Paul himself showed this humility (3:8). *Bearing with one another* requires us to practise restraint in response to irritations or offences. A non-retaliatory response is an act of *love*. Such restraint requires us to be *patient*.

The church's role is not to bring about *peace* between humanity and God, because that has already been established in the blood of Christ (2:13-18). However, the Christian is called to make *every effort* to maintain and model social harmony or *the unity of the Spirit* (**4:3**; John 17:11, 20-23). This is to be done in the new covenant family, the church, which was brought about by the Spirit of God (1:13-14, 17; 2:18, 22; 3:6, 16). The church is where the believer belongs, and where he or she demonstrates a commitment to unity.

4:4-6 Fundamental unity

The unity for which Paul appeals is rooted in the unity of the Trinity. The Messiah is one and he has only *one body*, namely the church, the people of God (1:22-23; 2:14-16). There is only *one Spirit* who gives life to the body (**4:4**). The Spirit also leads to the *one* future *hope* (1:10, 14), which

arises out of their calling. The list proceeds to the *one Lord*, the primary response to whom is *faith* which is expressed in *baptism* (**4:5**). The climax lies in God who is the *Father of all*, and who is *over ... through ... and in all* (**4:6**). Our unity is founded upon God's very nature and the response of faith in baptism and in active hope.

4:7-16 Diversity and maturity

Christ apportions *grace* to each member of the body of Christ (**4:7**). From the context it is clear that the "grace" referred to here is the ability to carry out one or more of the ministries in the church. These gifts of ministry are acts of grace because the recipients are not selected by virtue of their merit. The gifts show God's power (3:7) and are assigned by any or all of the members of the Trinity: Christ in 4:7 and Mark 3:13; the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:4, 11; and God the Father in 1 Corinthians 12:6, 28.

Paul thinks of this distribution of gifts in terms of a conqueror giving *gifts to his people*. Christ has conquered and has been exalted to the highest position of dignity beside the Almighty (1:20-23). Paul illustrates what he means by quoting an unusual translation of Psalm 68:18 in which the victor dispenses gifts (**4:8**).

Paul knows that Christ has *ascended higher than all the heavens* (**4:10a**). But in order to be able to ascend, he first had to descend *to the lower earthly regions* (**4:9**). Here Paul is probably referring to Christ's giving up his status as the divine Son of God in order to come down to earth as a man and save us. However, some suggest that what Paul is speaking of is Christ descending into the realm of the dead. We cannot insist on either interpretation, though the NIV rendering favours the first.

Now that Christ has ascended, he fills *the whole universe* (**4:10b**). This too points to his divinity, for God's wisdom, spirit and glory are said to fill the earth (Ps 72:19; Jer 23:24). But the expression may also refer back to his gifts. As these are used by the church and his kingdom expands, the ascended one fills the earth through his body the church (see 1:23).

Paul mentions five specific examples of functions within the early church that were gifts given by the exalted Christ (**4:11**):

- **Apostles** were normally those who had a direct experience of the historical Jesus and were commissioned to be authentic witnesses to him and to his resurrection (Acts 1:21-22). Paul was admitted to his group as a special case because of his commissioning by the resurrected Christ (Acts 9:3-15).
- **Prophets** were directly inspired and instructed like the apostles, except that they did not need to have been acquainted with the historical Jesus. They spoke under divine direct inspiration as the occasion arose.
- **Evangelists** seem to have been a distinct group. Philip is referred to as an evangelist (Acts 21:8) and Timothy is instructed to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim 4:5). Evangelists worked locally and also travelled around preaching the gospel to those outside and within the church. Their role was similar to that of modern missionaries.
- **Pastors and teachers** interpreted the teaching of the prophets, apostles and eyewitnesses and applied it to local congregations.

There is some overlap in these functions. Paul was an apostle, a preacher and a teacher (2 Tim 1:11); the Apostle Peter was called to be a pastor (John 21:15-17) and refers to himself as a fellow elder (1 Pet 5:1). But all five involve proclaiming the message of Christ, the gospel of God. These gifts are not given to bring prestige and privilege to those who receive them. Rather they are to be exercised for the sake of equipping and building the church *for works of service* (**4:12a**). Their task is not to train a professional class of church leaders; it is to equip everybody to serve and to participate in the holistic mission of the church. The task of a church leader is to proclaim Christ and to equip Christ's people for service by providing teaching, encouragement and training.

As all God's people serve, *the body of Christ* will be *built up* (**4:12b**). Earlier, Paul spoke of the church as a living temple (2:20-22) and here he is describing how that building is to be erected.

But then Paul changes the metaphor, and instead talks about the way in which a body grows from infancy to adulthood. He treats spiritual maturity as a corporate matter, not an individual achievement, although corporate maturity only comes as each individual participates and *we all reach unity in the faith* (**4:13a**). This unity in faith, that is, in *knowledge of the Son of God*, is a sign of maturity. Paul has already prayed that the church will be united in their understanding of the faith (1:17-19; 3:18-19). It is a sign of a pastor's faithful ministry when this is the case.

The maturity represented by *attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ* (**4:13b**) is contrasted with the immaturity and vulnerability of infancy (**4:14**). Children can be gullible, and there are cunning and crafty people who will be eager to lead them astray, just as Satan did Eve (Gen 3:1; Acts 20:29-30). The immature are like driftwood or reeds, vulnerable to being swayed by every breeze and every wave.

Those growing to maturity, on the other hand, can distinguish between truth and error, and will have a lifestyle characterised by truth and love (**4:15**). Their growing knowledge of Christ will strengthen the entire body of which Christ is the *head*. As the head, he unifies the whole body, while all the individual parts of the body work together in love to sustain the body (**4:16**).

On the basis of this passage, a mature church can be described as one that honours Jesus as its authority and source and one in which the members accept one another with love, recognising their mutual dependence and their fundamental unity. They are able to discern truth from error and together have a correct understanding of the faith and of Christ. In such a church, the truth is proclaimed and people are constantly growing in their love and service of one another.

4:17-24 Learning How to Live

Before giving some guidelines showing what Christian unity and spiritual growth look like, Paul again reminds the Ephesians of the contrast there should be between their former lives and their new life in Christ (4:17-24; see also 2:1-10). God has been gracious, merciful and loving to them, and they should respond by living in a new way.

What Paul is about to say has the force of a command: *I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord* (**4:17**). His readers must no longer carry on living like Gentiles who know nothing about God and so cannot think clearly about how to live (**4:18**). Because they do not share in the *life of God*, they are ignorant of what pleases him, and are not concerned to find it out. Their minds have become corrupt and their lifestyles are characterised by self-indulgence, materialism and a reckless pursuit of immorality (**4:19**).

What a contrast there is between this way of living and the life of Christ (**4:20-21**). They had *heard about Christ* when the gospel was preached to them, and they had been *taught* what he had taught. These two elements of the faith should always go together (Matt 28:19-20).

It appears that their instruction in Christian living specified three steps towards transformation:

- Putting off the old self (**4:22**) by repenting of evil and of their wrong priorities.
- Being renewed in their minds (**4:23**) by unlearning their old ways and learning new ways of thinking.
- Putting on the new self (**4:24**) that was *created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness* (see also Gen 1:26-28). In other words, they are to start living in a way that reflects their new identity in Christ.

4:25-6:9 Living as a New Creation

Paul now gives practical examples of what it means to "put off" the immoral ways of the old self and "put on" the new way of life characterised by righteousness and holiness.

4:25-5:2 In our community

The first of the old habits that needs to be given up is the tendency to lie to one another (**4:25**; see also Zech 8:16). Our neighbours are no longer to be seen as annoyances or competitors, but as fellow *members* of the *one body* of Christ.

We may still sometimes become angry with our neighbours. We may also be justifiably angry at sin and oppression. But Paul reminds us of the saying in the Greek translation of Psalm 4:4, *In your anger do not sin* (**4:26**). Anger should be controlled, not nursed till it turns into resentment and hatred. We should think through the situation that caused us to be angry and try to resolve it by addressing the situation and seeking reconciliation or forgiveness. To allow anger to fester (*let the sun go down while you are still angry*) is to provide *the devil a foothold* that he will use to tempt us into sin or to bring division in the community (**4:27**).

Truthful speech goes hand in hand with honesty in all we do. Those who have been stealing from others must stop doing so (**4:28**; Exod 20:15). Rather than taking from others, they should be giving to *those in need*, which is a central element in the Christian practice of love (Matt 25:35-40; 2 Cor 8-9; Jas 2:14-17). In order to have something to give, they need to find work, *doing something useful with their own hands*.

Dishonest speech is not the only form of speech to be avoided. We should also avoid anything that falls into the category of *unwholesome talk*, that is, any type of talk that is harmful rather than helpful. Our goal must be to build others up, not break them down (**4:29**).

Earlier, Paul said that God has sent his Spirit to live in believers as a seal showing that they belong to him and can be sure of their future inheritance on *the day of redemption* (1:14). To act in a way that is out of keeping with the way the Spirit would want us to act is to *grieve the Holy Spirit* (**4:30**). It is to refuse to allow him to do his work of transformation in our life.

Paul gives examples of the type of behaviour he has in mind when he says this. He is thinking of a far more intense anger than mentioned in 4:26-27 when he speaks of *bitterness* (intense resentment or hatred), outbursts of rage, angry screaming, defamatory speech and insults, along with all forms of hostile or harmful feelings (**4:31**). Such attitudes and the speech that flows from them destroy friendships, families, workplaces, neighbourhoods, and the unity of the church. All such behaviour must stop.

The behaviour of the new self we put on must be modelled on Christ (**4:32**). He was *kind and compassionate*, reaching out to help those in need rather than defending his own rights and being insensitive to the existence, rights and needs of others. He forgave our sins against him, and so we should be prepared to forgive those who sin against us (Matt 6:12; 18:21-35).

Children imitate their parents. Christians have been adopted into God's family, and they should follow the *example* set by their Father and their Older Brother (**5:1**). Like them, all believers must *walk in the way of love* and be prepared to show the same self-sacrificing love Christ showed (**5:2**; John 15:13). Such love is a pleasing offering to God.

Sometimes, this love is expected of women but not of men. But Paul makes no distinction. It must characterise all.

5:3-7 In our desires

Another area of our lives that must be transformed involves covetousness, whether coveting an immoral sexual relationship or something that belongs to someone else (Exod 20:17). Paul insists that *there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or of greed* among those who are called to be *God's holy people* (**5:3**). He thus condemns any form of sexual activity outside marriage (1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Thess 4:3). He also condemns *obscenity*, *foolish talk*, and vulgar language or *coarse joking*. These sins of speech are associated with the type of conversation that exposes an unclean heart and a dirty mind. Such speech tends to mock ideals and people God values; Christians' speech should express gratitude to God (**5:4**; 5:18).

Paul now issues a stern warning against getting involved in any form of godless lifestyle (**5:5, 7**). As children of God we have taken on a new identity as heirs of *the kingdom of Christ and of God* (1:14). Those who practise immorality, impurity or greed are giving their worship to something other than God, and so they are idolaters. As such, they are excluded from God's kingdom and will face his wrath (**5:6b**).

Some people may try to justify immorality and greed, but they are deceptive and their words are *empty* because they lack truthful content (**5:6a**). Believers must not partner with those who hold such views. The gospel of God's grace that offers salvation freely to all who believe is not a licence to uncontrolled or profligate living; rather, salvation empowers a weak human being to participate in godliness.

5:8-21 Three contrasts

Paul further explains how to live as God's people by comparing three types of lifestyles: living in light rather than darkness, choosing what is wise and not foolish, and being influenced by the Spirit rather than by alcohol.

5:8-14 Light and darkness. Christ identified himself as the light of the world (John 9:5; see also 1 John 1:5). As such, he not only enlightens but can change darkness itself into light (**5:8**, 13). As God's adopted children, believers are *children of light* and thus their lives must reflect Christ's character and display *goodness, righteousness and truth* (**5:9**). They are to actively set out to determine what type of behaviour *pleases the Lord* and then act on what they know (**5:10**). The gospel of John and 1 John have a lot to say about illuminated Christian existence or walking in the light (John 1:9; 8:12; 1 John 1:5-7; 2:11).

Light produces fruit (5:9), but no fruit grows in the dark. Thus the *deeds of darkness* are *fruitless*. These are acts of disobedience, injustice, violence, cruelty and licentious self-indulgence that people engage in secretly, while pretending to be good, caring and loving. Their hidden lives are too *shameful* even to be discussed (**5:11-12**). Honour-shame codes may differ from culture to culture, but if God considers certain things shameful (such as the vices Paul lists), then it is indeed shameful for anyone in the family of God to engage in them (5:1).

Christian morality goes beyond simply having *nothing to do* with what is wrong; it also involves exposing evil by holding it up to the light so that its true nature can be seen (5:11).

Paul's statement that *everything that is illuminated becomes a light* (**5:13**) may refer to believers, who have come to the light and are now themselves lights (5:8). Here he may also be drawing on the Jewish mystical tradition that those who see the heavenly light absorb it and then reflect increasing degrees of divine glory or brightness (see also 2 Cor 3:18).

He challenges the Christians to be alert and to live in Christ's light, and he does so by quoting what was probably an early Christian hymn, *Wake up, sleeper rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you* (**5:14**).

5:15-17 Wisdom and folly. Believers choose to live in a way that is *wise* rather than *unwise* (**5:15**). In the OT, the unwise (or foolish) are those who refused to submit to the claims of the one true God (Ps 14:1; Prov 10:23; 14:16; Rom 1:22). Jesus described foolishness as being able to hear a message but not putting what has been learnt into practice (Matt 7:24-27). Here in Ephesians, foolishness is the failure to discern that *the days are evil* (**5:16b**). Recognising that we are living in a world where evil rather than God prevails, we need to make *the most of every opportunity* to shine as lights for Christ (**5:16a**). As we go about this task, we must continually look to God to know his will (**5:17**, 10; Rom 12:1-2).

5:18-21 Alcohol and the Holy Spirit. In Paul's day, wine was an everyday drink. So here Paul is not saying that Christians should not drink anything stronger than tea. What is important for him is what controls us. Alcohol and drugs dull our minds and transform our characters, allowing us to act in ways that are contrary to the will of God (Prov 23:20-21, 29-35; 31:4-7; 1 Thess 5:4-7; 1 Pet 4:2-4).

Rather than being full of wine, we should be *filled with the Spirit* (**5:18**). The Spirit should be the one transforming our characters (Rom 12:2-3). Rather than singing drunken songs, we should be worshipping God joyfully, with hearty singing of different kinds of songs and thanksgiving for all he has done in Jesus. Such worship will encourage and bless all those who are present.

Rather than getting drawn into alcohol-fuelled conflicts, we should be on speaking terms with all members of the community and should demonstrate the grace of submission to one another (**5:19-20**).

In most situations, the person in an inferior position has to submit to the will of his or her superior. But Christ modelled a different way, the way of servanthood (Matt 20:28; Luke 22:25-27). Christ's followers should follow Christ's example (**5:21**). Their mutual submission is not forced, but is a practical recognition of their equality in God's sight (Phil 2:3). It is manifestation on earth of the equality and humility that prevails between the Trinity in heaven.

Acting in the ways that Paul has outlined in this section, and in particular practising mutual submission, is evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work.

5:22-6:9 In our homes

New life in Christ should also transform relationships within a believer's home, and so transform society. So Paul again focuses on certain areas to illustrate the type of transformation required. In particular he focuses on the relationships of wives and husbands, parents and children, and slaves and masters. In each case, he begins by addressing the party regarded as socially inferior and more vulnerable before reminding the party who is in a position of power of his or her responsibilities to the other. In all cases, the pattern to be followed is that of Christ's self-giving love.

5:22-33 Husbands and wives. In Galatians 3:28 Paul states that men and women are equal in God's sight. Some people argue that marriage too is a partnership of equals in which each party should submit to the other, as stated in 5:21. However, in 5:22 Paul specifically instructs wives to *submit* to their husbands. The word "submit" is repeated twice in the Greek text and three times in the NIV translation of 5:22-24. So clearly Paul attaches great importance to this. This submission is not rooted in any merit on the husband's part but in the wife's reverence for Christ, which leads her to show respect for the one who is *the head* of the family unit, tying it together in the same way as Christ unites the church under him (**5:22-23**). The use of the word "head" here does not mean that the husband is intrinsically superior to the wife, but merely that he is the one whom society regards as responsible for the family unit.

Wives may be startled to hear that the submission they offer should extend to all areas of life, without exception (**5:24**). This burden could be intolerable were it not for instructions to husbands that immediately follow. Here there is no mention of the man being the head. Instead, the focus is on Christ's self-sacrificial love and service to his people (**5:25**). This is the pattern husbands must copy.

Christ did not beat his followers or demand that they serve him. Instead, he loved them with all their flaws, and worked tirelessly to bless them. His love meant that he was even prepared to die for his church. Those who hear his message and come to him in faith are washed *with water through the word* (**5:26**). Here Paul may be referring to the symbolic washing of baptism, or simply to the repentance that follows hearing the word of Christ. Whatever the case, all those who believe are cleansed from their sin and made *holy and blameless* and beautiful (**5:27**). Paul's point is not that husbands can purify their wives, but rather that they should emulate the depth of the love that Christ displayed for the church and his joy in it.

Christ is the head of the church, and Paul has just presented the way Jesus loved his body, the church (**5:29-30**). Husbands as the "head" of their wives must similarly love their wives *as their own bodies* (**5:28**). The wife is to be loved, nourished and cherished; never hated or abused in any way.

The image of the husband-wife union as a head-body union underscores the close connection between them. The husband and wife are inseparable, for the head cannot live without the body. The same point is made by the description of them as *one flesh* (**5:31**). Marriage makes a new unit, respectfully distanced from all other bonding, even parental bonding, and makes the husband and wife one. The bond between them is far deeper than that between parent and child. We sometimes forget this, and a man may be urged to honour his parents when he should in fact be serving his wife.

Paul recognises the profound mystery of the relationship between Christ and the church, and the impossibility of fully emulating it in any marriage (**5:32**). But to reduce it to its simplest terms, *each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband* (**5:33**). Their relationship offers them an opportunity to serve one another and model Christ and his self-giving love and service to others.

6:1-4 Parents and children. Children are instructed, to *obey your parents,* not only because this is the *right* thing to do but also out of loyalty to Christ (**6:1**). Moreover, in doing this they are obeying one of the Ten Commandments, which comes with a promise of well-being and *long life* (**6:2-3**). Parents are to nourish their children with positive *training and instruction*, guiding their Christian education in the knowledge of the Lord. Parents should take care not to cause resentment or *exasperate* their children by taking them for granted or making unreasonable demands, especially when these are inappropriate for their age or the gifts God has given them (**6:4**).

6:5-9 Masters and slaves. Slavery was common in Paul's day. Some of the readers of this letter would have been slaves, and others might have been slave owners. Paul makes no comment on the practice of slavery, but he does seek to transform his readers' thinking about the relationship between slave and master by declaring that a) all are free in Christ irrespective of their social status; b) all are

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Marriage in a South Asian context is a family affair – it is the coming together of two individuals and their families. Thus the family plays a major role when it comes to choosing a life partner. In the past, the family often made the choice, and the bride and the bridegroom might not even see each other before their marriage. Abraham's choice of a bride for Isaac (Gen 24) was thus in keeping with the Asian way of choosing one's life partner. Asian couples accepted this, and whereas in the West most people marry for love, in South Asia the majority of couples choose to love the ones they marry.

Parents in Asia consider the role of choosing a partner for their child as a God-given privilege and responsibility. But many parents have abused and commercialised this privilege, leading urban young people to rebel against the system. They want to choose their own partners, although they will still seek their parents' consent to their marriage. Both parents and children need guidance from the church as they adapt to this new reality.

The payment of dowry is a glaring example of the commercialisation of marriage. Originally, this practice was intended to ensure that the girl obtained a fair share of the ancestral property, but over time it has become a cover for greed. Girls with an inadequate dowry may be unable to marry, or if they do, they may be murdered by their new family. Unfortunately, even Christian families sometimes demand a dowry, whereas they ought to take a stand against greed (1 Tim 6:8-10). A woman should be valued for who she is, not for the goods she brings with her. A wedding, too, should be a celebration of a union, not an occasion for extravagant spending and displays of wealth that leave families in debt for years.

Then there is the issue of in-laws and parental interference. Parents often find it difficult to release their children after marriage. Many men are expected to stay with their parents after marriage to take care of them and to ensure inheritance of parental property. In such homes, the parents may act as dictators and cause discord between the man and his wife. Meanwhile the woman loses all her rights as a member of her own family and becomes part of her husband's family. It is not surprising that the most common conflict in South Asian homes is between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law.

In Christian homes, such a situation reflects a failure to take seriously what the Bible says about marriage being a covenant in which "a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:24; see also Matt 19:5; Mark 10:7; Eph 5:31). God intends the bond between a married couple to take priority over their bond to their parents, so that the two become one functional unit. Jesus emphasised that it is God who puts a man and woman together and any attempt to divide the partners in this holy union is an act against God himself (Matt 19:5-6). Parents who constantly interfere with their children and disrupt a couple's family life are guilty of working against what God has joined together. They should learn to release their children so that the couple have space to grow in order to achieve God's purpose for their family life. This is not to say that children should not honour their parents after marriage, but there needs to be a balanced shift in allegiance from parents to spouse. The man, who has been appointed as the head of the family, needs to take the lead in setting this balance.

The fact that the man is to become "one flesh" with his wife also indicates that she is neither a piece of property nor a spare part that can be replaced at will. It also implies that a husband who abuses his wife harms himself, and parents who abuse their daughter-in-law harm their son.

In the past, spousal abuse has been tolerated and women have been told to endure it rather than risk divorce. But just as the OT prophets spoke out against abuse of the poor, so the church should speak out against the abuse of wives. Husbands should be made to realise that it is a sin to abuse anyone (Matt 5:22), and especially the one whom they are particularly commanded to love, protect and cherish (Eph 5:25; Col 3:19). The church has a responsibility to hold such abusive husbands to account and counsel them, while helping their wives to find healing for themselves and their families.

The changing economic environment in South Asia is also having an effect on marriages. Many men and women are working directly or indirectly for multinational companies. Women thus have some independent income, which has empowered them and disrupted traditional roles. Men are often no longer the sole breadwinners, and the increased assertiveness of women has sometimes led to even minor disagreements becoming reasons for couples to separate. Family routines and parent–child relationships may also be disrupted when the parents work in places like call centres, with odd hours. The fact that men and women now work together provides more opportunities for extramarital relationships.

In such circumstances, the church needs to help couples to safeguard their marriage and family from damaging influences. The best defence is a solid foundation in Christ. Psalm 127:1 says, "Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labour in vain." Money, education and the like can never provide security, but a home that has Christ as its foundation will weather the storms of life.

Good communication also acts like a wall protecting a marriage. Thus churches must encourage communication between husbands and wives, and couples must ensure that they share quality time together if they are to understand each other well.

Christ is the foundation of a healthy marriage, communication is the wall surrounding it, and committed love between the spouses is the roof over it. True love drives out fear and covers a multitude of wrongdoings. It can even be said that a marriage is a coming together of two forgivers, who do not hold grudges against each other. If a couple finds loving each other difficult, they need to turn to the cross of Christ. The springs of love that flow from the cross can keep filling and replenishing their hearts. This love will then overflow into their relationships with their children and those around them.

P. C. Mathew

slaves of Christ, who is the absolute Lord over all; and c) all are accountable to Christ the Lord. However, Paul did counsel slaves to obtain their freedom if possible (1 Cor 7:20-24) and Onesimus was restored to Philemon not as a slave but as a brother (Phlm 16-17).

Christian slaves are exhorted to respect and obey their masters and to be hard-working and honest (**6:5-6**). Their ultimate master is Christ, and he will be the one who will ultimately reward them for their service to him (**6:7-8**).

Christian masters are reminded that these words apply to them too. God knows how they treat their slaves, and whether they resort to threats and physical abuse. And God shows no *favouritism*. They will have to give an account to him for the way they treat others (**6:9**).

We may not own slaves today, but the principles that Paul has outlined here apply equally well to the situation of a house help and a homeowner, or an employee and an employer. Each of us must seek to offer faithful service to those in authority over us and to do our utmost to have nothing with which our Lord can reproach us in regard to the way we treat those over whom we have authority.

6:10-20 In a hostile environment

In this letter Paul has explained how God has demonstrated his grace and his wisdom. The church is to bear witness to this by the radically new way in which believers relate to one another as they grow in Christ. This is one way in which they are serving as the light of the world.

However there is another way in which they fulfil their calling. They need to proclaim the truth of the gospel in a very hostile environment. There are evil forces that seek both to stop people being transformed into God's likeness and prevent God's word being heard by others. These enemies are not human (*flesh and blood*) (**6:12**). They are entirely spiritual in nature, although they exercise their power and authority through the structures of everyday life. But since Christ is already exalted over all of these evil enemies (1:22-23), the church need not fear them. The believers should be *strong in the Lord*, recognise that these powers are at work in the world and be prepared to battle them (**6:10-11**).

The strategy for resisting evil therefore includes a) recognising we are living in a state of continuous conflict; b) recognising who the real enemy is; c) being strengthened with the power of God (6:10); d) being clothed with God's armour (6:11, 13-16); e) making a stand or resisting the enemy (6:11, 13-14); and f) engaging in active intercession and prayer aided by the Spirit of God (6:18-19).

The protective armour of God consists of the *belt of truth*, *breastplate of righteousness*, sandals of *readiness that comes from the gospel of peace*, *the shield of faith*, *the helmet of salvation*, *and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God* (**6:13-17**; 1 Thess 5:8).

Paul advises the believer to be clothed with the gospel and to persevere by faith in God and his word. We should make a prayerful stand (**6:18**), resisting all onslaughts against the truth of the gospel. Warfare is prayerful, confident, Spirit-dependant proclamation of the gospel, or making *known the mystery of the gospel* (**6:19**). A believer needs to be fully sheltered within and completely reliant in God and his powerful provision of the gospel, which is the full armour of God. What is commonly called "spiritual warfare" is being able to give a defence of what we believe, as well as evangelism that proclaims the gospel message. It also includes intercession for the spread of the gospel in all places, even when the bearers of the gospel are in prison like Paul (**6:20**).

6:21-24 Concluding Remarks

It seems likely that Tychicus, one of Paul's associates, would deliver this letter to Ephesus and give Paul's friends a more detailed account of Paul's circumstances (**6:21-22**; see also Acts 20:4; Col 4:7; 2 Tim 4:12). This personal report from a highly commended servant of God would encourage the readers.

The letter ends with the blessing of *peace … love with faith* and *grace* to all the faithful. These covenantal blessings will produce a community that may be described as those *who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love* (**6:23-24**).

Idicheria Ninan

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