

# Notes on Ephesians

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## 1:1–14

Paul may have written this letter for many churches and had it circulated. One of the earliest manuscripts of the book has a blank where *Ephesians* is otherwise written, and the letter has few personal references. However, Paul wrote because there were things he had to say as an apostle, and because of the gifts he had received from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, gifts of grace and peace.

Paul's heart was full because of the full spiritual blessing that had come to the world by God's will and through Christ. He will tell us what that blessing is but his words are actually a psalm of praise. To bless God is not to make him so but to acknowledge him as the source of all blessing. We could not bless God if we did not first receive who he is and what he has done; we could have no idea of who he is without receiving his blessings.

From the beginning, God has given his blessing to us so that we can look forward to, and come to, his goal for us and for all things. His blessing is actually his being present and doing us good. Through his covenants to Israel, God promised a blessing for the world, and showed them the way to live in that promise. Now, the world can be assured of God's blessing in Christ.

These verses will show why Paul blesses God, and what God has done so that his people, Jews, and then Gentiles, may live to the praise of his glory (vv. 12, 14). This adoration is not just in words but flows out in the life of those whom God has blessed.

The full spiritual blessing in Christ, in heavenly places, means all the blessedness of Christ himself in the Father's presence (2:6). God's blessing will go beyond what would empower our life in this world. It addresses our whole person whose life must be lived in 'heavenly places'. Evil powers seek control over us in this realm (6:12), and our inner being must be fortified to live in this 'real world'.

How then do we share in the blessedness of God? Paul reminds us repeatedly that it is by God's will and through Jesus Christ.

The God and Father of Christ chose us, in his Son, to be holy and blameless before him in love. It was his pleasure and will to choose out our destiny: to be adopted as his children through Jesus Christ. Therefore, we praise his glorious grace, grace we have received in the one the Father calls Beloved.

It was by this Son, and by the Father giving him up to death, that we have been set free, forgiven. What rich grace!

By him also, God has revealed his mystery, or his good pleasure to us, so we can participate in it, a plan to unite everything under the Headship of Christ.

Then, Jews, the first to trust in Christ, were promised an inheritance, dependent now, not on their keeping the law but on the gracious will of Israel's covenant Lord. In this way, Israel would now live to God's glory. Gentiles also, by the same faithful word, had received the Spirit and the same inheritance and could anticipate the redemption that would come to all God's people. So they too would be to God's glory.

We could say that to receive the full blessing of Christ is to live in the blessedness of God. That is, everything for which we here give thanks to God, we do so because it has pleased God of his own will and grace to make it over to us as the empowerment and assurance and hope of our life. God's blessing is his being all that he is as God to us and relating us to himself through Christ.

## Prayer

Father, may your will be done on earth as in heaven. You have planned and accomplished more than we could have sought or done. Because you offered up your Son, we are before you, holy and blameless. Your love is upon us as it is upon him, and our love is for you because we are your children. We look for the day when all things will be gathered together under his headship, just as all things were encompassed by him on his cross. We bless you for the inheritance that awaits us, and for your salvation which ensures we shall receive it.

Father, let us live for your glory. Lord Jesus Christ, may we seek no other humanity than yours. Spirit of God, keep us open to all that you have made known by your coming. This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## 1:15–23

When Paul heard of the faith and love of his readers, he gave thanks to God for them. Here was the outworking of God's purpose and the power of his Christ in the lives of his people. Paul could pray with confidence for the further gift of a spirit of wisdom and revelation so they would grow in their knowledge of the God who had blessed them. He is the 'God of our Lord Jesus Christ', the 'Father of glory'. Well may we say: 'Father, show us your glory!' (cf. Exod. 33:18). The gift of knowing is as much a gift of grace as redemption itself. Our blindness means that we do not readily see the power and the grace of God's works (cf. Deut. 29:2–4, 29; 30:1, 6).

This knowledge of God comes by illumination for the 'eyes of our hearts' (cf. Matt. 6:23). It is not mere information, or secret knowledge, but an opening up of ourselves through what God revealed in Jesus Christ and by the Spirit. It is by this Spirit that we are acknowledged and empowered for new life. May we know the future before us, and what it means to be God's inheritance! (God's inheritance must be the future gift that will come to him as the fruit of his loving.) May we understand the power with which God works in us!

There can be no effective psychology of revelation. The two elements we can use are proclamation of the gospel, and prayer for those who are blind. What happens then is a work of God. We may

describe what happens as a testimony, but cannot explain it. To presume to do so would be to put ourselves on the same level as the one who acts.

This power has overcome death by raising Christ from the dead. It has placed him at God's right hand, in the heavenlies, above all other powers or persons, present or future, evil or good. Everything being at Christ's feet suggests he has conquered everything; being head over all things suggests that he has already summed them all up (to disempower their evil, to turn them all to his purposes and to unify all things). All this is for the sake of the church, a body that could never be anything in itself, but is Christ's body. The church is the fullness of Christ whom God has made to fill all things.

## Prayer

Father, we stand before you and your Son with wonder. Christ is already seated beside you with authority over all powers, both friendly and hostile. The debris of this creation will be restored to order and joy and presented to you by him. We have come to faith and love. Hope is being restored as you open up to us the power that Christ is using on our behalf. Then Lord, enlighten the eyes of our hearts. May the dullness of living within our own horizons be wiped away, and may we live in the fullness of Christ whom you have ordained to be the fullness of all things. In his name we pray. Amen.

## 2:1–10

The blessing of being in Christ and participating in him is highlighted by a contrast. We formerly lived in trespasses and sins; now, the God of mercy, love and grace has brought us to life. Our former life was learned from the world, and, in fact, from the prince of this world, Satan, whose spirit inspires all those who are disobedient to God. Paul links himself with us, his Gentile readers: together, we had fallen into fleshly cravings, and had no more to guide us than the longings of our own bodies and minds. All of us lived life under the wrath of a jealous God.

We had excluded God but God had not excluded us. By the Christ whose blessings he has already described, by the mercy, love and grace of God, we have been made alive, actually raised up with Jesus to be seated with him before God, in full humanity, awaiting the surpassing riches of his grace and kindness to us.

All this, our being rescued and restored, is due to God's grace. Paul told us before that God's choice of us in Christ was so that praise would rise to God for the glory of his grace (1:6); now this is happening. What we did was believe. This is another way of saying that we made a choice to trust in God's works rather than our own abominable works. All the praise would be to God and none to ourselves for our choice. The Worker is God, and he has worked so that (not because) we would be freed for good works, pre-planned for us by God.

God being the Creator will be mentioned again: to explain the new humanity of Jew and Gentile as one people (2:15); to show the origins of the mystery of the church which does nothing less than proclaim the wisdom of God (3:9); and to show that our good works are like clothing ourselves in what God has created (4:24).

## Prayer

Father, you have made us again, in your image. Our life is now in Christ and in him raised up to live before you. Our slavery to the world, the flesh and the devil was no match for your kindness and grace and love and mercy. Our life is now created by you, and with our participation in that. Our future is opened up, not by our passions but by your affections. Then, thanks be to you, Father God, for your works, and for the power to rely on you. Surely, the surpassing riches of your grace and kindness will follow us all the days of our lives, until the full revelation of this comes in glory. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

## 2:11–22

God raised up Israel to be a light to the nations, and the means of their being blessed. For the most part, Gentiles had not received this, and so Israel had reason to call Gentiles uncircumcised. They had no promise to guide their future, no God and no peace. To Paul, the blindness of the nations was awesome. What would it mean to be in this world without the light of God's covenant promises?

From another point of view, the Jew's disdain of Gentiles was based on the latter's not having God's law. Their supposed superiority was hardly warranted given that, for the most part, Jewish circumcision had not affected their heart. But Gentiles not having the law is not his point here.

All of this has changed with the coming of Jesus. Humanity now has before it, not just Israel with a message of blessing, but Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of Israel's mission, the full blessing in person. By this message, Jews and Gentiles were being brought to peace with God, and so, to peace with one another. Israel's law had divided Jew and Gentile because the latter could not come into the full worship of Israel. Gentiles were hostile because they knew God's law had excluded them. They were hostile to the Jews because they were the witnesses to that. But now, Christ, who fulfilled the law, has drawn us together to the Father.

Paul tells us Gentiles who were 'far off' (like the wicked in Isa. 57:19–21), to remember that we were once without Christ and without hope. He wants us to appreciate what it now means that we are one with Israel's great heritage and hope, and one with their Christ and one with each other before the Father.

There had always been the possibility of people joining themselves to Israel, being circumcised and so being one with them in the covenants (e.g. Exod. 12:48–49; Ezra 6:21). But this was limited in compass and nothing like the gathering of the nations now happening in Christ.

It is the spilling of Christ's blood, a deed done in his flesh, which brings us all near to God, and reconciles us to God. Christ's death brought the administration of law, by which Jew and Gentile had been separated, to an end. Nothing less that this could bring to its finale what God had begun in Israel and nothing less would heal the division between God and man and between Jew and Gentile.

Other teaching on law may be found elsewhere. It was the law which condemned us all and from whose debt we are released through forgiveness (Col. 2:13–14). The hostility was not merely cultural but spiritual. It was caused by guilt and healed by blood. Gentiles may not have had the law but they had its requirements written on their heart (Rom. 2:15).

It was not only Jews who needed the law abolished in order to have peace with God but Gentiles as well.

Other teaching on blood may be found elsewhere. We have redemption through Christ's blood, meaning the forgiveness of our sins (Eph. 1:7). The blood of Christ spilt on the cross was an act of propitiating God (Rom. 3:25), and of justifying us (Rom. 5:9). It established a new covenant (I Cor. 10:16; 11:25; Heb. 13:20). By this blood, God was reconciling all things to himself (Col. 1:19–23). Christ's blood has provided an eternal redemption, not just temporal, and cleanses not just the flesh but also the conscience (Heb. 9:12–14; 10:4, 19).

Christ established peace in his flesh. Now he proclaims it to us. Christ has made a single new humanity (*anthropos*) in himself. This is the peace we have before God and with each other.

Now, Jew and Gentile may enter into the Father's presence by the Spirit and are God's household. Gentiles are now full members of this home, built on Christ and the apostles, a temple or dwelling of God by the Spirit. Gentiles, who were deeply lost in sin and desperately lonely in the universe, are now full members of God's family and home.

If the blessing promised to Abraham was so that all the nations in him may be blessed, we have to ask if there was no blessing for Gentiles until Christ came. Many were blessed, such as Egypt under Joseph, Naaman the leper, the Syro-Phoenecian woman and, doubtless, many others. Jesus was adamant that the temple remain a house of prayer for all nations. Many, like Cornelius, longed to know and honour the God of Israel, but whatever crumbs these people obtained, it was not full access to God and to the people of God. It could not be known that such a thing existed because, as Paul tells us in the next chapter, it had not been revealed. It could not be revealed until the covenants of promise given to them were fulfilled by the Christ who was promised to them, the atonement completed and full fellowship established in him.

## Prayer

Father, how could we know you unless you revealed yourself to us? Israel knew you and drew near to you by the covenant you made with them, and you taught them to hope in the One you would send. We thank you for the fulfilment of your purpose for them and for us in sending your Son, and for the offering up of his flesh and his blood.

Father, your law has done its work. It has shown Israel the way of true worship. It has excluded us who were far away. But it has exposed the hostility of us all and exposed us all to your wrath. Thankyou, our Father, that our enmity with each other, and with you, has been abolished. You have removed the prescriptions that separated us. Thanks be to you, Father of our Lord Jesus, that he shed his blood to fulfil, in our place, all your holy will, and that he has reconciled us to yourself, and to each other. Hear our prayer in Christ's name. Amen.

## 3:1–21

Paul was in prison, but his heart was not locked up there. He was preoccupied with the administration of God's grace to the Gentiles.

In 1:8–10, Paul spoke about the will and good pleasure of God, set before us in Christ as a plan for the end time to sum up all things in Christ. The plan is not a sketch on paper but an administration being worked out, and shown to be working out in Christ.

Christ summed up everything on his cross and in his resurrection so that we could live in redemption now. The whole creation and we are being lifted from slavery to corruption. This is what we now proclaim because it is God's pleasure to have it so, and it is the revelation of God's wisdom and prudence in Christ as it is preached. Effectively, Paul means that his preaching is part of Christ's administering the creation with a view to the unity of all things.

Paul occupied a special place among the apostles. He asks us, his Gentile readers, to check it for ourselves by reading his letter, and to 'perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ.' However, it is not just his understanding he wants us to marvel at but what had been revealed to him.

He was given the stewardship of God's grace for us (v. 2), given grace by God's power to be a servant of it (v. 7) and given the grace of preaching it to Gentiles (v. 8). He felt its irony powerfully because he considered himself the least of God's people. But the special grace given to him was for others and had to do with the place his Gentile readers would have in God's purpose. He was in prison for their sake and wanted them to consider it their glory (v. 13).

In fact, Paul says that the revelation was made, not just to him, but to Christ's 'holy apostles and prophets'. To him had been given particular insight but he no longer had it alone. The apostles and prophets stood together led by the Spirit, in declaring this news to the whole world.

God chose Israel to be his people as a witness to his grace. They were to love him and fulfil his will. Old Testament prophets had clearly prophesied that Gentiles would be included on the day when God saved his people (e.g. Isa. 19:23–24). What is new is that this has happened through Jew and Gentile being incorporated in the body of Christ. The gospel has shown that Gentiles who believed in Christ are equally members of God's people, sharing the same inheritance and promises. The mystery is Christ (v. 4) and Gentiles participating in his body and his promises (v. 6), the boundless riches of Christ (v. 8). The mystery was revealed to Paul, to share it with everyone (v. 9).

Paul in this section is the opposite of Jonah in the Old Testament. Jonah could not bear the thought that God would include people outside Israel in his purpose and grace.

God's grace could not be fathomed. Nevertheless, the mystery of the Creator's plan was now Paul's to announce, so that the endless variety of God's wisdom would be displayed to the watching (and possibly hostile) spiritual powers. This eternal plan of God has been carried out in the person of Jesus Christ, and is now being filled out through Jew and Gentile, in him, coming confidently to God.

We really meet Paul when we see him on his knees. His thinking about God's grace had brought him to worship—kneeling before this great Father. How could the Creator of the world become known? Only through this gospel by which God was declared as the world's Father—the Father from whom all family relationships derive.

May the Father give strength to his children by the Holy Spirit, so that Christ may dwell in us as we live by faith and grow in love. May we comprehend what cannot be comprehended, or rather, participate in it, knowing the love of Christ and being filled

with God's fullness. God's power is at work among believers so we should not set limits to what God is about in us. God is revealing his glory in the church and in its Saviour together.

## Prayer

Lord God, you have become our Father, through the gift of your Son, and by calling us to participate in your grace and promises and inheritance. As one people, we come to you, boldly, and in worship. Your love has encompassed all that you have made and you will complete what you have begun, to your glory. 'Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen' (vv. 20–21).

## 4:1–16

Paul's sufferings were incidental to his calling, which was, to participate in Christ's administration of the gospel (3:2; also I Cor. 9:17; Col. 1:25; cf. I Thes. 2:4). But, he reminds us that he was in prison, to reinforce his call to us to act worthily of our calling. We also can participate in the administration of the gospel.

The unity of the Church, 'the body', is not an ideal or a demand but what Christ has accomplished in himself. At the same time, it has a practical outworking. Those who have been joined to Christ are summoned to act with humility, gentleness, patience and love, qualities and actions which gave us the gospel, and which will make unity a practical reality in the world. We cannot make unity but must maintain it.

There is one body. There is only one Christ and everyone joined to him is joined to each other member. We have only one Spirit, one hope, one content and dynamic of faith, one baptism and one Father who is the Fountainhead of all things.

The unity being worked out among us derives from the grace measured out to each one by Christ. He is the conqueror of captivity itself, returning from battle (on the cross), ascending his throne and distributing booty to his troops. No depths of death remain to haunt us; no power can rival his reign. He has conquered in order to fill all things with himself. This explains the apostles, prophets and evangelists and pastor teachers given to the church. By them, and by the whole church so equipped and in action, Christ is filling his whole church with himself.

The suggestion here that we are a container to be filled up should not be pressed because the rest of Paul's imagery shows that what we have is ours in Christ. Christ is not a filling station but the new humanity in which we live.

It is by the mutual serving of one another that each saint fully participates in faith's unity and the knowledge of Christ. By Christ serving his church with grace gifts, and their equipping the saints for service, Christ will bring his church to maturity—to nothing less than the fullness of his own stature.

With such a dynamic action of Christ in action, we should not leave ourselves a prey to falsehood, doctrinal or personal. Rather, we should live the truth of love revealed by Christ, and so, grow up into him. He is filling the whole by what he supplies through each one. Fullness may still be coming, but Christ is forming in us now what will appear on the last day.

## Prayer

We bless you, our Father, that we live through Christ's powerful and gracious giving to us. Nothing that resists your oneness can withstand the victory you have granted to him. From his victory we have all received; grace to cover all our sins; grace too, to have something to bring to the building up of your body. We bless you for all Christ's gifts, and for our participation in this work of love. May the meekness and gentleness of Christ himself preserve us in this unity forever. In his name we pray. Amen.

## 4:17 – 5:2

This world has been subjected to futility (Rom. 8:20), so, nothing in the creation can ever have purpose in itself. God himself provides its hope and purpose. Those who don't want God in their thinking are given up to futility (Rom. 1:21). So, Paul says, their understanding is without light, their heart is like stone and they have no true feeling. Rather, they give themselves over to whatever they want to have or do, and they acknowledge no rule over them.

It may be offensive to some to say they have no feelings (insensitive) when they pride themselves on being aware of their own feelings and the feelings of others almost constantly. But, without God, the capacity to feel truly so as to be sensitive to what is really so, has been deadened.

'Don't live this way!' says Paul. This is not the 'teaching we received in Christ's school' (Calvin). We learned to discard the manner of life of what we were (in Adam), corrupted by lusts which deceive. We learned to be renewed in mind (i.e. not just to behave differently) and to clothe ourselves with the new humanity created in Christ (as in 2:15). This humanity is 'according to God', in his image (as in Genesis 1:26–27), holy and righteous.

'Do what you have learned!' says Paul. 'Discard lying to one another and say what is true. We are one body' (as in 2:15). Saying what is true must mean saying what is true in Christ and so what will build up the other.

'In Col. 3:9 "lying" is the main characteristic of life under the sway of the Old Man... Thus the whole former existence of the saints is defined as a lie, or as living a lie.... But while secular existentialism considers inauthenticity a deviation from each individual man's potential, Paul measures man's existence against the "truth in Jesus" or the "true word," i.e. the Gospel, and their social effect, i.e. the fact that "we are members of one body" (Marcus Barth, 2/511).

New behaviour fleshes out the new humanity we received in Christ. Satan had gained the advantage over us through our anger. Now anger may do its job, without sin, and be finished in a day. Property was the scene of our coveting and theft, but is now earned by labour and shared with the needy. Speech was formerly the overspill of our vile hearts but is now used to build others up with the grace it inwardly knows. Israel once grieved the Spirit of God by not receiving his grace and goodness and mercy and compassion (Isa. 63:7–10). Now, we, a people of God, led by the Spirit of Christ, put aside all malice and slander and share the kindness, compassion and forgiveness of Christ with others.

'Imitate God! No less!' says Paul. The love of God has lighted on us, his children. The love of the Father led the Son to give himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to his Father. In like manner, let us live our life in love for one another.

## Prayer

Father, forgive us, for we have been arrogant, and have thought that we could make a purpose and world of our own. You gave us up to futility and we became most vile. Surely, you have been gracious to us and renewed us in heart and mind through Jesus Christ. Give us a steady purpose and zeal to put away all that has marred your image. May the truth and grace and goodness revealed in your Son be formed in us and among us for the sake of your glory. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

## 5:3–20

How does someone behave when the love of God is flowing in them, as it flowed first of all in Christ? What behaviour is appropriate if we are to inherit the kingdom of God? Sexual licence, every uncleanness, and greed or idolatry is excluded from this life and this future, completely. 'So let it be so now!' says Paul. There are always those who will teach that the kingdom of God is broad and tolerant, so don't be deceived. God will destroy what is not of him. There will be nothing unclean in the new heaven and earth (Rev. 21:9 – 22:5).

Neither Christ or Paul envisaged Christians having no contact with the world, but we are to be as distinct from the world as light is from darkness. God has lit us up. The alternative to uncleanness of all kinds is more than restraint. It is doing all that is good and right and true. Our life can be spent finding out what pleases the Lord. This will expose all that is false, not necessarily by finding it out and talking about it, but by being what we are, the breaking in of the new age of love on a corrupt and failing world. As this light shines, it illuminates the world around. Paul seems to mean that some who have been in the darkness are changed by this shining and become light themselves. This is what had happened to others before (v. 14 with v. 8). 'Wake up!' says Paul. 'Christ is shining on you!'

J. B. Phillips translates this verse: 'It is even possible (after all, it happened with you!) for light to turn the thing it shines upon into light also.'

Wisdom, then, is redeeming time, or making the most of it for God's purposes. We can't avoid the days being evil, but as those who will inherit the kingdom of God, we can use the present day to serve the interests of that kingdom. Folly reveals itself by giving in to the desires of body and mind, like drunkenness (a prime example of folly). Wisdom is understanding and doing what the Lord has chosen for us, and being filled with his Spirit (the source of all wisdom). This wisdom is best expressed as we address each other, with songs from our heart to the Lord (Christ), giving thanks to the Father in his name. How different this is from conversation focussed on what people have done in secret (v. 12)!

## Prayer

Father, you have lit your love in our hearts through your Son, Christ. You have rescued us from the filth and folly of this present world. You have made us heirs of the coming kingdom and given us deeds to do now which are the sign of your reign. Shine on us Lord! Let our life

be aflame! Set others alight! Let our life be full of praise to you and to your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

## 5:21 – 6:9

What does Spirit filled living look like in our specific relationships? Paul says they are to be characterised by mutual submission. That is, each is to regard himself or herself as the servant of the other. This is what Jesus lived and taught (Matt. 20:26–28; Phil. 2:3–5), and our life is now lived in reverence for him.

The exhortation to submit to one another continues to fill out the series that began with 'be filled with the Spirit' (v. 18), and the relationships addressed in what follows are the examples of what he means by mutual submission.

A wife who is submitted to the Lord is to submit also to her husband. He is her head, just as Christ is head of the church. Christ's headship is characterised by his being the Saviour of his body, the church. A wife should expect her life and welfare to flow from her husband.

We should not expect life to flow from a particular social arrangement but from the Spirit. But, given the new life of the Spirit, we should expect relationships to flow in the way described here because they are the outworking of the life we have received. The fact that we live in imperfect situations should not prevent our hoping and expecting that life will flow in mutual submission.

A husband who knows that Christ loved the church and gave himself for her, and who knows that the whole church has been cleansed and made holy by this action so as to be presented in splendour to Christ as bride, should love his wife in the same manner. His wife is his own body. Would he not care for this? In such a manner, Christ has regarded us, his church, as his own body.

Consider this: the command given at the time of creation says a man is to leave his parents and be joined to his wife. The two become one flesh. Paul found this to be a profound mystery, and says it refers to Christ and his church. Since creation, all history has moved forward under the promise of a Son of God who would nourish and cherish his people, as a man would care for his own body. In fact, Christ would lay down his own body to sanctify us. So, in the light of this awesome mystery, each husband should love his wife as himself and she should reverence him. From the beginning, man and wife have been a representation in common life of the one loving union of Christ with his bride.

Only children are directed to one of the Ten Commandments, but their obedience is 'in the Lord'. This suggests that they are among God's saved people through Christ's discipline and instruction mediated by their parents and so, are living in love. It is in the Lord that the love is found to obey. Children will benefit by obeying because of the promise attached to it. Every command carries with it the promise of life (Ps. 1; Matt. 5:19; John 14:21), but this is the first of them, and, of course, the place where the truth of benefiting from obedience is learned.

Parents who understand the discipline and instruction of the Lord (cf. Deut. 11:2-3), will know how full of mercy and encouragement it is and will represent this to their children.

Slaves had little opportunity to choose a life style, but they could choose their attitude. In working, they could obey Christ, be slaves of Christ, do the will of God heartily, serve their master as though he were Christ and expect a good return from Christ. This principle is true for slaves and for masters. So masters should have the same care for their servants and not use their power for personal advantage. God doesn't judge on the basis of some being masters and others being slaves.

## Prayer

Father, how complex our relationships become when we try to find our own place and climb to where we cannot be troubled by others. You have placed us with one another, with varying roles and responsibilities. Then let us live to you and to your Son. Protect us from the arrogance of the strong, and may the strength of your love and the beauty of your purpose shape and colour all our days. Loose us from our fears and settle us in your promise, for the sake of Christ our Lord. Amen.

## 6:10–24

We already know from this letter that Christ is above every dominion (1:21), but that there is a 'ruler of the power of the air' (2:2) who opposes him. It is in this environment that the church displays God's wisdom to rulers in heavenly places (2:10). It is here that the power within God's people is able to accomplish far more than they could imagine (3:20). Paul has spoken of the moral battle between truth and falsehood (4:22–25), light and darkness (5:8–17) in which we are involved. Therefore, it is no surprise that we are now addressed as soldiers.

Paul has prayed that we would be strengthened by God's power (3:16). Now he exhorts us to be strong in that power. All the teaching of the book comes to its finale in this exhortation.

The devil is wily, his forces numerous and powerful. They are not flesh and blood so cannot be confronted with physical weapons. But it was in the heavenlies that we received the full spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3) so we could live to God's glory. Now we must stand in the full armour of God to withstand the enemies.

The items to be used so we may stand boldly have all been proclaimed in this letter. Truth is the gospel of salvation we have heard (1:13). It is Christ in whom we live and who teaches us (4:21). It is a life we live and words we speak (4:15, 25), the things we now do in the light of Christ (5:9).

Righteousness is part of the new humanity created in the likeness of God and which we are to put on (4:24). We are God's workmanship in Christ, created for good works (2:10).

Peace is proclaimed to Jew and to Gentile, bringing both to the Father, and each to the other (2:15–18). This makes us ready to be God's people in the world.

Faith, with love, comes to us as a gift of grace (1:15; 2:8) and gives us confidence to come to God (3:12). By this faith, Christ dwells in our hearts (3:17) and we live in the

oneness of the whole church (4:5, 13). All this is needed to quench the fiery darts of accusation by Satan.

Salvation has come to us by the gospel (1:13) and it means being made alive with Christ (2:5). It has come through reliance on the grace of God so there is no way of our taking credit for it (2:8). It is Christ himself as our Saviour/Bridegroom (5:23).

Take all these, and wear and use them. Take the word of God, in the power of the Spirit. It will be weapon enough to destroy all enemies. Pray always, aided by the Spirit, in all conditions and for every believer.

Paul desired such prayers for himself, because he wanted a special utterance and boldness to be God's ambassador, so that God's mystery may be known.

Tychicus, a companion and messenger for Paul brought this letter, and would both tell the readers about Paul and encourage them in the faith. Paul's own encouragement and prayer flowed out for his readers. 'May our Father, and Christ, give peace to all his people, may love attend faith, and grace be with all who have undying love for Christ.' Here was an exhortation for the believers at Ephesus (and wherever else this letter travelled) never to lose the love by which they now lived (cf. Rev. 2:1–7).

## **Prayer**

Father in heaven, our life is not confined to flesh and blood. We live in the heavenly places, with Christ, at your right hand, but also among the enemies of faith, hope and love. Keep us by your gospel, and by the life now flowing in us by your Spirit. May we not be hindered by this world's confinements, or the devil's threats, or the tiredness of our own hearts. May nothing around us or within us ever impede the speaking of your word. This we ask in the name of Christ your Son. Amen.

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