

Sermons on Ephesians - Robert Morgan

Robert Morgan Sermon Intro - **Introduction - Robert J Morgan** is the teaching pastor at [Donelson Fellowship in Nashville, Tennessee](#) and is well known for expository messages that are rich in excellent illustrations of Biblical principles.

SIT, WALK AND STAND Ephesians (Overview)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints in Ephesus... (Ephesians 1:1)

This morning *I would like to begin a study into the New Testament book of Ephesians. I hadn't intended to preach this fall from this portion of the Bible, but earlier this year as I was reading through Ephesians in my daily devotions, I became so impressed with the richness of this little book that I wanted to share it with you.

And "richness" is the right word, because Ephesians is all about how rich we are in Christ Jesus. Let me show you some introductory verses:

In (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace... (Eph 1:7).

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints (Eph 1:18).

But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ... (Eph 2:4).

...in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of his grace (Eph 2:7).

Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph 3:8).

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being (Eph 3:16).

We can say in general terms that the first three chapters of Ephesians deal with our riches in Christ. These blessings and riches are listed, catalogued, described, and impressed upon us. Then the last three chapters of Ephesians deal with how we should conduct ourselves in this world--our responsibilities and obligations. Rich people tend to act differently from normal folks. Since we are rich in Christ, we must act differently. Our behavior is effected. Our lifestyle and our moral choices and our conduct is different. Our attitudes are unique in the world, as we fulfill our various roles as husbands and wives and dads and moms and employers and employees and church members.

So there you have the broad themes and overall structure for this forty-ninth book of the Bible: The riches and the responsibilities of the Christian, our riches being listed in the first three chapters and our responsibilities being described in the last three.

Background

Now, to really get a good understanding of this book, we need to know the story behind it, so this morning I'd like to take you on a little trip into New Testament times. Let's travel along with the Apostle Paul as he journeys through the book of Acts, beginning with Acts 18.

The last half of the book of Acts is concerned primarily with three great church-planting trips the Apostle Paul made across portions of the Roman Empire. Here in chapter 18, we find him in Greece, in the city of Corinth which is located not far from Athens. The last time I was in Athens, I was with a tour and we drove over from Athens to Corinth to see the ruins of that ancient city. Well, if we had gotten on a boat in Athens and sailed directly across the Aegean Sea, we would have landed in Turkey, in the modern city of Izmir, which is very close to the ancient ruins of Ephesus.

In Acts 18, Paul was on his second missionary term of service, and he was in Corinth; but in verse 19 he sailed across the Aegean and docked there with a couple of friends. His initial visit to Ephesus was brief, but important.

Look at Acts 18:18ff: They arrived in Ephesus

Who is they? Paul was traveling with a married couple named Priscilla and Aquila. This was one of the smartest and sweetest married couples in all the Bible. They had devoted their marriage to Christ, and they were great evangelists and Bible teachers. They were a missionary team, husband and wife. So these three, Paul, Priscilla, and her husband Aquila, sailed from Corinth and

docked in Ephesus.

What sort of city was Ephesus? It was the Roman capital of this part of the world, and one of the five greatest cities on earth at that time. It was the gateway to Asia, and the capital of Asia Minor. It was not only a bustling seaport, but it was at the intersection of several major trade routes. It also boasted one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of the goddess Diana, otherwise known as Artemis. So it was a great political, commercial, and religious center. And it was absolutely pagan. To the best of our knowledge, there was not a single Christian anywhere in Ephesus.

Into this busy harbor, then, sailed Paul, Pricilla, and Aquila.

Now, Paul was tired and ready to finish his second missionary journey. He wanted to get back to his home church in Antioch and report on his progress. So he did just a bit of evangelizing in the Jewish synagogue, then he departed. But he left behind Pricilla and Aquila. Let's continue reading:

They arrived in Ephesus where Paul left Pricilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus.

But he left behind this extraordinary couple who set to work building bridges, establishing contacts, and laying the groundwork for the planting of a church in this great city. Now, another interesting character suddenly showed up in Ephesus. Continue reading in Acts 18:24ff:

Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria (Egypt), came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures (meaning the Old Testament). He had been instructed with the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.

In other words, here was a gifted Old Testament scholar from Alexandria, Egypt, who was a powerful and persuasive Bible teacher. He loved the Old Testament, and he knew about the ministry of John the Baptist and about the beginnings of the ministry of Christ. But he had not yet heard about all that Jesus had done and said in the flesh. He didn't yet know about the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord. The Gospels had not yet been written. The news had not yet reached him.

He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

By the time Apollos left Ephesus by ship, sailing across the Aegean to Athens and Corinth, he was himself a missionary and an ambassador for Christ. Shortly afterward, Paul the apostle, having started his third missionary journey, arrived back in the city. Look at chapter 19:

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples....

In other words, there were some Jews in the synagogue who now believed John the Baptist was a prophet and a forerunner for the Messiah. Priscilla and Aquila had been plodding along and laying the groundwork like an advance team for Paul. But they had not been able yet to actually lead many people to faith in Christ. Their work had been, as we might say, pre-evangelistic.

There he found some disciples and asked them, "Do you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

And that is the beginning of the church in Ephesus. How many were there? About a dozen. Look at verse 7: There were about twelve men in all./

Now, the remainder of Acts 19 describes one of the most fruitful periods of Paul's ministry. He stayed in this city for over two years, evangelizing and teaching and establishing the church. Converts and missionaries went out from Ephesus and evangelized all of Asia Minor. It was a time of great revival. Look at verse 18: Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

Clint Morgan is our missionary in the Ivory Coast who has worked with the Lobi tribe. He has told me that when a Lobi comes to Christ, very often he will have a ceremony in which he burns his idols and his fetishes, very much like the Ephesians did here with their occultish materials. In so doing, the Lobi man not only clears these things out of his life, but he gives public testimony that he is

once and for all turning from these things.

I think that very often we need to do something similar. I had a young man several years ago who came to Christ, but he never seemed to grow in the Lord as I thought he should. In questioning him, I learned that he still had a stock-pile of pornography stashed under his bed. He said, "I haven't looked at it since I became a Christian, but I don't want to give it to someone else, because that wouldn't be right. But I paid a lot of money for it, and I don't want to just throw it away."

I told him to close his eyes, gather it up in his arms, stuff it in paper bags, carry it out to the back yard, and burn it as an act of repentance and worship. But he never did. Sometimes we just have to physically get rid of the things that can draw away our souls. And so the people of Ephesus burned their materials relating to sorcery, and the result is given in verse 20: In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

When we get serious about dealing with sin in our lives, the Lord gets serious about growing His church.

Now, as I said earlier, Ephesus was a great religious center, the home of the magnificent temple of Diana, otherwise known as Artemis. Many people made their living because of that. The silversmiths and shrine-makers sold idols of the goddess. And as remarkable as it sounds, so many people in this magnificent city began turning to Christ that the economy was impacted. Look at Acts 19:25:

About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way (that is, about the Christian Way, about the presence of the growing numbers of Christians in the city). A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis (or, Diana), brought in no little business for the craftsmen. He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited...."

Demetrius managed to provoke a riot and to stir up such opposition to Paul that the apostle had to suddenly leave town. Chapter 20 begins: When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said good-bye and set out for Macedonia.

A little bit later in chapter 20, Paul ventured into that area again, but he didn't actually enter Ephesus. Instead he sent word for the church leaders from Ephesus to meet him in a town about 30 miles away. The last part of Acts 20 is the wonderful message or the sermon that the Apostle Paul gave to those church leaders from Ephesus.

Paul then went on to Jerusalem where he was arrested. For two years he remained in a prison cell in Israel, in the city of Caesarea. Then at the end of the book of Acts, he was transferred to Rome where he lived under house arrest. Look at the way the book of Acts ends. Chapter 28:30-31 says: For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house (in Rome) and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was during those two years in the early 60s of the first century that he wrote letters to some of the Christians he had met and to some of the churches he had established earlier in the book of Acts. It was during this time that Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesian Christians, to the church he had left back in the city of Ephesus. And that is the background of this book.

A Circular Letter?

But now I want to show you something else that is interesting about this epistle. Turn back to Ephesians 1:1: Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints that are in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.

In some of our oldest manuscripts, the word Ephesus is missing. They are addressed to the saints in _____. You may notice, additionally, there are no personal greetings in this letter. When you read Romans, for example, almost the entire last chapter is devoted to Paul sending personal greetings to his friends in Rome. When you read the book of Colossians, there are personal greetings at the end of the book. But not in Ephesians. Why is that? If Paul spent two to three years in Ephesus, we would expect him to have a lot of friends there, but why does he not refer to them?

And here's another thing. This is practically the only letter that we have from Paul that does not address a specific problem. Very often, he wrote to a church or to an individual to discuss some problem they were having, but there's nothing like that in the book of Ephesians.

So what does all this mean? The book of Ephesians appears to have been a circular letter, sent to the leading church of Asia Minor--Ephesus--but designed to be circulated among all the churches in the entire province. This was Paul's general letter to all the churches in which he wanted to talk to them at large about the riches and responsibilities of being a Christian.

Or, to put it differently, this is God's general, universal message to His church everywhere. It is positive in tone. It is the richest and deepest of all the biblical letters. It is His message to all of us, telling us in no uncertain terms how rich we are and the ensuing responsibilities that we have because of that wealth.

Outline

So we've looked at the basic message and structure of the book, and at its historical background. Now I'd like to conclude this introductory message by sharing with you the best outline of Ephesians I've ever found. In my library are many commentaries on the book of Ephesians. The largest is by two 17th century Puritan writers. It is over 1500 pages long. Now, the book of Ephesians only has six chapters. It runs a little over 300 words, and in my Bible it only covers about six pages. But this commentary is over 1500 pages in one volume. I've never read it because it's too heavy to lift from the shelf.

At any rate, I have quite a few commentaries on Ephesians. But one is my favorite, and it's very short. Sixty-four pages. It was written by a Chinese Christian, Watchman Nee, earlier this century. Actually it was taken down as notes from his lectures before he was imprisoned and eventually killed by the Chinese Communists. It is entitled Sit, Walk, and Stand. And with those three words, we have the outline of the book of Ephesians: **Sit, Walk, and Stand.**

I've already said that the book of Ephesians falls into two sections. The first three chapters deal with our riches as Christians, and the last three deal with our responsibilities. But that second section can be subdivided into a long section that covers chapters 4, 5, and the first part of chapter 6; and a second and much shorter section that runs from chapter 6, verse 10, to the end of the book.

So for the purposes of our sermon series, let's think of these three sections as composing the outline of Ephesians.

Watchman Nee uses the word "Sit" to describe Section 1 (Ephesians 1-3). Why? Look at Ephesians 1:20: He (God the Father) raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

And Ephesians 2:6: And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

We'll discuss later the implications of this, but for now let me just say that the whole theme of Ephesians 1-3 is that we are seated with Christ on His throne in the heavenly realms. Watchman Nee says, "Most Christians make the mistake of trying to walk in order to be able to sit, but that is a reversal of the true order.... Christianity does not begin with a big DO, but with a big DONE.... We are invited at the very outset to sit down and enjoy what God has done for us; not to set out to try to attain it for ourselves.... Sitting is an attitude of rest.... To sit down is simply to rest our whole weight--our load, ourselves, our future, everything--upon the Lord."

When we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we identify with Him, and He shares His life with us. There is a sense in which we are seated with Christ on His throne at this very moment. That is our position, and Paul is doing his best to help the Ephesians realize just how very rich that makes them to be. That is Ephesians, chapters one, two, and three.

Now when we turn to Ephesians 4, we begin a new section. Look at how it begins: As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Paul wrote this in the Greek language, and the Greek word he used is peripateo, to walk around. The older translations render it more literally: Walk worthy of the calling you have received.

When we come to Christ, when we share His wealth, when we are seated with Him, as it were, in the heavenly places, we can't live anyway we want to. We just live differently, and chapters 4, 5, and the first part of chapter 6 tells us how that life should be lived, how we should walk. These chapters deal with the Christian's daily walk.

Now turn to chapter six and verse ten: Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.... Stand your ground... stand.... Stand firm.

The last paragraphs of Ephesians tell us that we have a strong and devious enemy, the devil, and we must take a strong stand against him.

So, in summery, the first part of the book tells us about our position in Christ: We are seated with Him, secure in Him, enriched by the One who shares His throne with us. The second part of Ephesians tells us about our position in the world. We are to walk through this world in a manner worthy of Christ. And the last little section of Ephesians tells us about our attitude toward the enemy. We are to take our stand against the schemes of the devil.

And so it is that the entirety of the Christian life can be summed up in those three little one-syllable verbs that form the skeleton for the book of Ephesians and the backbone for our daily experience: Sit, Walk, and Stand.

Do those three verbs describe you? Are you seated with Christ in the heavenly places? Are you walking in a manner worthy of the calling you have received? Are you taking your stand against the wiles of the devil?

HEAVENLY PLACES

Ephesians 1

Every week we get catalogs through the mail, full of color pictures of all sorts of things to buy. As the Christmas season approaches these catalogs come by the bushel. We toss most of them in the trash, but sometimes I enjoy thumbing through them, admiring the watches and jewelry, the clothes, the furniture, and all the lovely things one can buy if only one has enough money. In the old days, they called these catalogs "Wish Books."

Well, the first chapter of Ephesians is a catalog of our blessings in Christ. Not a catalog of things we can buy, but a catalog of all the blessings we already have if we belong to Christ Jesus by faith. The Apostle Paul inventories them, lists them for us, describes them to us, then prays that our eyes will be opened so that we can see how very rich we really are.

Look at this wonderful paragraph that begins with Ephesians 1:3-14:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will--to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possessions--to the praise of His glorious grace.

Believe it or not, this is one single long rambling sentence in the Greek. Our English versions divide it up so we don't get lost trying to read it, but when Paul wrote this he was so caught up in it and so excited about it that he just kept writing and writing and writing. It is the longest single sentence in the Bible.

The theme is found in the first and last phrases of the paragraph. It begins: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it ends in verse 14 saying: To the praise of His glorious grace.

This is a grand doxology of praise, a lifting up of the heart and mind into the heavenly places, a resounding anthem dedicated to the great God of heaven. This is like the Fanny Crosby hymn that says:

Praise Him! Praise Him!
Jesus our blessed Redeemer!
For our sins He suffered and bled and died;
He our Rock, our hope of eternal salvation,
Hail Him! Hail Him!
Jesus the crucified.

Now, our question is--why is Paul praising the Lord so exuberantly in Ephesians 1:3-14? Why does He violate every rule in grammar by writing a long, rambling, never-ending sentence dedicated to praise to God? Well, he is making an inventory of our blessings in Christ. He is cataloging how rich we are in Jesus Christ. And he becomes so excited about it that he goes on and on and on as if in a rapture of praise.

In this paragraph, we're told that we have three great patrons, three providers, three very rich Persons who are opening their coffers and their checkbooks and who are richly endowing us with more than we can ever count or calculate. In Ephesians 1:3-6 we're told about what we have from God the Father. In Ephesians 1:7-12 talk about what we have from God the Son. And Ephesians 1:13-14 talk about what we have from God the Holy Spirit. Today we'll look at the first of these, what we have from God the Father.

Who Has Blessed Us

Look at the way verse 3 begins: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us....

This is an usual word. In the original Greek, it is *eulogein*, from which we get our English word "eulogy." It is the combination of the prefix *euj*, which means "good," and *legw*, which means to speak a word. So the Greek term here literally means "to speak a good word to," or "to speak a good word about." When we give the eulogy at a funeral, we're supposed to be saying something nice about the person in the casket.

Well, sometimes that term means to bless, to make a good pronouncement upon someone. That's the way it is used here. Ephesians 1:3 says: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us... That is, who has pronounced good and never-ending blessings on His people.

In The Heavens

Notice the next phrase: ...who has blessed us in the heavenly realms....

The Greek says, ...who has blessed us in the heavens. The King James renders it ...in the heavenly places... and the NIV, in the heavenly realms. This is a characteristic phrase that we find five times in the book of Ephesians.

Ephesians 1:3: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Ephesians 1:20: ...which He exerted in Christ when he raised Him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms...

Ephesians 2:6: And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus...

Ephesians 3:10: His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.

Ephesians 6:12: for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

So how do we define this phrase? I've checked every commentary I have on Ephesians, and I'm still not satisfied that I understand it. I can tell you that at the very least, it means that when we come to Jesus Christ and receive Him as Lord and Savior, we become people who are not just going to heaven in the future, but who are citizens of the heavenly kingdom right now, in the present. Philippians 3:20 says about Christians: Our citizenship is in heaven.

When missionaries from America are serving overseas, they may have a baby born in a foreign country. Sometimes in some country that child automatically has dual citizenship. He is an American citizen, but he is also a citizen of the country in which he is born. I've always thought it would be neat to have dual citizenship, to carry two passports.. But on second thought, I do have two passports. I am a citizen of earth, but I am also a citizen of heaven.

My capital city is in the heavenly realm. My King, Jesus Christ, is seated in the heavenly realms. My name is on the citizenship registers there. And out of those heavenly realms come certain benefits and prerogatives, certain blessings.

Every Spiritual Blessing

Which ones? Which blessings are mine? Every one of them. Read on: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing. Every blessing that God has to offer is yours and mine in Christ.

There was a Christian gentleman living in England named R. C. Chapman. Some time ago, a friend met him and asked him how he was feeling. He replied, "I'm burdened this morning." But he had a smile on his face and seemed happy, even exuberant. The friend questioned him, "Are you really burdened, Mr. Chapman?" "Yes," he replied, "but it's a wonderful burden." And then he quoted a verse of Scripture, Psalm 68:19, which says: Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadth us with benefits (KJV).

Psalm 68:19 and Ephesians 1:3 are parallel verses:

Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadth us with benefits. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing...

What are those blessings? Well, that's what this long sentence, Ephesians 1:3-14, is all about. Paul is going to list some of those blessings for us in the next several verses. But notice the last two words of the verse:

In Christ.

This is the acorn of truth from which the whole forest of Ephesians sprouts and grows. This phrase In Christ or its equivalent occurs more than ten times in this one rambling sentence alone. It is found 164 times in all of Paul's writings. T. D. Bernard, who wrote a powerful little book called *The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament*, claims that every word that Paul ever wrote--all his sermons, all his letters--can be boiled down to those two words. It is the essence of the Pauline doctrine. The apostle tells us:

- God was reconciling the world unto Himself in Christ
- The Scriptures make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus
- If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation
- My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus
- In every thing give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
- Be strong in the grace that is in Christ
- When Jesus comes for His own, the dead in Christ will rise first
- Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord

And here in Ephesians 1:3 we're told that we have been blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

If you aren't in Christ Jesus this morning, think of all you're missing. In Him there is every blessing you'll ever need in eternity. Outside of Him, there is not one of them. In Him we are saved. Without Him we are lost.

Now as we read on, we learn why God has done this for us.

He Chose Us

For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world...

This is one of the most astounding verses in the Bible, for it tells us that before God even created the world, before He designed the Garden of Eden, before Adam and Eve were ever created, before they ever sinned, that from the shadowy world of eternity past God knew you and He knew your name and He loved you and He was planning for the day when you would come to Jesus Christ and share in all the wealth of heaven.

For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will--to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves.

Notice those strong Calvinistic words: Chosen and predestined. The same vocabulary is used down in Ephesians 1:11:

In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will.

This is telling us that in some way God choose and predestined those who would be saved. We can't get around that teaching, for it's certainly there. At the same time, the Bible continually invites us to choose Christ as our Savior. Joshua preached, Choose you this day whom you will serve. Elijah thundered, How long will you waver between two opinions. The apostle Paul said, I beseech you in Christ stead, be reconciled to God. The Bible says, Whosoever will may come.

From the days of Augustine, theologians have been arguing, trying to reconcile the sovereignty of God with the free will of man. I recently read a book presenting four different views on this subject, and I didn't like any of them.

I just think it is a mystery we'll not fully understand until we get to heaven. We have two truths that are presented in a parallel way in the Scripture: Divine predestination and human freedom. We cannot comprehend how the two of them fit together, but just because they seem contradictory to us doesn't mean they are contradictory to God. Imagine I had a child with me on the platform this morning and I asked him what would happen if I stood on a mountain top and threw a rock from the edge of a cliff. He would tell me that the rock would fall and would hit the bottom of the gorge. Suppose I asked him what would happen if a helicopter took off from that same mountaintop. He would say, "It would ascend into the sky and fly away."

The two would appear to be contradictory. The law of gravity and the law of aerodynamics appear to a child to be contradictory laws. But someone older and wiser could explain how the two fit together.

The truth of divine sovereignty and the truth of human free will appear to be contradictory, but I believe that God in His wisdom will explain it to us some day, but we may not fully understand it until we're in heaven. By the very nature of the definition of the word God, there are some things about Him that are beyond the scope of our finite understanding. He says, "My ways are not your ways, and My thought are not your thoughts, for as high as the heaven is above the earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

But I'm glad for both doctrines. I need the truth of the sovereignty of God. Someone once said: The more we trust the sovereignty of heaven, the less we fear the calamities of earth.

I agree with John Calvin when he said something to this effect, that we would worry much less about the affairs of life if we thought more about the sovereignty of God. His exact words were: When the light of divine providence has once shone upon a godly man, he is then relieved and set free not only from the extreme anxiety and fear that were pressing him before, but from every care.... Ignorance of providence is the ultimate misery; the highest blessedness lies in knowing it.... (It gives) incredible freedom from worry about the future.

Yet I also need to know that I'm not a mere pre-programmed robot, that I can choose to love God and to make Jesus Christ the Lord of my life. So when I get to the Calvinistic verses in the Bible, I'm a Calvinist. When I get to the Armenian verses in the Bible, I'm an Armenian. I can not in my feeble mind adequately reconcile the two, but I like the way A. W. Tozer put it in his little book, *The Pursuit of God*:

God will not hold us responsible to understand the mysteries of election, predestination, and the divine sovereignty. The best and safest ways to deal with these truths is to raise our eyes to God and in deepest reverence say, "O Lord, Thou knowest." Those things belong to the deep and mysterious profound of God's omniscience. Prying into them may make theologians, but it will never make saints.

Here in Ephesians 1, all is praise, all is glory, all is joy. Praise be to the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will, to the praise of His glorious grace.

And that glorious grace can reach anyone. It can even reach you.

Recently I had a telephone conversation with a man in Atlanta named Philip Bray, who pastors a church there and oversees a ministry to the homeless and hurting of Atlanta's inner city. He shared with me his testimony. Despite growing up in a parsonage, son of a preacher, Philip strayed from the grace of God during his younger years. "I began drinking and drugging," he says. "Especially cocaine. I developed a thousand-dollar-a-day habit, and I was in real bad shape. I got involved with organized crime to pay for my habit, and I was doing everything, and I mean everything. I didn't just go from bad to worse, I went from worse to worst. "Then one night I came home stoned after a party and turned on the television. There was my cousin, Billy Watson, on a religious program. I couldn't believe it. I idolized Billy. He owned about fifty night clubs across the country. He was involved in a lot of the bad things, but he had a lot of money and was very successful, very powerful, and I admired him because of that. He always wore a lot of jewelry and was very gaudy, a very proud man. But I thought of him as the most successful person I knew. "Well, here he was on television, talking about how Jesus Christ has changed his life. Every time I'd ever seen him, he'd been high or drunk, but here he was, sober, sharing his testimony. I was curious so I listened. I decided he was scamming, just doing it for the money. "Then I found out that Billy would be speaking at my dad's church the following Sunday night. I was furious, because I thought he was just trying to get money out of our church." At his mother's pleading, Philip nevertheless decided to attend that Sunday evening to hear Billy's presentation. Philip was stoned when he took his seat on the back pew, and he was still angry, thinking his cousin insincere. But when Billy got up, he could hardly talk for crying. He kept saying, "I once was in bondage, but now I'm free. I tried getting off drugs and alcohol on my own, but I couldn't. Jesus is the only way to freedom." On the back row, a sobered Philip listened intently. His anger melted away and the message took hold of his heart. "I took him up on it," said Philip. "That night I gave my own heart to Jesus, and Jesus set me free."

That's what God the Father wants to do for you and me. There's an old song that says: "What He's done for others, He'll do for you." The first four verses of this longest sentence in the Bible tells us what God the Father wants to give us through our Lord Jesus Christ, and it's all for you, if you'll have it. If you'll receive it:

Praise be to the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will, to the praise of His glorious grace.

MARKED WITH A SEAL

Ephesians 1:13-14

When I was younger there was a television show called, "Let's Make a Deal," which had three doors, each with some kind of treasure behind it, and the contestant had to choose one of those three doors.

Well, the apostle Paul opens the book of Ephesians, chapter 1, with a long, uninterrupted sentence (in the original Greek) that runs from verse 3 through verse 14. In these verses, he describes three doors with all kinds of blessings behind them, and the Christian has full access to all three doors. We don't have to make any deals. Everything is given to us by grace.

In verses 3-6, we're told of our treasure from God the Father. In verses 7-12, we're told what we have been given in God the Son. And today we're coming to the last part of this paragraph, verses 13-14, in which we open the door to the treasures we have from God the Holy Spirit. It says:

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. 9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. 11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

This final paragraph is our study for today, and it starts out with a very important word: Included. It happens to all of us at one time or another, that we have a friend who plans something to which we aren't invited. Or we find out that some buddies got together, but we weren't told about it. Occasionally we all feel left out.

But the Lord Jesus never forgets us. When we hear the word of truth, the Gospel of our salvation, and believe, we are included in Christ. And at that moment, we are marked in Him with a seal, who is the promised Holy Spirit.

The key word here is the term here is marked with a seal, or sealed (sphragizo). The sealing of the Holy Spirit is a neglected doctrine today, but it is referred to here and three times in Scripture:

- Ephesians 4:30: And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
- 2 Corinthians 1:12-22: Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.
- 2 Corinthians 5:5: Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

What does it mean--this sealing of the Spirit? In biblical times people used various seals to authenticate documents. We do the same thing today. Some time ago I needed a document notarized, so I took it to a notary public who witnessed my signature, added her own, and then she took her official seal and impressed it into the paper, making the document official and legal.

In Jeremiah 32, the prophet Jeremiah bought a field and the documents were signed and sealed in much the same.

The Bible says that Queen Jezebel "wrote letters in Ahab's name, placed his seal on them, and sent them to the elders and nobles."

The book of Esther tells about a document written in the name of King Xerxes himself and sealed with his own ring.

Not everyone could write, but everyone could have his or her own seal. One of the unsavory stories in the Bible took place in Genesis 38, when Judah succumbed to a woman whom he thought was a prostitute. He wanted to sleep with her and promised to give her a young goat in payment. She said, "Will you give me something as a pledge until you send it?" And so he gave her his seal and its cord. Evidently, the seal was worn around his neck or perhaps tied to his belt. He used it on documents to authenticate his identity.

In the Israeli Museum in Jerusalem, one of the most interesting displays involves ancient seals that have been discovered. We have more than 1200 ancient seals from Old Testament times, including the royal seal of King Hezekiah himself. (That one, unfortunately, is not at the Israeli Museum, but in the hands of a private collector in London)

Let's suppose we had a letter we wanted to seal or, in biblical times, a scroll. We'd position the paper then drop a little hot wax on it. Then, taking our seal or our signet ring, we would press it into the warm wax, and the image would remain. The document could not

be opened without breaking the seal.

The Bible tells us that when we receive Jesus Christ as Savior, God does something that is akin to that. We are marked with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.

What does it mean? There are four implications.

A Mark of Ownership

First, it implies a mark of ownership. The city of Ephesus was a port city, and they did extensive trading in timber. Suppose I wanted to purchase some logs. I would go up to the forests and select the trees I wanted. They would be felled and marked with my seal. Then they'd be pushed down the flume into the river to join all the other logs that had been purchased by other merchants. But down at the port in Ephesus, they would be separated by their mark. My mark would indicate my ownership. I would identify my logs by my seal.

In a similar way, the Bible teaches that during the Tribulation period of the last days, the Antichrist is going to mark those who are his with a sign of some sort.

Well, Ephesians 1 tells us that when we come to Jesus Christ, God stamps us with His seal--His Holy Spirit--indicating ownership. We are not our own, for we have been bought with a price. Christ purchased us with His blood.

Now here we are on planet earth, intermingled with billions of other human beings. We fly in the same airplanes, eat at the same restaurants, work at the same jobs, go to school at the same institutions. But we have a different owner, and therefore a different way of living and a different destination at the end of life.

An Imprint of Identity

Second, in Bible times the seal was an imprint of identity. Everyone had his or her own seal, and whatever was on the seal was a reflection of their identity. It might be the person's name, or his initials, or perhaps a symbol that represented that person. The seal of Hezekiah, for example, has the words "Belonging to Hezekiah, (son of) 'Ahaz, king of Judah." Those words formed a circle, and inside the circle was an image of beetle, having two wings. (Evidently he was a beetles' fan.)

But every seal was different and when that seal was pressed into soft clay or into wax, it was in imprint of identity.

Charles Wesley wrote one of our favorite Christmas hymns, and, as we would expect from Wesley, it contains a lot of theology and biblical truth. Verse four says:

Come, Desire of nations, come,
Fix in us Thy humble home;
Rise, the woman's conquering Seed
Bruise in us the serpent's head.
Adam's likeness now efface,
Stamp Thine image in its place:
Second Adam from above,
Reinstate us in Thy love.

This is the Holy Spirit's role in our lives, to stamp the image of Christ upon the moldable clay of our heart. There's another hymn that says:

O to be like Thee, O to be like Thee
Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art,
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness--
Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart.

When we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, it is an imprint of identity.

A Bond of Security

Third, it is a bond of security. Not long ago I received a registered letter in the mail, containing some important information. It had been sealed and registered at the Post Office, and the postman had me sign my name across the seal before he tore it off and handed me the letter. That seal was a bond of security.

Seals were used like that in the Bible. In Daniel 6, the prophet Daniel was thrown into a den of lions. Daniel 6:17 says: "A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that

Daniel's situation might not be changed."

The Bible says that when we come to Christ, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit.

In the Gospels, Pilate authorized the Roman guards to seal the tomb of Jesus Christ. A. T. Robertson says that the sealing of the stone was probably by a cord stretched across the stone and sealed at each end. Pilate said, "Make it as secure as you can."

The Bible says that when we come to Christ, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, and that sealing implies security. Our theological roots as Free Will Baptist are Arminian, but that doesn't make us insecure about our salvation. In fact, [Jacobus Arminius](#) himself, when asked about the perseverance of the saints, said: "I never taught that a true believer can either totally or finally fall away from the faith and perish, yet I will not conceal that there are passages in Scripture which seem to me to wear this aspect."

We admit that there are passages in the Bible which can be interpreted to teach the possibility of apostasy, yet we state in our denominational treatise: "There are strong grounds for hope that the true regenerate will persevere unto the end and be saved through the power of divine grace...."

I never worry about my security in Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us!" We have been marked by His seal.

A Deposit of Inheritance

Finally, the sealing of the Holy Spirit also serves as a deposit guaranteeing our future inheritance. Look at the way it's put here in Ephesians 1: Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of His glory.

Here the word "redemption" has to do with our future redemption from death and hell. It is used to describe that coming day when we'll be resurrected to eternal life. Our greatest days, as Christians, are in front of us. The Bible says that eyes have not seen, nor have ears heard, what God has prepared for those who love Him. But the Holy Spirit in our hearts is a sort of down payment. The Holy Spirit brings us a portion of heavenly life, a portion of heavenly peace, a portion of heavenly thinking, a portion of heavenly living, and places these in our hearts now. We can experience heaven on the way to heaven.

I read a story some time ago about a very wealthy man who died, leaving a large inheritance and a very small son. He left everything to the boy, but according to the stipulations in the will, the son could not claim full control over the inheritance until his twenty-first birthday. Until then, however, his every need was to be met and he was to receive a generous allowance that would serve as a foretaste of the entire amount.

It's very much like that with us. We are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. Throughout all eternity, we'll enjoy life in the new heavens and on the new earth, as described in Revelation 21 and 22. No more problems, pain, aggravations, or illnesses. No more tearful separations, emotional vexations, or disputed elections.

But until then we can sing:

Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine.

This foretaste is the Holy Spirit in our hearts. The Holy Spirit strengthens us. He gives us peace. He lifts us up. He reminds us of Scriptures. He brings Bible verses to mind just as we need them. He gives us power for ministry. He produces His fruit within us, for the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. The Holy Spirit is God's deposit in our hearts guaranteeing our inheritance until that day when we enter fully into it.

It is a mark of ownership, a stamp of imprint, a bond of security, and a deposit of inheritance. This is what's behind door number three--what we have from the Holy Spirit.

And you were also included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of His glory.

THE RICHES OF GOD'S GRACE

Ephesians 1:7-12

I suppose that most of us are on pins and needles about Tuesday's elections, and I want to encourage every one of you, however inconvenient it may be, to vote. In an audience this size there are undoubtedly supporters for every one of the presidential

candidates, and I would never tell you how to vote. I would encourage you to study the records of the candidates as it relates to the great moral and spiritual issues of our day and to pray about it. But whatever your political affiliation, we need for Christians in America to vote. And then, having voted, we need to remember that statement that is given three times in chapter four of the Book of Daniel: "The Most High rules in the kingdoms of men."

One of the remarkable things about this election is that it is occurring at time of unprecedented prosperity in our nation. More people have money invested in the stock market than at any other time in history. Recently the stock market has been swinging back and forth by hundreds of points from day to day, and many people become nervous about their investment and their net worth.

Every morning's edition of USA Today as a special section entitled, "Money." Every day the Nashville Tennessean has a section called "Business." Every day CNN has a popular program called "Moneyline." Many people subscribe to Money Magazine, or to one of the other periodicals that gives financial advice. If you have mutual funds or equity investments, you get regular reports telling you how your stocks are doing.

Well, the Bible also has a special section telling us about our spiritual investments, about our spiritual wealth, and about our assets and riches in Christ. And that section is called the book of Ephesians. Whenever I think of Ephesians I think of that old song that says:

How rich I am since Jesus came my way,
Redeemed my life, and turned my night to day.
How very rich, How very rich, I am.
All things have changed; my eyes once blind now see
And all of life is not a symphony.
How very rich, How very rich, I am.

Well, we've begun a study of Ephesians in order to review our riches in Christ, and this morning I'd like to begin where I left off last week. So would you turn with me please to Ephesians, chapter 1. I'm going to take just a minute to review so that we'll have the context, then we'll read the paragraph we're coming to today.

At the very end of the book of Acts, the Apostle Paul was under house arrest in Rome. Some few years before he had helped establish a church in the great city of Ephesus, the gateway to Asia. Now he had these Christians on his mind, and so he wrote this letter to them. He wasn't dealing with any particular problem in the church. He just wanted to encourage them and to take them a little deeper in his teachings about the Christ-life.

My favorite outline for this book of Ephesians was developed by a Chinese Christian, Watchman Nee, who described it in three words: Sit, Walk, and Stand. Chapters 1-3 talk about our being seated with Christ in the heavenly places. Chapters 4, 5, and the first part of chapter 6 talk about our daily walk. And the last part of chapter 6 tells us to take our stand against the wiles of Satan.

So Ephesians tells us about our wealth in Christ, our walk in the world, and our warfare with the devil.

Last week we read Ephesians 1:3-14, and I told you that in the Greek, this was one, long, rambling, run-on sentence. It's a listing or an inventory of our blessings from God. Paul began writing, and he got so excited he couldn't even stop to draw a breath or place a period. It is a great doxology of praise for all we have from the Triune God.

Ephesians 1:3-6 tell us what we have from God the Father.

Ephesians 1:7-12 tell us what we have from God the Son.

Ephesians 1:13-14 tell us what we have from God the Holy Spirit

Last week we looked at our blessings from God the Father: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ....

Today we want to look at that middle paragraph, and I'd like to show you the blessings we have through God the Son. So today's Scripture reading is Ephesians 1:7-12:

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory.

We could spend a year studying these verses, because the vocabulary that Paul uses is so rich. I can hardly think of another place where so many content-heavy, wonderfully powerful theological words are grouped together in such a significant way. But because of

time, I just want to be very simple and summarize this by mentioning four broad areas of blessing described here; each is more wonderful than I can relate to you or even understand myself.

He Redeems Our Souls

First, Christ gives us redemption. Ephesians 1:7 says: In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

Redemption is an Old Testament concept. The Greek word that Paul used here is *apolutrosis*. It comes from the prefix *apo*, which means "from," and the stem word *lutron*, which means to loosen. It means to loosen from, or to set free. In the Old Testament, if a man had become so poor that he had fallen into slavery through debt, a near relative could come forward and pay his debts and set him free. The poor man would be redeemed. The word is used in a similar way in the book of Exodus to describe God's loosening the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and setting them free. In Exodus 6:6, the Lord told them, I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.

But in the books of Job and Psalms, this word is used in the sense of being redeemed from death and decay. Job said: "I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25).

Well, the great teaching of the New Testament involves the identity of that Redeemer. It is Jesus Christ. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

Galatians 3:13: Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

I will sing of my Redeemer and His wondrous love for me
On the cruel cross He suffered, paid the price and set me free.

Recently I was talking to a man named Philip Bray who oversees a ministry in Atlanta known as Safehouse. He ministers to all kinds of people, to street people, to the homeless, to those who are caught up in drinking and drugging and can't get free. Safehouse cares for between 500 and 1000 people every day. I asked Philip about the beginning of Safehouse, how he had started that ministry.

Philip Bray grew up in a parsonage, a preacher's kid, but he got involved in a terrible life of drugs, alcohol, and organized crime. When he finally gave his life to Jesus on a Sunday night in his father's church, he had a lot of ground to make up. Everyone was happy for him, yet no one trusted him enough to give him a job. But the Lord had a job for him, and one day a friend named Al Palmquist challenged him to go into the streets, witnessing to prostitutes.

"When I started Safehouse Outreach Ministries in Atlanta," Philip told me, "our primary focus was on winning prostitutes to Christ. Al challenged me to approach prostitutes about the Lord and to share Christ with them. I asked him to go with me, but he had a plane to catch. So I called a friend named Keith, a street level dope dealer who had gotten saved, and said, 'Let's go talk to hookers about Jesus.'"

Keith said, "I'll go on one condition, that I bring my gun." That night Philip and Keith (accompanied by Smith & Wesson) wandered through the streets, seeking to witness but having little success. The prostitutes thought they were crazy, and discouragement began to set in.

"Keith," Philip said, "I don't think I'm called to a ministry of rejection. Why don't we pray about this. We forgot to praying before we started."

So the two men joined hands on the sidewalk and prayed a simple prayer, asking God's blessings on their efforts. As they finished, a teenage girl crossed the street in high heels and a short dress. Approaching them, she said, "Hi, guys, what's happening?"

"I guess you're happening," they said. "How's business?"

"Not too good. I don't think I can feed my child tonight." The two men had never thought of a prostitute as a loving, caring mother, as someone willing to sell her body to take care of her child. They began asking her questions.

"Are you guys cops?" she asked, tensing.

"No," said Philip. "We just care about you."

"Nobody cares about anybody here in the street."

"Surely your parents care about you."

"Let me tell you about my parents," the girl said bitterly. "At age nine, my father pimped me out to pay his poker debts. By age twelve, I was pregnant. My mother threw me out of the house, and since then I've just been trying to survive for me and my kid."

"Well," said Philip, "God cares about you." And he began sharing the Scriptures with her, telling her about Christ and reading from Psalm 46. "We're just two old dope dealers turned hope dealers," they said. "We were wandering around here, and you crossed our path. God saw you and your need. He sent you over to talk to us."

The girl, weeping now, said, "I just prayed today to the God of my grandma to send someone to help me. I know that my grandmother knew the real God, and I told that God if He didn't help me today, I was going to kill my child and myself tonight." The two men prayed with the girl, led her to Christ, and got her off the streets.

"Today Safehouse is reaching 500 to a 1000 people a day in urban Atlanta," Philip told me. "And it all started because of her."

She was redeemed, set free, forgiven. You might not be in her situation, but perhaps in your own way and in your own life you need to be set free, to be forgiven, to be redeemed. This passage says, In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

He Reveals Our Future

The second great blessing we have in Christ is insight into our future. Look at verse 9: And He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

In other words, Paul is telling us that in the future, on that day of days when time will be consummated into eternity, the heavenly sphere and the earthly sphere will merge together and will become one.

This is described for us in great detail in Revelation 21: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...

In other words, after the rapture of the church, after the Great Tribulation, after the Second Coming, after the Millennial reign of Christ, after the judgments, at the very end of history, God is going to overhaul and renovate the universe. He is going to create a new sky, new stars, and new cosmos, and a new planet earth.

Many Christians don't realize that. Most Christians think they're going to spend eternity in heaven. Heaven--the highest heaven--is currently the throne room of God. It is the seat of His power. It is where He is sitting on His throne with Christ seated at His right hand. We can't see it, for it is above us and in a spiritual dimension. But when our loved ones die in Christ, they go to be with the Lord in heaven. The Bible says: To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

But at the end of time, God is going to create a new universe and a new planet earth. Read on in verse 2: I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

In other words, out of the highest heaven there will come a new city, the New Jerusalem, the city that hath foundations whose builder and maker is God. That city will relocate from the highest heaven to the new earth.

Sometimes we've seen workers move an entire house. I don't know how they do it, but somehow they jack up a house, slide wheels under it, and move it to a new location. But I've never seen that done to an entire city. But it will be no problem for God. At the end of time, He will create a new universe and a new planet earth, and the heavenly city of New Jerusalem will descend from the highest heaven down to the recreated earth.

Now look at verse 3. This is one of the most extraordinary verses in the entire Bible, as far as I'm concerned: And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men."

Now, God has vacated His heavenly home. Now God has moved out. He has relocated. His has changed His address. He is moving His throne to a new location.

/Now the dwelling of God is with me, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

/When times will have reached their fulfillment at last, all things in heaven and on earth will come together under one head, even Christ. Jesus Christ gives us this information in advance so that we'll not worry too much about who wins or loses some election or other along the way. Nothing is going to change God's plan for eternity.

He Resolves Our Problems

So, Jesus redeems our souls, He reveals our future, and, third, He resolves our problems. Look at Ephesians 1:11: In Him we were also chosen having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His

will...

Now long ago I was worried about some problem or another, and in my reading in the Bible I came to this verse. Look at those five words:

...Him who works out everything...

This is a comprehensive restating of Romans 8:28. That verse says,

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love the Lord."

This verse says that God works all things out so that in the end they conform to His will. He can take any situation in your life and any situation in world history and work it out. Nothing escapes His sovereign rule. Isaac Watts said:

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth its successive journeys run;
His kingdom spread from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

He Receives our Praise

And that leads us to the fourth thing in this passage: He receives our praise. Look again at verse 11: In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory.

Praise Him! Praise Him! Jesus our blessed Redeemer. He redeems our souls; He reveals our future; He resolves our problems; He receives our praise. How rich we are since Jesus came our way.

Joy Christofferson told me this week how her family came to Christ. Many years ago, when they were attending a liberal church somewhere, Joy's sister went to their pastor and said, "I've done some things that I feel guilty about and ashamed of. I need to be forgiven of my sins. What should I do?" The pastor patted her on the back and said, "Oh, Jean, you're such a good girl. You're one of the finest girls I know. Don't you worry about it. You don't need to be forgiven."

But she did worry about it. Later she went on to Chicago to school, and while there she heard the Gospel and learned that Jesus Christ had shed His blood on the cross to redeem and forgive her and to set her free. She found Christ as her Savior and Lord, and she wrote a letter back home telling about it.

Joy said that when the family received that letter they all thought Jean had fallen off her rocker, but gradually they all came to recognize their need for a Savior. Eventually Jean's testimony and witness was the means for the entire family coming to Christ.

Now what about you? Can you think of one good reason today for neglecting the one who came to redeem your soul, to reveal your future, to resolve your problems, and to receive you praise? He is waiting to lavish on you the riches of His grace in Christ Jesus our Lord.

THE WORKING OF HIS MIGHTY STRENGTH

Ephesians 1:18-23

Sometime ago I discovered that if you want to pray effectively for someone else--for a child or a spouse or a friend--the most powerful prayers are the ones found in the Bible itself. There's great power in praying the very words of Scripture. And I believe that's one of the reasons why so many of the prayers of Paul the Apostle are recorded. He knew just what to pray.

Well, today, in our ongoing study through the New Testament book of Ephesians, we're looking at Paul's prayer for the Ephesians. The book of Ephesians actually contains two prayers, one at the end of chapter one and the other at the end of chapter three. We're in chapter one today, and chapter one is very simple. Let me give you an outline.

The first half of the chapter is a proclamation of our riches in Christ: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. And then he goes on to list some of these blessings. The last half of the chapter is a prayer that we will understand it all, that we will grasp more fully just how enriched we are. In her little commentary on Ephesians, Ruth Paxson wrote, "Paul, in one breath, as it were, has proclaimed the wonderful message of redemption according to the riches of His grace. He has told it out; now he must pray it in." Last Sunday night we began studying this prayer. It's one of the greatest prayers in the Bible. Today I'd like for us to finish our studying it, beginning with Ephesians 1:18:

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he

has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way (Eph 1:18-23)

I pray that the eyes of your heart might be enlightened, Paul prays, so that you will know three things:

- The hope to which He has called you
- The riches of His glorious inheritance
- His incomparably great power for us who believe

And then he devotes the rest of the chapter to describing that divine power which is available to us believers. When we think of power, we think of the horsepower built into the engine of a sports car, or we think of the muscles of a competitor in a triathlon. We think of military hardware, SWAT teams, or of people in positions of great authority.

But one of the things we notice as we read through the book of Ephesians is the number of times and the terms in which power, might, and authority are conveyed. Jim Weaver has loaned me a new commentary on Ephesians devoted to this very subject. It is entitled "Power and Magic." I haven't had time to study it yet, but its thesis is that the people to whom this epistle was originally addressed had come to Christ out of a background of magic and superstition and demonic influence. They had been followers of the goddess Diana. Many of them, upon their conversion, had burned their books of occultism and sorcery. We know that from Acts 19. As Christians, they were now facing great spiritual opposition. And so Paul keeps going back, over and over, to the true nature of spiritual power. I don't have time today to trace this theme all the way through Ephesians, but one day soon I'm going to sit down, read through the book, and study all the references to power, authority, might, and so forth.

Here in our text today, Paul is praying for the Ephesians, that they would come to better understand the power of the Lord: I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you might know... His incomparably great power for us who believe.

It isn't just His power; it is His great power. But it isn't just His great power; it is His incomparably great power.

What is the power of God like? Sometimes we glimpse His power in nature. I remember when Victoria was a small child. One night we had a terrific thunderstorm, and it sounded like the storm was right over our house. The thunder shook the walls. She was terrified. But as the storm passed on, I took her tightly in my arms and went out onto the porch. As I held her, we looked at the lightening, still flashing in the distance. We listened to the thunder, still rumbling. And I talked to her about the power of God who was able to wake everyone in Nashville--all one million of us-- in the dead of the night by one incredible clap of thunder.

Now, that's power.

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the world Thy hands have made.
I see the stars; I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

We have a hymn that says:

I sing the mighty power of God that made the mountains rise;
That spread the flowing seas abroad, and built the lofty skies.
I sing the wisdom that ordained the sun to rule the day;
The moon shines full at His command, and all the stars obey.

But then one day, I walked out onto my driveway and noticed that a tiny, spindly, whitish blade of grass had managed to push its way through the four inches of gravel and three inches of solid asphalt of my driveway.

That's a different application of power.

Recently I read the biography of Bertha Smith, Southern Baptist missionary to China. Once during her early days she traveled to a village and the only housing she could find was in an barn. They gave her an ox stall in the barn, and that was her home for the week. Her biggest problem was the flies whenever they tried to eat, especially when it rained (as it generally did in that area). House flies and horse flies, black ones and green ones, hundreds of them. They almost drove Bertha Smith crazy. One afternoon she went for a walk and talked to the Lord about it. She said: "I am one of your spoiled children. All my life I have been accustomed to screened houses and clean food. Now, I just can't eat with those flies all over my food. Down in Egypt you had flies to come and go at Your word. You are the same today and You are ready to work the same way if my situation demands it. Now please do one of

two things for me: either take the flies away, or enable me to eat and not mind them. You then just take care of any disease germs which they may put into my body. Just whichever You wish to do will be good enough for me!"

From that moment, not a fly flew into that ox stall for the remaining five days Bertha was there witnessing and teaching. That's power.

Recently I talked to the director of Safehouse, an urban ministry in Atlanta. On Wednesday nights at Safehouse they have a Gospel service led by a preacher named Joe McUtchen. One night Willy staggered into the meeting. Willy was in trouble. Homeless. Drinking. Drugging. Sleeping under a bridge or wherever he could. Well, Willy started coming every Wednesday to hear Joe preach the Gospel. The message took root, and Willy gave his heart to the Lord. Seeing his progress, Joe placed Willy in a Christian drug rehab program in Tampa, Florida. Some months later, Willy called Joe to invite him to his graduation from the program. "Willy, I just can't make it," said Joe apologetically, "but tell me how life's treating you."

"Well, Joe, when I got here they asked me a lot about my addictions, and they helped me through withdrawals. They talked to me a lot about God, and they tested my job skills. When they found out I used to be a master chef, they called around and got me a job at the Ritz-Carlton."

"The Ritz-Carlton!"

"Yeah, and in my rehab program I learned that I should do everything with all my heart, like I was doing it for God. So--would you believe it?--I'm now head chef at the Ritz-Carlton in Tampa. But Joe..."

"Yes, Willy?"

"I'd like to come back to Safehouse in Atlanta on a Wednesday night and give my testimony. I'd like to tell the guys what Christ can do, and how your messages helped change my life."

"That'd be great, Willy," said Joe. "Let's plan that real soon. And when you come to town, Judy and I would like for you to stay with us. No need to pay for a room."

There was a pause on the line, then Willy said, "That's not necessary, Joe. When I come to Atlanta, there's already a room waiting for me."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, Joe. I work for the Ritz-Carlton, and they take good care of their employees. When I come back to Atlanta, I'll be staying at the Ritz."

That's power. Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes." And he said here to the Ephesians: I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you might know... His incomparably great power for us who believe.

I have a book in my study written in 1914 by a man named John Faris. He said that several years earlier in Springfield, Illinois, a Bible teacher suggested to a group of men, "When you reach home this evening write down the names of all the persons in Springfield whom you would like to have saved, and then pray for them by name, three times a day, that they may be saved. Then make your best possible efforts to introduce those persons to turn to God for salvation."

There lived in Springfield at that time an invalid woman who, physically, was almost absolutely helpless. She had been bedridden for 17 years. She had always prayed in a general way for the salvation of lost souls, but when her family shared with her this suggestion, she said, "Here is something I can do." There was an adjustable writing table at the side of her bed. She wrote down the names of 57 acquaintances. She prayed for each of these by name, three times a day. She wrote them letters telling them of her interest in them. She also wrote to Christian friends and urged them to speak to these persons about their soul's welfare. She had unquestioning faith in God. In time, every one of those 57 people came to faith in Jesus Christ.

That's power. James said, "The prayers of a righteous person are powerful and effective."

The Apostle Paul wrote: I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you might know... His incomparably great power for us who believe. In the remainder of chapter 1, Paul goes on to describe this divine power in four ways.

Resurrection Power

First, it is resurrection power. Verse 19 says: That power is like the working of his mighty strength which He exerted when He raised Him from the dead.

To reverse the process of death was not an easy thing. In fact, it's impossible. How often, when standing beside the casket of a

friend or loved one, have I not wished I could snap my fingers and wake them up. To bring Christ from death to life, to resurrect Him bodily from the grave--that is an impossibility for anyone and everyone except the Omnipotent God. But the Bible says that God can do it. The Bible says, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?"

Death cannot keep his prey, Jesus my Savior!
He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord!
Up from the grave He arose
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes;
He arose a victor from the dark domain,
And He lives forever with His saints to reign.
He arose! He arose!
Hallelujah, Christ arose!

Paul is telling us that the same power that resurrected Christ from the grave is available to change our lives and to answer our prayers and to resolve our difficulties in life and to give us immortality.

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you might know... His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength which He exerted when He raised Him from the dead.

Exaltation Power

Second, the power that God makes available to us is Exaltation power: I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you might know... His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength which He exerted when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms.

Sometimes we sing:

Crown Him with many crowns
The Lamb upon His throne!
Hark! How the heavenly anthem drowns
All music but its own.

If we had a telescope powerful enough to peer into the highest heaven, we would see Christ now seated at the Father's right hand, exalted in layers of light, surrounded by His angels, and enveloped with glory.

The power that resurrected Christ and exalted Him to the Father's right hand is the same power that is available for us to change our lives, to answer our prayers, to resolve our difficulties, and to give us immortality.

Lordship Power

Third, it is Lordship Power. Continue reading: I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you might know... His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength which He exerted when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Jesus Christ is higher than the angels. He is greater than the demons. He lords over the principalities and powers. He rules the world, setting up one and deposing another. We fret and fear the political machinations of earth, but God Most High rules in the affairs of men. He will bring about His purposes and draw history to its pre-appointed end.

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
does its successive journeys run;
His kingdom spread from shore to shore,
till moons shall wax and wane no more.

And that Lordship power of Jesus Christ is the same power available to change your life, to answer your prayers, to resolve your difficulties, and to give you immortality.

Headship Power

Finally, the measure of power afforded us is Headship Power. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you might know... His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength which He exerted when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head of everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills

everything in every way.

Jesus is head of His church. He's the boss around here. He's the senior pastor. He's the archbishop. He's the great shepherd. He's our great High Priest. And the work that He does in this world, He does through His body the church.

When I have a thought in my mind, that thought is useless unless carried out by some other part of my body. If I think I'd like a drink of water, my hand has to reach for a glass. If I think I'd like to engage in a conversation, my mouth has to open and talk. If I think I'd like to go for a walk, my feet have to begin moving at my brain's command.

Jesus is the head of the church, and all of us are members of His body. Our only job is to obey the commands that come from our head. But as we do so we receive power. Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the world."

Are you living in the supernatural power of Jesus Christ? The power that is measured by His resurrection, His exaltation, His Lordship and His Headship? Jesus said about the people of His day, "You are mistaken because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God." Ephesians 1 is a prayer that we will know the Scriptures and the power of God. That power is like the working of His mighty strength which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is named.

And that is the power available to change your life, to answer your prayers, to resolve your difficulties, and to give you everlasting life.

For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

Ephesians 2:1-9

Most of my messages are about thirty minutes long, but occasionally I've dragged on for forty or forty-five minutes. Sometimes when I'm leading a seminar I may fill a time slot of one hour. I've never preached a sermon that lasted four hours, but one man did. His name was Peter Gabriel.

In the mid-1500s the Reformation was spreading through Europe. The established church at that time had become very corrupt, not only in its moral behavior, but also in its theology and doctrine. There was a belief that a person had to do certain things to be saved. If you wanted to establish a relationship with God and be assured of heaven, you had to keep the sacraments, observe certain ceremonies, go through certain motions. These good works qualified you for heaven, it was thought.

But Martin Luther came along in Germany, and John Calvin in Geneva, and Zwingli in Zurich--the great reformers. They thundered back and said, "No, we are saved by grace through faith and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast."

Well, the Reformation reached Holland in the mid 1560s. There was a man named Peter Gabriel who began teaching Reformation truth to a small group in his home every Sunday. Along with some fellow Christians, he began preaching in the reeds and thickets outside Amsterdam and throughout Holland. These Dutch reformers were threatened with the gallows and with confiscation of all their goods; a price was put on their heads. Still they preached.

Well, outside of Amsterdam was an estate owned by a very wealthy man. It was announced that there would be a great preaching service on this estate on July 14, 1566. Authorities in Amsterdam tried to block the meeting by shutting the town gates and forbidding anyone from leaving the city. But people found ways of getting outside the walls, many of them by swimming through the canals or by forcing their way out of the gates in the early hours when the milkmaids were leaving for the fields. By 11 o'clock, the authorities relented and opened the gates, and thousands of people gathered on the grounds of the estate.

Peter Gabriel stood up and announced his text--Ephesians 2:8-10:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

He preached for four hours, but apparently nobody minded. They hadn't heard the gospel preached for a thousand years, and they were hungry for its message. And Peter Gabriel's sermon that day helped establish the Reformation in Holland.

Today in our study through Ephesians, we're coming to the same text. My sermons isn't going to be as long as Brother Gabriel's, but it is on the same theme and it conveys the same truth. As we read this Scripture today, pretend that you haven't heard it before. Listen to it as though you were hearing it for the first time in a thousand years:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not of works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:1-9)

The theme of this passage is salvation by grace through faith. Verse 5 says: it is by grace you have been saved. And verse 8 repeats: For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. The word "saved" is part of our Christian vocabulary, but it might not mean a lot to someone who didn't grow up hearing it used as we often use it. In church language, we say, "I got saved on such and such a date." We ask, "Are you saved? When did you get saved?" What do we mean by that?

When Paul wrote here that we are saved by grace, he used the word *swvzw*, which literally means, "to rescue from danger, to deliver." A couple of years ago there was a terrible flood where my mother lived. She lived beside the Doe River, but up the hill on the side of a mountain, so she was not in danger. But just below her several people were swept out of their homes and perished. Across the road lived a woman who was recovering from hip replacement surgery and confined to her bed. The flash flood occurred at night, and the waters swept up her yard and into her house. She was in danger of drowning in her own bed until the paramedics arrived and rescued her. She was saved.

The Bible teaches that all of us are sinners and that the flood of God's judgement is rising against us. We need a great, divine paramedic to come and rescue us from drowning in the floodtides of the wrath of God. When you reach out and trust that divine One to save you, at that moment you are saved. When you trust Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord and when you receive Him by faith, at that moment you are saved.

Now with that as background, let's just give this wonderful paragraph of Scripture a brief overlook.

Human Condition

The first thing we notice in verses 1-3 is the hopelessness of our human condition. In these three verses, Paul describes our condition without Christ in six different ways.

First, we are dead in our transgressions and sins. The root word in the Greek for transgressions is *parapipto*, which comes from two smaller words: the prefix is a preposition meaning beside, and the stem is a word meaning to fall. The word transgression literally means to fall beside the road. Have you ever tried to climb up a steep path when you've lost your footing and slid back down. Have you ever taken a false step? That's the idea here, and all of us have done that morally. We've messed up. We've fallen. We've lost our footing morally and spiritually.

The word sin is *hamartia*, a word meaning, to miss the target. No matter how hard we aim at perfection, we keep missing the mark.

The Bible teaches that outside of Christ, everyone is dead--separated from God--in transgressions and sins. This world is being run by dead men and women. The vast majority of the politicians and business leaders and educators and journalists are dead. We're surrounded by dead people, millions of them, billions of them. They are running around in circles, seeking pleasure and success and security, but on the inside they are morally and spiritually dead. They are dead in terms of a relationship with God.

Second, without Christ we are described as following the ways of this world. Jesus said there are two ways, two highways, two pathways. One is wide and bright and crooked and it leads to destruction. The other is straight and narrow, but it leads to life. Without Christ, we're on the wrong road. We're dead people traveling down a dead-end street.

Third, without Christ we are following the ways of the ruler of the kingdom of the air (Eph 2:2). That is a clear reference to Satan, but why is he called the ruler of the kingdom of the air? Commentators are divided. Even the great commentator R. C. Lenski confesses that he just doesn't know what to do with this term. Most interpret this in one of two ways. Some take it literally, that Satan's demonic hosts fill the air and pollute the atmosphere. They are everywhere if only we had eyes to see them. Others take this phrase figuratively, that Satan is the prince of the moral atmosphere of earth. Perhaps both meanings are true.

Fourth, without Christ we are following the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient (Eph 2:2). This is another reference to Satan, who is prominently mentioned in the book of Ephesians. He is active and at work in the lives of those around us. His invisible hand, his subtle influence, and his deceptive tomfoolery are closer at hand than we realize.

Ephesians 2:3 goes on to say: All of us also lived among them at one time, and here's the **fifth** characteristic of the person without Christ:

...gratify the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.

The devil, who rules the air and works in the ungodly, finds an able and willing ally in our own sinful natures. We're trapped between the fallen nature inside of us and the fallen angel on the outside of us, and none of us can escape. The Bible says, "There is none righteous. No, not one!" (Romans 3:10)

Sixth, we are by nature children of wrath. That is a Hebrew idiomatic phrase meaning we are under the sentence of wrath. We are all facing the wrath of God. This doesn't mean that God is mad at us in an immature or juvenile sort of way. It refers to God's right and necessary response to objective moral evil.

In John, chapter 3, we have the wonderful 16th verse--For God so loved the world.... Jesus was talking to Nicodemus about being born again. But we forget that the last verse of that chapter, John 3:36, says: Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.

I suppose that all of you have read about the Hindenburg, the German airship or zeppelin coming in for a landing at an airfield in New Jersey on May 6, 1937. It was 7:25 at night. The Hindenburg was a thrilling sight, three football fields in length and held aloft by 7 million cubic feet of hydrogen. It could fly 84 miles an hour. It was luxurious, with a dining salon, lounges, and staterooms. Gigantic Nazi swastikas were painted on its tail fins. Hundreds of people had gathered to watch it land. Suddenly a lapping tongue of fire appeared near the stern, and within a few seconds the Hindenburg exploded in a huge ball of fire, falling tail first with flames shooting out the nose. In one moment, the wonder and excitement and beauty was turned to fire and terror and destruction.

Without Christ all of us are passengers aboard the Hindenburg. We may be enjoying ourselves to the fullest, but we don't realize that the next moment is going to bring us to judgment.

Ephesians 2 says,

"You were dead in your transgressions and sins. You followed the ways of the world. You followed the ways of the ruler of the kingdom of the air. You followed the spirit who is now at work among the disobedient. You gratify the craving of your sinful nature. You are all objects of wrath.

Divine Motivation

That's our human condition. But notice the next verse, Ephesians 4:4: But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--for by grace you have been saved.

According to this verse, God has two great motivations for wanting to save us from judgment. The first is: "His great love for us." He loves us. The aforementioned John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world."

The Bible teaches us that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

Jeremiah 31:3 says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you."

Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

1 John 4:19 says, "We love Him because He first loved us."

To God be the glory, great things He hath done;
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son...

God's second motivation is His rich mercy

But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy....

Mercy is a feeling compassion that makes one person want to save or rescue someone else. And God's great love and His rich mercy combined to send Him to this earth for the express purpose of being nailed hand-and-foot to an upright post, the blood flowing from his forehead where the thorns had been, the blood flowing from his back where the scourge fell, the blood flowing from his hands and feet where the nails were, the blood flowing from his wounded side, pierced by the soldier's lance.

And the Bible says there is something about the blood of Jesus Christ that satisfies the wrath of God. Romans 5:9 says:

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him!

His great love and rich mercy give us Eternal Salvation, and that's the third thing to notice in this text: Our Eternal Salvation

Eternal Salvation

God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions...

When we come to Christ, we move from death to life. We experience a spiritual resurrection.

And seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works so that no one can boast.

God does three things for us:

- He makes us alive in Christ
- He seats us with Christ in the heavenly realms
- In the future, He will show us the incomparable riches of His grace.

When Paul wrote this he was imprisoned in the city of Rome, but he had the attitude of someone living in heavenly realms.

Over the years I've very frequently quoted from my favorite preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who preached and pastored in London 100 years ago. There are so many stories about Spurgeon, but one of my favorites has to do when he was a teenager. He had been invited to preach one evening in Suffolk, but he was late in arriving. His grandfather, also a preacher, finally began the service by reading Ephesians 2. He began preaching on the theme, "For by grace are ye saved through faith...." He had gotten some way into his discourse when there was a little commotion at the back door and in walked his grandson, arriving late. "Here comes my grandson," exclaimed the old man. "He can preach the Gospel better than I can, but you cannot preach a better Gospel, can you, Charles?"

Charles, walking up the aisle, said, "You can preach better than I can. Please go on." The grandfather refused, but he told him his text and explained that he had already shown the people the source of salvation--grace--and was now speaking about the channel--faith. The younger preacher stepped into the pulpit and took over just where his grandfather had left off.

After a few minutes, the grandfather interrupted, wanting to preach a little more of the sermon. Then he sat down, and Charles resumed preaching, with the grandfather sitting behind him, saying, "Good! Good! Tell them that again, Charles. Tell them that again."

Ever after that, Charles Spurgeon said that whenever he preached from Ephesians 2, he could hear his old grandfather saying, "Tell them that again, Charles. Tell them that again."

I love to tell the story, for those who know it best
Seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest...

Maybe you've heard this before, but I'd like to tell you this again. By grace are we saved through faith. Perhaps today you need to be rescued, you need to be saved. Perhaps today you are dead in your sins, following the ways of the world, following the ruler of the kingdom of the air, following the spirit that now works in those who are disobedient, gratifying the cravings of your sinful nature, an object of wrath.

But God in His great love and rich mercy loves you. He wants to raise you from the dead, seat you with Himself in the heavenly realms, and show you the incomparable riches of his grace in Christ Jesus.

Will you come to Him today? For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest no man should boast.

EPHESIANS 2:8-9

Today we're beginning a new series of messages on the subject of the life of faith. We often think of faith in terms of religion and spirituality. The media talks about "faith-based programs" and about "people of faith." But the faith-principle is something that God wove into the entire fabric of our lives. Faith is not just a Bible word, and it's not just a term we use in describing our relationship with God. Faith is essential for all healthy relationships.

In a marriage, for example, husbands and wives need to be able to trust each other. If that trust is violated, it takes a lot of work to restore the relationship. In a bond between parents and children, it's important to be honest. If a young person lies to his or her

parents, then trust is broken and it may take a long time to restore it. Or vice versa. In a friendship, we need to be able to trust one another; and when that trust is well-founded and well-placed, it serves as the basis for a good friendship.

Trust is even an ingredient in our political system and in good government. Whenever I turn on the faucet at my kitchen sink and pour a glass of water, I'm exercising faith in the municipal powers that operate the water treatment systems for Middle Tennessee. Whenever I drive through an intersection with a green light, I'm trusting my life to the municipal engineers who designed and installed that light; I have confidence that if it's green for me, it's red on the crossing sides. Whenever I drive across a bridge over the Cumberland River, I'm trusting the municipal powers that oversee the conditions of our highways. Whenever I buy a steak at the supermarket, I'd depending on the health inspectors to be doing their job. And because we have a reasonably trustworthy system, I don't worry very much. I drink a glass of water without a lot of fear, and I drive over a bridge without thinking much about it.

We sometimes joke about our politicians and our government, and we know that our systems are imperfect and sometimes fail. But when they do fail, it's a big story in the news—like the bridge that collapsed over the Tennessee River a few years ago, or the E. coli scare with our spinach last year. By and large, we have the most trustworthy system of government the world has ever seen. What if we lived in a country in which had no trust whatsoever in the judicial system or the utilities department or in the national leadership? We call those "Banana Republics" and "Tin-Horn Dictatorships." It's terrible to live in a land in which the government can't be trusted; and some of the anger we've seen in Town Hall Meetings during the August Congressional Recess is a fear on the part of some people that the American Government has lost some credibility in recent days. You may recall seeing one senator saying to crowd, "Don't you trust me?" and the crowd shouted back, "No!"

Well, actually, I think that we still do have a high level of trust in our government here in America; but my point is that in every area of life, there is a certain amount of faith and trust that's needed to make things work correctly. So it should not surprise us that if God built this principle into the fabric of all human relationships, it would also be an element of our spiritual life. And it is. Faith is important, not just in our relationship with our spouse and children and friends and associates, but with God as well. The Bible says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because the person who comes to God must believe that God is, and that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6, paraphrased).

So today we want to begin with the subject of "saving faith." And that brings us to our memory verses for today, which are found in the book of Ephesians, chapter 2:8-9. In these two very simple verses we have the whole subject of saving faith, as it is revealed in all the Scripture, truncated into just a few short, simple phrases.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and that not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not of works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

1. We Are Not Saved By Doing Good Works

I have only two points in today's sermon, and the first is this: We are not saved by doing good works. We cannot be restored to fellowship with God or gain heaven or eternal life by doing good works. Most people in America today, if you asked them, would disagree with me on that. Suppose we took a camera and microphone out to the mall and asked people: "Do you believe you're going to heaven when you die?" Very many people would say, "I hope so." If we asked them, "Why do you think you're going to heaven?" many of them would say, "I'm trying to live a good life. I'm trying to be a good person. I'm trying to treat people correctly. I'm trying to go to church. I've been baptized."

But the Bible is very clear on this subject. We can never get to heaven on our own merits or on the basis of what we are trying to do. Let's begin at the front of this passage, beginning with verse 1, and I'll show you how the Lord explains it to us.

As for you....

Ephesians 2 was written to Christians in the city of Ephesus. These were people who, earlier in their lives, had not followed Christ. But then they had heard the Gospel and had responded to it by faith and had been saved. The apostle Paul is going to review their history and their story for them.

But as for you, you were dead....

What a strange thing to say. What if I came up to you and said, "You know, you and I go back a long ways. I knew you when you were dead." Or what if I asked you, "What was it like to be dead? Tell me about the time you when you were dead?"

Well, we have to bear in mind the biblical definition of death. For an insect, to be dead means that life has ceased. Up in the mountains where I grew up, two brothers were talking one day. One little boy asked the other, "What does it mean to be dead?" The other brother saw an insect on the rock, and he smashed it with his foot and said, "That's dead." It was a vivid little lesson. But in the book of Genesis, God made Adam and Eve in His own image, in His own likeness. He breathed into them the breath of life, and they became living souls.

For us, made with living souls in the image of God, death is not the cessation of life. The biblical definition of death is “missing.” If you are dead, it means that an essential element of vitality is missing. If you’re physically dead, your spirit is missing from your body. If you’re eternally dead, you’re missing heaven. But in this passage, Paul wasn’t talking about physical death or eternal death; he was talking about spiritual death. He was saying that at one time their lives were missing God. They were missing a relationship with the God who had created them and with the Savior who had died for them.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

You used to live lives that were missing God, because you were separated from Him by your sinful nature and you were following the ways of the world and of the devil. And you weren’t alone. That’s the universal human condition. Read on.

Verse 3: All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

That means that we were fully subject to the judicial wrath of God. But now, look at verse 4: But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive....

He resurrected us!

Someone once asked me, “What do you think it’s going to be like on resurrection day, when we’re resurrected from the dead?” Well, I could well have said, “I’ve already been resurrected.” Imagine the surprise if I said that. But there’s a sense in which that is true. One day we’ll be physically resurrected, but our physical resurrection in the future is based on our spiritual resurrection which has already taken place. At the moment of our conversion, God takes us from a state of spiritual death to a state of spiritual life. We are born again. We are made alive in Christ Jesus. The great essential vitality of life, which was missing, is now restored. We are suddenly given a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and it’s like plugging a light into a power source. We come to life. We are raised in newness of life.

Because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

Grace is a word that means God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.

Now when we come to verse 6, we begin moving into the future. In verse 1, Paul told us what we had been before we met Christ—we were dead. In verse 4, he tells us that now God has raised us from death to life. And in verse 6, he’s going to talk about the future:

And God has raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

And that brings us to our memory verses—these two priceless verses that give us the biblical doctrine of justification by grace through faith, Ephesians 2:8-9:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—not of works, so that no one can boast.

When Jesus died on the cross, He shouted out three words that ring through the ages and echo from the highest heavens to the four corners of the earth: It is finished! When we think about our salvation, we don’t think of the word “DO” but of the word “DONE.” It isn’t righteous acts that we do. It’s not works of rightness that we perform. It’s not a matter of living a good life or hoping that our altruistic actions outweigh our selfish ones. It’s a matter of what Jesus Christ has DONE for us on the cross.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—not of works, so that no one can boast.

So my first point is: We are not saved by doing good works.

2. We Are Saved to Do Good Works

But my second point is: We are saved to do good works. If you have your Bibles open on your laps, notice that the paragraph doesn’t end with verse 9. It goes on for one more verse. Look at verse 10: For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

This is an incredible verse, because it tells us that we aren’t saved by doing good works; but we are saved to do good works—and

that God has even planned in advance what those good works will be.

I want to show you another passage which makes the same point. Look at the book of Titus, chapter 3. If you have ever been in a Scripture memory program and have memorized a set of verses on saving faith, you've probably had to memorize Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 3:4-5. Let's begin with verse 3 to get the context, and notice how similar this is to Ephesians 2. It is a cross-reference, a parallel passage:

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another...

He doesn't say that we were dead in our sins, but he uses a similar analogy, saying that we were enslaved by our passions and pleasure.

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

This is the same doctrine in slightly different words—we are not saved by doing good works; we are saved by grace through faith. But notice the next verse—verse 8:

This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and praiseworthy for everyone.

It is truly remarkable how much the Bible talks about good works and good deeds. Look at Acts 26:19. In this passage, the apostle Paul is standing before King Agrippa and making his defense. In this verse, he talked about his conversion on the Damascus Road, and this is what he said: So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.

...by their good works! We are not saved by good works, but good works provides the evidence that we have been saved by grace apart from works.

I don't have time to trace all the verses in the Bible that tell us to do good works, but it fills the Scriptures. And when you study the history of the world, you'll find that Christians have always been at the forefront of benevolence, and social reform, and education, and hospitality, and medical care.

- Jesus told us that when we visit the prisoners and feed the hungry and help the oppressed, it's as though we were doing it for Him.
- Paul told Timothy to warn the rich people of his day to be rich in good works and thus to lay up for themselves treasures in heaven.
- James said that true religion before God was to care for the widows and orphans in their distress and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.
- John said that if we see our brothers in need and don't help in some way, how can the love of Christ be in us?

I've just finished reading a book on the history of Fisk University here in Nashville. Andrew Ward is a journalist who wrote a book entitled *Dark Midnight When I Rise: The Story of the Jubilee Singers Who Introduced the World to the Music of Black America*. He tells the story of how Christians from the North, both black and white, felt an incredible burden to provide educational opportunities for the thousands of newly-liberated slaves in the South following the conclusion of the Civil War. These were Methodists. These were Presbyterians. These were Baptists. And one of the men who came as a virtual missionary to the South was a small, chin-whiskered Irishman who had immigrated to America when he was a teenager. His name was Joseph Gillespie McKee, and he was deeply moved by the story of some American Presbyterian missionaries who had given their lives for the advancement of the Gospel in the 1850s, and he dedicated himself to be used by the Lord wherever called.

When he heard about the impoverished freedmen in the South, he arrived here in Nashville on the brink of one of the harshest winters Nashville had ever known. It was 1863, and Nashville was under occupation. There were about 10,000 fugitive slaves who had fled into the city and Nashville was filled with tents and shacks and lean-tos. McKee himself was not in good health. He was suffering from the onset of tuberculosis. No one wanted to take him in; and for the first several nights, McKee slept outdoors in the cold, on the limestone steps of the state capital building. It took him almost a week to find a room, and then it was a bare, ramshackle room. But the thousands of slaves and freedmen were living in wretched conditions, and McKee went everywhere trying to provide food and blankets. He applied to Governor Andrew Johnson for surplus tents, but Johnson refused. The little Irish

missionary then sent word to the Presbyterians in Ohio, and within a few weeks, money and food and tons of clothing were pouring into his mission, transported down on Union trains.

McKee established four preaching points that doubled as distribution centers, and there he preached the Gospel, started Sunday Schools, and conducted prayer meetings. But most of his time was spent touring the makeshift shanty neighborhoods, handing out food and blankets and supplies. One morning, McKee found a family lying freezing on the floor; they had burned their bedstead the day before and eaten their last morsel of food.

Cholera, tuberculosis, and smallpox broke out, and McKee often labored late into the night helping the sick and finding rooms for the homeless who were streaming into occupied Nashville.

It was Joseph McKee who realized that one of the greatest needs of these fugitive slaves and freedmen was literacy, and he set about to open a school for them. This wasn't universally appreciated by Nashville residents at the time, and McKee was threatened, and his 500 students were sometimes stoned as they came and went. McKee himself was pelted, and rocks crashed through the windows of his school so often that the students began ignoring them and going on with their class work as though nothing had happened.

But it all took a toll on McKee, and within a year his health broke. He left to recuperate and then returned to continue his efforts to establish an educational system for blacks here in Nashville. He did establish a school, but right after the end of the Civil War, another Christian organization, the American Missionary Association, supported by the United Church of Christ, established another school which came to be known as Fisk University.

McKee's students ended up streaming into Fisk University, and McKee was heartbroken. He said, "I have proved (to be) a failure." And he left Nashville thinking his life's work was futile, and he died shortly afterward at the age of thirty-six. But after his death, Presbyterian officials moved what remained of his school and his resources to Knoxville and established Knoxville College, which has been providing a quality education for young people for over 100 years. And to this day there is a building there named in honor of Joseph McKee. (Based on material in *Dark Midnight When I Rise: The Story of the Jubilee Singers Who Introduced the World to the Music of Black America* by Andrew Ward (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), chiefly from chapter 4: "Can't You Read? Joseph Gillespie McKee." Based also on "McKee Paved the Route for Knoxville College" by Robert Booker, in *KnoxNews.Com*, at <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2007/Sep/25/booker-mckee-paved-route-knoxville-college>; accessed August 11, 2009.)

It's remarkable how many schools and colleges and universities and benevolent organizations have been established through the years by those inspired by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, we may not found a college. We may not go out as a missionary. But we can all do what we can right where we are. On the very day that I prepared this message, I received an e-mail from a member of one of our LifeGroups. He and his wife had given birth to a child who had a serious heart problem. Apparently at the same time they were having trouble with one of their kitchen appliances. I'll read you the short note as it came to me:

Dear class: Thank you so much from the bottom of our hearts!!! Last night I went to sleep at 9:00 PM totally exhausted. When I woke up at 6:30 this morning there was a new refrigerator in the kitchen!! It was plugged in and working very well!!! Beth and I are so grateful for this true outpouring of love and support. Truly it blesses us to know while we are going through this trying time we have the body of Christ that is demonstrating His love! You can be encouraged that you are being His "hands and feet" in what are doing! God bless you!

When I read that letter, I thought of a woman named Dorcus in the book of Acts. The Bible says about her: "She was full of good works." She was always making things to give away—items of clothing and articles of love. Full of good works.

We are not saved by doing good works; we are saved by grace through faith. But if we are saved by grace through faith, we soon come to realize that we were saved to do good works. So let's memorize and live out Ephesians 2:8-9, and let's not forget verse 10:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and that not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—now of works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

THE PERFECT CHURCH

Ephesians 4:1-16

There's an old joke that says if you ever find a perfect church don't join it--because then it wouldn't be perfect any more! Well, it's true there isn't a perfect church in this world, but there is a perfect description of the church. It is found in the first half of Ephesians

4, and it is 317 words long, but it can be summed up in only three words. Let's read the 317 words first, then I'll give you the three key words that summarize God's description of His church in its best and most perfect earthly form:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called--one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, He led captives in His train and gave gifts to men." (What does "He ascended" mean except that He also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heaven, in order to fill the whole universe.) It was He who has some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will be no longer infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:1-16).

Unity

The first six verses deal with unity. A healthy church is one that is characterized by unity and oneness, by love and a sense of commonality, and that's only true when the members and attenders of that church are marked by humility. Look at Eph 4:1ff again: As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. The phrase bearing with is a translation of the Greek word, *anekhomai*, which is an interesting little word. The prefix, ana, is a preposition meaning up, and the stem word, echo, means to hold or to put. So this sentence in Ephesians 4:2 could literally be translated, "put up with one another in love."

This last Wednesday night in our Bible study we came across an interesting little verse in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 12:16 says, A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.

In other words, people who are genuinely humble don't take offense easily and they aren't easily irritated. This week there was an interesting letter in the Ann Landers column. A man was writing to Ann Landers because he was upset with his wife. He said,

Dear Ann Landers: I have been married to "Louis" for 10 years. Last weekend, there was a birthday party for one of Louis' relatives. I bought a gift and a card, and left them on the dining room table while we dressed. Usually I sign the cards for the whole family, but I thought it would be nice if Louis handled this one, so I asked him to sign it. When he returned to the bedroom, he said he signed all our names. I don't know what possessed me, but for some reason I felt compelled to check. I opened the sealed envelope and saw the card signed, "Love, Uncle Louis, Jane, Tabby, and Martha." Jane is our daughter. Tabby is our cat. My name is Martha. I put the card back and resealed the envelope, but I was so angry I couldn't see straight. Can you imagine, Ann? Not only did he sign our daughter's name before mine, but even the cat's name was before mine. After a few minutes, I said to Louis, "Why did you sign our names in that way?" He replied, "What's wrong with it?" Needless to say, we got into a terrible argument. He thinks I am making a big deal over nothing. I am hurt and angry. Was he wrong to sign our names that way? Please give me some advice.

Ann Landers replied very wisely, in my opinion: So, the cat's name appeared on the card ahead of yours. Big deal. I hope you never have anything more insulting to be upset about. Get your priorities straight, Lady, and save the adrenaline for more important matters.

That's just what King Solomon, the advice columnist of 3000 years ago, would have said. A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult. Here in Ephesians 4, Paul is cautioning the Ephesians about being easily offended, about having feelings that are hurt easily. He goes on to say in verse 3: Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. And then he tells us that there is a theological underpinning for our unity. We're to be one in Spirit because we belong to one body that is under the control of one Lord. Verse 4 says: There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope... one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God....

We're going to occasionally disagree on one thing or another, but we've got to be careful to do so without upsetting our unity, for we are part of one family, controlled by one Spirit, led by one Lord, headed for one great hope. And Jesus said that the world will know we are Christians by our love.

So the first word is unity. But the second paragraph in this text is all about diversity.

Diversity

Ephesians 4:7 begins with the conjunction, **But**. We are united into one body, into one family--but! But there is diversity within our

unity. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. The particular kind of grace Paul is referring to here is not saving grace, but serving grace. He is going to say that God has given every person in his church a special gift with which to serve Him. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.... He goes on to say that when He ascended back into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, these grace gifts were distributed to God's children. And he continues in verse 11: It was He who have some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up....

Paul lists five different offices or gifts here, and in other passages in the Bible there are about 15 other gifts mentioned (depending on how you count them). There are lists of these spiritual gifts here and in Romans 12 and in 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Peter 4.

The purpose of my message is not to try to list all the so-called "Gifts of the Spirit," but to emphasize the point Paul is making here--every Christian is gifted by God in some way for divine service. And I believe we are placed here on this earth to accomplish a task that God has specifically designed us for.

You may remember that earlier, in Ephesians 2:10, Paul wrote, For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

I've been reading in the book of Jeremiah, and in the very first chapter, when God calls Jeremiah to his task, the Lord says to him, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

The Lord has a job that only you can do, and He has placed us here for a certain period of time to do it. The 17th century British preacher, Thomas Fuller, once said: God's children are immortal while their Father hath anything for them to do on earth.

David Livingstone, in a letter describing the death of Bishop Mackenzie, March, 1862, said: Men are immortal until their work is done.

On Thursday night, September 21, 1871, Charles Spurgeon was preaching at a church in Newington, England, and this is what he said to the congregation: Whatever occurs around us, we need not be alarmed. We are immortal until our work is done. And amidst infectious or contagious diseases, if we are called to go there, we may sit as easily as though in balmy air. It is not ours to preserve our life by neglecting our duty. It is better to die in service than live in idleness--better to glorify God and depart, than rot above ground in neglecting what He would have us to do. Unto God belong the issues from death. We may, therefore, go without temerity into any danger where duty calls us.

The Bible says: My times are in Thy hand, or, as the old song says, "We'll work till Jesus comes, then we'll be carried home."

Sometimes the work God has for us to do is within the parameters of our church ministries. We're always looking for teachers and musicians and greeters and ushers and nursery workers and children's ministers--and about a thousand other kinds of ministries. Often our ministry is outside the organized programs of our church. It might be caring for a loved one in a nursing home, volunteering at the Crisis Pregnancy Support Center, or seeking to win your co-workers to Christ.

I read about a woman who went to her pastor complaining of her work environment. It was so crass and crude, her co-workers used bad language, and she was the only Christian there. "I don't think I can put with it!" she said. Her pastor asked her just one question of five words, and it completely changed her perspective. From that point, she understood why God had placed her there, and she went to work each day with a new purpose and attitude. His simple question was: "Where do you put lights?"

There's a need, and we must fill it. There's a work, and we must do it. There's a crown and we must win it.

There are many gifts, many jobs, many diverse ministries, but they function within the organic unity of the church. Now, what happens as we all go about our assigned task? That brings us to this third paragraph, the one that talks about the growing maturity within the church of Christ.

Maturity

Then--when there is unity exhibited and diversity exercised--we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him, who is the Head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

John Newton was the author of the hymn "Amazing Grace." He had been a worthless, evil slave trader. His story is one of the most remarkable in Christian history. After his conversion, he went into the ministry, and in 1780, he was asked to become the pastor of St. Mary's Woolnoth in London, where he is now buried. Several years ago, I visited St. Mary's, a little church now surrounded by skyscrapers and modern buildings in the heart of London's financial district. I stood in John Newton's pulpit, and tried to imagine his

first service there. He was one of only two evangelical Anglican ministers in all of London, and people were uncertain as to how he would get along. On that Sunday in 1780, he climbed the winding steps of the pulpit, stood and looked over his audience. He opened his Bible, and turned to this text, Ephesians 4:15, and he called them to maturity in Christ.

And to this day, people are still talking about John Newton and St. Mary's Church, and the impact it had on London and on the world.

James Montgomery Boice tells of Lawrence of Arabia visiting Paris after World War I with some Arab friends. He showed them around Paris, but what fascinated them most was the faucet in their hotel room. They spent hours turning it on and off; they thought it was wonderful. All they had to do was turn the handle, and they could get all the water they wanted. When time came to leave, Lawrence found them in the bathroom trying to detach the faucet. They explained, "It is very dry in Arabia. What we need are faucets. If we have them, we will have all the water we want." Lawrence had to explain that the effectiveness of the faucets lay in their connection to the pipeline.

Are you connected to God's pipeline? Is His love flowing through you? Unity, Diversity, Maturity--Paul's description of the perfect church. May the Lord make each of us humble, hard-working, and mature--channels of His living water for our spiritually-dehydrated world.

WHAT LIFESTYLE FITS THE CHRISTIAN?

Ephesians 4:17-32

I don't know of any word that is subject to more adjectives than the popular term lifestyle. Almost every day we hear something on the news about the American lifestyle, a healthy lifestyle, an expensive lifestyle, a gay lifestyle, a Hollywood lifestyle. There was an article in the news the other day about a terrorist in Germany who was seduced into carrying out criminal acts by promises of a "James Bond lifestyle." A popular television program of a few years ago touted the lifestyles of the "rich and famous." Well today, I'd like to take you to a passage of Scripture that describes a distinctively Christian lifestyle, and I'd like to deal with the question: "What lifestyle best fits the Christian?" In our ongoing study of the New Testament book of Ephesians, we are coming to the last half of chapter four, so will you read with me Ephesians 4:17-32.

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger, do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Let's look at the three paragraphs that make up this section of Scripture. The first paragraph, Ephesians 4:17-29, describes the world around us. Look at the way it's put in verse 17:

The World Around Us

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord. This is the Apostle Paul writing, but He is writing under the inspiration of God, so we can just as well take these words as coming from God Himself to you and me. He is speaking insistently. He is very much in earnest. He is most emphatic. He is insisting that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do. The word live is the Greek word *peripateo* (*per-ee-pat-eh'-o*), meaning to walk or to walk around and it has to do with our lifestyle, our way of living, our daily walk; and the word for Gentiles is the Greek word *ethnos* (*eth'-nos*), from which we get our English word "ethnic." It means the nations, the peoples, or, in this case, the world around us. In other words, God insists that His people maintain a different and distinctive lifestyle than the world around us.

Now, he goes on to explain the world around us, giving us a very vivid description of a society and a culture that disregards God and His Word. Verse 18: They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

The Greek word for hardening is *porosis* (*porosis*, po'-ro-sis), which means to become like stone. It was the word the Greeks used to describe petrified objects. I'll never forget when my dad and mom took me on a trip out West and we visited the petrified forest. I had expected to see a forest grove of trees still standing, all having turned to stone. But instead it was just the trunks of trees scattered here and there across the landscape, all of them having turned from soft, living, wood and plant fiber to hard stone. The guidebook explained that over time, water saturated with minerals infiltrated the organic matter, eventually turning it to stone. The Bible says that the same thing can happen to our hearts and to our consciences. Over time, our hearts can become hardened, petrified.

Verse 19 continues: Having lost all sensitivity.... The Greek word here means to lose the ability to feel shame or embarrassment. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality (behavior completely lacking in moral restraint, usually with the implication of sexual licentiousness) so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more.

I was very interested with the reaction to the new show *Temptation Island*. Television critics and social commentators and media pundits all said that the very idea behind the show was morally repugnant. Advertisers have been bailing out left and right. But Americans are tuning in, and the show has been consistently among the ten most watched shows in the country.

Recently at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the Theater Department decided to perform the play *Corpus Christi* on campus. It depicts Jesus as a homosexual who has sex with his disciples. There was a Christian student there named Michael Marcavage, who was on the dean's list, and was active in Campus Crusade for Christ. He immediately complained to the dean of the School of Communications and Theater, as well as to the president of the university. He posted fliers across campus so that everyone would be away of the blasphemous nature of the play. He agreed not to initiate protests outside the theater, but he did ask permission to stage a Christian outreach to the student community. While he was in the university vice president's office, police officers arrived, he was handcuffed and taken to a psychiatric hospital where he was involuntarily committed for examination and treatment.

There was a report last week from London that violence and physical attacks against Christians and against churches has dramatically increased in the past year in the United Kingdom.

This is not a Christian-friendly world. This present society will not tolerate any moral rebukes or restraints at all. They want the freedom to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

I read an interview the other day with Heather Graham, the star of the movie *Austin Powers*. She was very bitter toward the church because, she said, it stifled her sexuality. Her exact quote was, "Why do I have to do what all these men are saying? Why is a woman's sexuality supposed to be so evil?"

Well, sexuality in itself isn't evil; it was created by God. But the Bible warns that God intends for us to be responsible moral and spiritual people. So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live like the Gentiles live, in the futility of their thinking.... Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more.

That's the world around us, as described in Ephesians 4:17-19. Now the next paragraph, Ephesians 4:20-24, describes the change within us.

The Change Within Us

Verse 20 begins, You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. In other words, this is not the way you've learned to live in Christ. Now that you've become a Christian, something different has happened within you, something that separates you from the world, something that gives you a distinctive lifestyle. Paul goes on to describe the change in terms of wardrobe.

When I was twelve years old or so, I spent a week or two with my Aunt Louise, who owned a factory and was fairly well-to-do. One day I dressed in my coat and tie and went with her to her factory. About mid-morning, she sent me down the street on an errand, and as I walked along the street a tractor-trailer drove by, hit a mud-puddle, and splattered me with mud from head to foot. You should have seen my Aunt Louise when I walked into her office. Mud was dripping from my hair and off the end of my nose. My clothes were drenched. In great alarm, she sent for a driver who took me to her house and made sure that I took off every stitch of clothing, had a hot shower, and was properly dressed again in clothes just from the cleaner.

That is exactly what happens to us when we come to Christ. The world, the flesh, and the devil splatter us with sin and impurity. Our

righteousness is as filthy rags. When we stand before the cross of Christ and receive Him as Lord and Savior, He removes our dirty clothes, cleanses us in His blood, and dresses us in the garments of His righteousness.

You were taught with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Now that leads to the last paragraph of the chapter, which describe the demands upon us as those who are dressed in the righteousness of Christ, yet living in a world given over to sensuality and every kind of impurity.

The Demands Upon Us

Ephesians 4:25 begins with the word, Therefore...

Therefore, each of you must.... Notice the imperative, the note of insistence. And now the Lord is about to tell us the lifestyle that fits the Christian. There are several areas mentioned here. The first has to do with his morality, his integrity. Verse 25: Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all citizens of one body.

In the past, you didn't think anything about lying your way out of problems or stretching the truth or saying whatever was convenient in any given situation. But now, your word is an indication of your character, and you must be people who are characterized by honesty.

The second area has to do with the way we deal with the Christian's mood, specifically regarding anger. We're all bound to become angry from time to time, but we must be careful about how we express that anger and how long we stay angry: In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

In the last several years, there have been a lot of sociologists who say that we're better off to get things off our chests, to be assertive, to express our hostility. And there are times when the wise person may do that. But I recently read one psychologist named Gary Emery who is questioning that advice. He wrote, "Although a whole school of thought recommends that you verbally express your hostility, a great deal of recent research has found the opposite to be the case. Researchers have found that freely venting your anger corrodes relationships and breeds more anger, not less. In one recent study... only one out of 300 happily married couples reported that they yell at each other."

So Paul deals with integrity and anger, and in the next two verses he deals with the Christian's money: He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

In other words, we must never come by one cent in a deceptive or dishonest way. Christians are to be hard-working people, earning money with the express purpose of sharing some of it with others.

The next area he deals with is the Christian's mouth. Verse 29 says, Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

The word grieve is a very strong and emotional word. The apostle Paul could have said, "Do not displease the Holy Spirit. Do not disappoint the Holy Spirit. Do not let the Holy Spirit down." But the word grieve conveys emotional suffering and deep sorrow. It says that when we tell lies, when we lose our temper, when we steal, when we let unwholesome talk come from our mouths, it causes emotional suffering and deep sorrow to the Holy Spirit who lives within our hearts. He is grieved by that kind of behavior.

Then in verse 31-32, we're told about the Christian's magnanimity, his compassion: Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Is there someone you haven't forgiven. God has forgiven you of all your sins in Christ; should you not also reflect His compassion and forgive your enemy?

So in view of the world around us and the change within us, these are the demands upon us, in terms of our morality, our moods, our money, our mouths, and our manner, our magnanimous hearts.

Just this week, the last male survivor of the sinking of the Titanic died in the south of France. His name was Michel Navratil, who was only three years old when the Titanic sunk after hitting an iceberg in 1912. He was 92 years old. Navratil and his two-year-old brother, Edmond, were traveling with their father who was estranged from his wife and had kidnapped the two boys and taken them aboard ship without her knowledge.

When the Titanic hit the iceberg, his father dressed the boys very warmly, took them to the deck, and made sure they were safe in a

lifeboat. The father went down with the ship, but the two little boys were saved and landed in New York, but no one know who they were. They were dubbed "the Orphans of the Titanic," and their mother learned of their whereabouts through newspaper accounts.

Now, there are only four women still alive who survived the sinking of that great ocean liner in 1912.

Why did the Titanic go down? Because water flooded into her. Ships are built to be in the water, to float the water, to inhabit the water. But when the water gets into the ships, they sink. Christians are made to be in this world, to inhabit this world, to change this world. But when the world gets into the Christian, and when the world gets into the church, we pitch and roll and founder and sink.

Or as it is put elsewhere in Scripture:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

FORGIVING OTHERS

Hebrews 12:15; Ephesians 4:32

See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many (Hebrews 12:15).

I can't think of a more unpleasant beginning to my message today than by describing a clogged-up commode. Suppose you went into a restroom to find a commode had been used again and again without anyone having bothered to flush it. It is filled with malodorous waste and filth. A virtual roll of toilet paper has been dropped into it. Suppose, being a brave (or a desperate) soul, you edged close enough to flush it. But the drain was so clogged that the water backed up, spilling the entire mess across the floor.

That is a picture of a human heart that refuses to flush away its anger, resentment, and bitterness. The unhealthy debris builds up and backs up until the person's life becomes toxic and repulsive. Then it spills into other people's lives. That's why Ephesians 4:32 says,

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you." Colossians 3 says, "But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice... Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

Yet forgiveness doesn't come easy for us, and we occasionally come across situations in life in which we aren't even sure forgiveness is appropriate. I have a friend who told me his harrowing experience. He and his wife and daughter were at home one evening when a man burst into their house, waving a gun. He robbed them at gun-point, then, with his gun pointed at the teenage daughter, he warned the father that if he tried to interfere his daughter was a dead woman. Then, with his finger on the trigger of the gun, he raped the girl before fleeing.

Would you advise that family to forgive their attacker?

You can see that we are not dealing with an easy subject. Yet the Bible deals with this topic in a sensitive and wise and comprehensive way. A thorough study of the subject of forgiving others would take many weeks. For today, I would like to share just three elements that help make up the chemistry of forgiveness.

First, we must all learn that true love overlooks the many small, daily offenses that are bound to occur. Almost all of us have a few sharp edges here and there. Most of us have some rough patches to our personalities. We sometimes rub each other the wrong way, or we get miffed at each other, or we neglect each other, or we say something without thinking. There are about 10,000 ways we can offend another person, and there are an equal number of ways in which we can get our feelings hurt. It's especially true if we're a little insecure or if we have a low self-image. We take things personally and become defensive and easily offended. Roommates get out of sorts with each other. Husbands and wives rub each other the wrong way. Fellow-workers on the job take little jabs at each other. Church members think one another stuck up or snobbish.

But as we grow in the Lord Jesus Christ, we increasingly tend to overlook small, daily offenses more and more. Paul summed up his attitude in five little words: "But what does it matter?" He said, "It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."

Peter said, "The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:7-8).

Proverbs 12:16 is my favorite verse on this subject because it is so plain-spoken: A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.

And Ephesians 4:2 says, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." The phrase "bearing with..." is a translation of a Greek word coming from the verb "to put" connected with the preposition "up." It literally means, "to put up with." I told one of my daughters recently that one of the most important techniques to learn in dealing with people is the power of a well-timed shrug. Shrugging your shoulders is usually better than swinging your fists or wagging your tongue. I've found that is no limit to the number of things I can shrug off. Why? Because true love flushes away a multitude of small, daily offenses and keeps the sludge of anger, hurt, and bitterness from backing up into the plumbing system of the soul.

The second element of forgiveness involves more serious offenses. The Bible teaches that when someone comes to us with contrite, repentant hearts, asking our forgiveness, we are obliged to forgive them just as we ourselves have been forgiven by God.

The Lord brings this up at both the beginning and the end of his ministry. In his first sermon, he taught us to pray, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us" (Matthew 6:12). And near the conclusion of his ministry he broached the subject in greater detail. He said in Matthew 18 that if someone commits a serious offense against us and we confront them and they repent, we should forgive them completely.

Peter asked, "How many times should we forgive them? Seven times?" "No," replied Jesus. "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." (Matthew 18:21, 22)

Then he proceeded to tell Peter the parable of the unmerciful servant.

A servant owed the king a large amount of money, millions of dollars, and the king could have tried to extract the money in ways unspeakably cruel. But when the servant cried out for mercy, the king forgave the debt. Going his way, the servant was approached by a man who owed him a few dollars. "Have mercy on me," said the man. "I will pay you back when I can." But the servant had the man thrown into prison until he could repay the debt. Jesus said, "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said. 'I canceled all the debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed." Then Jesus added these alarming words: That is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart. (Mt 18:23-35)

Corrie Ten Boom provided us perhaps the best and most widely-used illustration of this. Corrie was imprisoned during the war years in a concentration camp, humiliated and degraded, subjected to strip searches, and forced to shower before the ogling eyes of leering guards. Her dear father died at the hands of the Nazis, as did her beloved sister Betsy. Corrie miraculously survived the holocaust, and after the war she became a roving missionary for Christ. She preached and shared the Scripture all over the world. Then one day, she was speaking in Munich. After the sermon, she saw a man coming toward her with outstretched hand. "Ja, Fraulein, it is wonderful that Jesus forgives us all our sins, just as you say." She remembered his face. He was one of the leering, lecherous, mocking SS guards who had humiliated and abused her.

Her hand froze by her side. She could not forgive. She thought she had forgiven, but she suddenly realized she could not forgive this particular guard, standing there in solid flesh before her. She sent up a silent, urgent prayer, "Lord, forgive me, I cannot forgive." Her hand was suddenly unfrozen. The ice of hatred melted. Her hand went out. She forgave as she had been forgiven.

We have an obligation, based on the forgiveness of Christ. It is by his grace that we have the grace to extend the grace of divine forgiveness. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you.

The third element in the chemistry of forgiveness involves the impenitent who offended us, hurt us, or abuse us. They have never apologized, and perhaps they are even scornful of their high-handed evil. Perhaps they enjoy tormenting us and twisting the knife in our backs or pouring salt in our wounds. Here I believe we have two biblical options.

First, we may choose to forgive them if we feel we should. Jesus prayed for his executioners, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34) Stephen prayed as he was being stoned to death, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." (Acts 7:60)

A couple in our church (I'll call them Tom and Mary) told me their story. When they were first married, Tom's first wife, who still angry and embittered, decided to do everything possible to make life miserable for Tom. She repeatedly took him to court, tried to ruin him financially, sought more and more alimony and child support payments, and refused to give him any visitation rights. Tom and Mary

developed very hostile feelings toward this woman. But they were both new Christians, and they wanted to handle their attitudes in a way that would please the Lord. They didn't know what to do, but they decided to ask God to give them forgiving spirits. They decided to pray for this woman, and to pray for her happiness. They didn't pray for God to change her heart or make her a Christian. They just prayed that she would be happy.

Tom and Mary prayed for a solid year, and they discovered that it is very difficult to remain angry or envious at someone you are earnestly praying for. Yet during that time, the situation became harder and harder to deal with. But one day they received a surprising phone call from the woman. She had found the Lord, and instantly the whole situation totally changed. They were able to work through all their circumstances, and a working friendship developed among them that has continued for thirteen years.

So the Lord may give us the grace and the wisdom to forgive even those who seem to have unrepentant hearts. Still, when you study this subject carefully in the Bible, you discover that God's own forgiveness of sinners is not *carte blanche*, but is extended only to those who repent.

Biblical forgiveness is conditioned by repentance. For God to forgive everybody for everything with no demands of contrition or repentance would betray his own holiness and justice. The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins..." (1 John 1:9). Jesus said, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

We are not told that we must pardon everyone for everything. Robertson McQuilkin wrote in his booklet on forgiveness,

"Though love may sometimes choose to forgive, it is not obligated without repentance."

What, then, do we do with people who abuse, hurt and betray us and never come seeking forgiveness? We make up our minds to turn them over to the Lord, and in so doing, to release the resentment and bitterness that can so easily clog up the plumbing of our souls. Romans 12:17ff says:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This is what happened in the case I told you about earlier about the man who broke into the home and raped the daughter at gunpoint. If something like that happened in my home, I don't think I could ever forgive the man who would do it should he remain impenitent. Even if he confessed his sin and begged forgiveness, it would take the divine grace of Jesus Christ for me to forgive him. With no confession, no contrition, no repentance on his part, I'm not sure that I should even contemplate forgiving him. But neither would I want my family to go through the rest of our lives encumbered by rage and bitterness.

So this particular family came to the point of kneeling down and praying, "Lord, the man who did this to us has never been caught, and perhaps he never will be. There is nothing we can do to extract justice and judgment. But you know who this man is, where he is, and you have told us to leave room for your wrath. We ask you to settle this account. We turn it over to you, and we ask you to flush the rage out of our hearts by your grace. We release the man into your hands, and in so doing we also release the rage and bitterness.

Perhaps the Lord will convert those who have hurt us. Perhaps he will condemn them. In any case, when we leave it in his hands, we can turn the corner and get on with our lives.

This week Pete Peterson was confirmed as the first United States post-war ambassador to Vietnam, and he will soon be traveling to Hanoi to represent the United States. Peterson was last in Hanoi as a prisoner of war. He was tortured and interrogated, detained for over six years in the infamous Hanoi Hilton. But he said that from the moment of his release "I just resolved that I would leave my hate at the gate and start building a future."

Several years ago, I read the story of a pastor in Zaire. In these more recent days, as we've seen the bloodshed and destruction of Zaire, I've wonder what has become of him. His name was Botembo Isako. He was a soldier, a military man in his country. After basic training, he was assigned to a military police unit in Muanda. He lived an evil life, doing drugs, committing immorality, and misusing his authority against civilians.

One day he was assigned to security detail at a soccer game. Being in charge of his unit, he sent his men inside the stadium while he remained outside bullying people and forcing them to give him their watches, jewelry, and money. He approached a 17-year old and searched him. The youth had nothing but a little book. In a rage, Botembo beat the boy until the lad finally managed to get free and run away, badly hurt and drenched in his own blood. But as he fled, he shouted back, "God bless you. May the Lord forgive you."

Botembo laughed. After the game he went home and surveyed his loot. He saw the little book and discovered it was a New

Testament. He began to read it, and for the first time in his life, he started feeling guilty for his evil ways. He could hear the young man's voice, saying over and over, "God bless you. May the Lord forgive you."

The more he read the little book, the more he began to change. His family noticed, unsure what to make of it. Shortly afterward, Botembo fell ill and was rushed to the hospital. There he continued to read his stolen New Testament until he finally crawled out of his hospital bed, knelt in the floor, and begged God for forgiveness. When he asked Jesus Christ to be his Savior, he said, "...a truckload of guilt fell off my heart and I turned my life over to God." That day he decided to leave the army, and today he is serving the Lord as a pastor in Zaire, always on the lookout for a 17-year old with a missing New Testament.

I wonder if someone here needs a spiritual plumber. Your heart is all clogged up by anger, bitterness, hurt feelings, or an unforgiving spirit. God has forgiven you of your sins against him through Jesus Christ. But you haven't extended his grace toward others. Perhaps there is someone you need to forgive from your heart. Or perhaps there is someone you need to commit into God's hands, releasing years of anger, bitterness and resentment.

The grace of God demonstrated in Jesus Christ is a plunger that can unclog the heart. It can clear the pipes. It can free up the pipelines to once again convey the fresh, sparkling waters of the Holy Spirit. So take advantage of it. Discover the power of forgiveness. Discover the truth of Hebrews 12:15 which says, See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

WHEN IMITATION IS THE REAL THING

Ephesians 5:1-2

Good cooks keep on the lookout for that suspicious, frequently-used, much-derided term 'imitation.' The other day, I purchased a mix for blueberry muffins, but when I got home I noticed the label said: 'Made with real imitation blueberries.' Inside was a packet of mysterious little purple pellets which I took to be the real imitation blueberries, and I wondered what they were made of. They were roughly the color of blueberries, and had a vague blueberry-like flavor, but I don't know what they really were. Maybe they were made of soybeans, or perhaps just some little chemical pebbles. At any rate, the next morning we enjoyed hot and steaming real imitation blueberry muffins at our house.

The reason we see the word 'imitation' in our pantries and on our kitchen shelves is because the real ingredients are sometimes rather expensive, or they're out of season or unavailable; so we have to substitute. But the imitation is always inferior to the original.

But there is one time when the imitation is the real thing, and that's what I would like to show you this morning. In Ephesians 5:1-2, the Apostle Paul writes:

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Real Christians are—not imitation—but imitating Christians; that is, we are Christians whose great purpose in life is to imitate our God and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This morning I would like for us to study these two verses phrase by phrase.

Be Imitators of God

Chapter 5 of Ephesians opens with the words 'Be imitators of God.' The word imitators is the translation of the Greek word *mimēthv* (*mimēteus*, *mim-ay-tace*'), from which we get our English words 'mime' and 'mimic.' It means that we should be mimes and mimics of God. This is a recurring theme through this middle portion of Ephesians.

For example, look at Ephesians 4:13: ...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Verse 15 adds: ...we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

And look at Ephesians 4:24: (we are to) put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

And verse 32: Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore....

Now, this brings up a very interesting distinction. When we talk about becoming like God, we're talking about a very thin line between good and evil, between the essence of iniquity and the essence of righteousness.

The essence of iniquity is wanting to be like God in His greatness. In the book of Isaiah, we have an account given of the fall of Lucifer, the archangel whom we better know as Satan, or the devil. The great desire in his heart was to be like God. In Isaiah 14, we read:

12 How you have fallen from heaven,
O morning star, son of the dawn!
You have been cast down to the earth,
you who once laid low the nations!
13 You said in your heart,
'I will ascend to heaven;
I will raise my throne
above the stars of God;
I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly,
on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain.
14 I will ascend above the tops of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.'

He wanted to become as great as God, as glorious as God, and as powerful of God. Because of that, iniquity was found in his heart and Lucifer was expelled from heaven. He wound up on this earth in the Garden of Eden, and do you remember what he said in his temptation to Adam and Eve? Genesis 3:4-5 says: 'You will not surely die,' the serpent said to the woman. 'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God....'

And at the end of the age, the Bible predicts that a great world ruler will come to the forefront of history, the Antichrist. And listen to this description of him in 2 Thessalonians 2:4: He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

There is a little bit of this in all of us. The first emperor of China and the man for whom the nation of China is named was Ying Cheng, who became a warlord at age 13 and eventually amassed an army of a million soldiers. He boasted he would establish a dynasty that would last 10,000 years. He proclaimed himself to be god. His palace measured a mile-and-a-half long and a half-mile wide, with thousands of rooms and an audience hall that could seat 10,000. It was Ying Cheng who built the Great Wall of China which, if it were in the United States, would reach from Los Angeles to New York and back again to Chicago. But what happened to this man who proclaimed himself to be god? When he was at the height of power, his Prime Minister plotted against him and he was assassinated. His son and heir also perished in the coup. The Emperor's murderers tried to conceal his royal body, but it rotted and began to smell, forcing them to pull a cart of salted fish nearby in an effort to obscure the odor.

How many men and women in human history have wanted to be like God. But someone said, 'Those who appear as gods before men soon appear as men before God.'

Yet all of us have this same urge within us to be gods in our own little universe, to be the center of attention, to be noticed, to achieve recognition. We are selfish and self-centered by nature. We want what we want, we want our own way; and the essence of sin is the desire, to one degree or another, to be like God in His greatness. But Isaiah 42:8 says, I am the Lord; that is my name. And my glory I will not share with another.

But now let's look at the other side of the coin. Although the essence of iniquity is desiring to be like God in His greatness, the essence of righteousness is desiring to be like God in His goodness.

Missionary E. Stanley Jones once asked Mahatma Gandhi what would make Christianity more acceptable to the masses of India. Gandhi said, 'I would suggest, first, that all of you Christians...begin to live more like Jesus Christ.'

Going back to Ephesians 4:24, we're told to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. We can say that the process of sanctification is the process of growing increasingly to be like Christ. Christlikeness is our goal.

I read about a heavyset woman who went to an exercise and diet clinic. The first thing the supervisor did was draw a silhouette on a mirror in the shape she wished to become. As she stood before the mirror, she bulged out over the silhouette. The instructor told her, 'Our goal is for you to fit this shape.' For many weeks the woman dieted and exercised. Each week she would stand in front of the mirror, but her volume, while decreasing, still overflowed. She exercised harder and dieted more rigidly. Finally one day, to everyone's delight, as she stood in front of the mirror she was conformed to the image of the silhouette.

That is what God is seeking to do with us, to perfect that which concerns us, to make us more and more to be like Jesus Christ in His goodness. And so Ephesians 5 begins: Be imitators of God therefore....

As Dearly Loved Children...

Now, notice the next phrase: Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children. We're talking about a family likeness here. We are children of the heavenly Father, so we should share in the family likeness.

I'd forgotten how naturally children mimic and imitate their fathers until my granddaughter Christiana was born. She is about a year old now, but her tendency to imitate began very early. She would focus those big blue eyes on me, and if I smiled at her, she would likely smile back. If I made a funny face, she would make a funny face. If I clapped my hands, she would clap hers. If I made a sound with my mouth, she would try to make the same sound, and sometimes I was amazed at how well she could imitate me.

It's no different with God's children. As we focus our eyes on the Lord, it is only natural for us to imitate him—especially in one great area.

And Live a Life of Love...

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love.

The word live is the one that we've seen over and over again in this section of Ephesians, and even if you have no knowledge of Greek, perhaps you're getting to know this word from our studies. It is *peripateo* (per-ee-pat-eh'-o), literally to walk, or to walk around. This section of Ephesians tells us about our Christian walk, and here we're told to walk around in love.

Tony Campolo once told a story about a guy named Joe, who was a drunk, but who was miraculously converted at a Bowery mission. Prior to his conversion, he had gained the reputation for being a dirty wino for whom there was no hope, only a miserable existence in the ghetto. But following his conversion to a new life in Christ, everything changed. Joe became the most caring person that anyone associated with the mission had ever known. Joe spent his days and nights hanging out at the mission and doing what needed to be done. There was never anything that he was asked to do that he considered beneath him. Whether it was cleaning up after some violently sick alcoholic or scrubbing the bathrooms, Joe did what he was asked with a smile on his face and a seeming attitude of thankfulness. He could be counted on to help feed feeble men who wandered off the street and into the mission, and to undress and tuck into bed men who were too out of it to take care of themselves.

One evening, when the director of the mission was delivering his evening evangelistic message to the usual crowd of sullen men, there was one man who looked up, came down the aisle to the altar, and knelt to pray. He cried out for God to change him. The repentant drunk kept shouting, 'Oh, God! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe!'

The director of the mission leaned over and said to the man, 'Son, I think it would be better if you prayed, 'Make me like Jesus.'

The man looked up at the director with a quizzical expression on his face and asked, 'Is he like Joe?'

There's a little poem that says:

You are writing a gospel
A chapter a day,
By the deeds that you do,
By the words that you say;
Men read what you write,
Whether faithless or true.
Say—what is the Gospel,
According to you?

Just as Christ Loved Us...

The last part of this passage says, live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

There is a popular movie out now titled *Thirteen Days*, telling the story of the Cuban missile crisis. When the events portrayed in the movie took place in 1962, I was ten years old. It was in October, and school was in session. I was in the fourth grade. I remember that day, because our teacher, Mrs. Norris, had suspended her teaching. She had a radio and she stood beside it at the counter beneath the windows, fear and strain on her face. We all listened as the Soviet ships drew ever closer to the American blockade, and the world teetered on the brink of nuclear war. At that moment, nothing mattered, and the whole world held its breath.

But today, in 2001, the world is facing a greater threat than the Cuban Missile Crisis. The entire earth is facing the judgment and condemnation of Almighty God because of her sinfulness and evil. The words 'judge' and 'judgment' occur 758 times in the King James Version of the Bible.

But God, concerned about His creation, sent Jesus Christ on a peace mission, to mediate a settlement, and that's what He did on the cross when He died for our sins. And the Bible says that when we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

He loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Our task is to receive Him as Savior and Lord, and then allow Him to transform us into the image of His own Christly character. Will you accept His terms for peace? Will you give your life to Him. The whole of the Christian life is summed up in this:

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a

THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

Ephesians 5:18

Today we're coming to the passage in Ephesians that has really been the theme of my ministry here over these 21 years, and a theme and a passage that is very precious and dear to me. I'm talking about Ephesians 5:18 the theme of the "Fullness of the Holy Spirit."

I became acquainted with this passage in 1971 at age 19. I believe that I genuinely trusted Christ as my Savior in childhood, although I can't remember the exact day and time. My high school years and my first year in college were pretty wobbly, and when I transferred as a sophomore to Colombia Bible College in September of 1971, I was confused and backslidden, weak and insecure both personally and spiritually. My father and my pastor took me to Columbia, South Carolina and dumped me out on the steps of the dormitory. I found my room, unpacked my bags, and, by and by, two guys walked in, suitcases in hand, who said they were my roommates. One of them, Bill McCoy, was from Orlando. He was a "military brat" who had gotten into surfing while his dad had been stationed in Hawaii, and there he had also gotten heavenly involved in drugs. We struck up a friendship very quickly, and that evening he shared with me his testimony.

As everyone my age knows, the late-1960s and early-1970s were very difficult for Americans. The Vietnam War was raging, university campuses were marked by rioting and sit-ins. Four students at Kent State University were shot and killed by the National Guard. The assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy traumatized the nation. And a counter-culture developed among young people, marked by a casting off of restraints. This was the era of Woodstock, Timothy Leary, and of the hippies.

But the Holy Spirit finds young people wherever they are, and a revival broke out in segments of this counter culture. Time Magazine did their famous cover story of the Jesus Movement, and these young, converted hippies were called Jesus people. My friend Bill McCoy had come to Christ during this movement and here he was now, enrolled at Bible College. As he shared his testimony with me, I was very deeply moved. His eyes were so fresh and excited, and his joy was like that of someone who had been... born again. It was one of the most dramatic and wonderful stories I had ever heard.

Then he asked me to share my testimony, and it quickly became apparent I didn't have much of a testimony to share.

At length that evening, he said, "You know what's wrong with you? You need to come to the Lord in full surrender and be filled with the Spirit."

At first, I didn't know what he meant, and I didn't like the sound of it. The only time I'd heard the phrase "filled with the Spirit" used was when referring to people who did bizarre things such as screaming and shouting and falling over in trances and claiming to perform odd miracles and shouting out gibberish. I thought of a little Pentecostal church near my home in Elizabethton where, on occasion, all the members would be seen running out the door, dashing around the church, and flying back in without missing a note of their hymn.

But Bill went on to explain that being filled with the Spirit means simply that Jesus Christ has control of one's life, that we've made Him Lord of all the corners and crevices of our lives. As we are filled with the Holy Spirit, the character of Christ begins to develop within us.

I pondered this decision for 24 hours, because I wasn't sure I was ready to give up everything for Christ. But the next night, September 2, 1971, I knelt at an old vinyl sofa at the end of the hall and turned my life over to the Lord and asked Him to fill me with His Spirit.

I remember going to bed a couple of hours later, looking out the open window of my dormitory. The night was a hot, South Carolina night, and the sky was clear. The moon was out. I was too excited to sleep. I had found what I'd been looking for all my life, and for the first time in my life I was genuinely excited about Jesus Christ, and I couldn't wait to share Him with others. That night was the turning point in my life.

In the days immediately following, Bill and another student, Joe Medina, drew me into some discipleship Bible studies, and there (as well as in my classes at Columbia Bible College), I made the acquaintance of Ephesians 5:18. I've been preaching this message ever since.

I'm not sure I have a sermon on this passage that you haven't heard in one form or another at least a dozen times, but if nothing else this morning, let me stir up your minds by way of pure remembrance. Let's read together this passage, a very dear passage to me, from Ephesians 5:18-21.

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

A Command

Here we have four things: A command, a contrast, a comparison, and a change. First, the command: Don't get drunk on wine, but be filled with the Spirit.

The word "drunk" comes from the Greek root word *methe* (*methe*, *meth'-ay*), from which I'm quite sure we get our English word "methane." It referred to alcoholic cider or mulled wine, and Paul warns that being intoxicated leads to debauchery. Here the Greek word for debauchery is [asotia](#) (*asotia*, *as-o-tee'-ah*) which is found several times in the Bible. For example, we're told in Luke 15:13 that the prodigal son wasted his substance on [asotia](#)--riotous living. It is the idea of moral looseness. People do things when they're intoxicated that they wouldn't do otherwise, and it is never for the better. Somehow the things we do when we're drunk are never good things.

We aren't to get drunk. Instead, we are to be filled with the Spirit, and I'd like to point out several things about this verb filled:

It is in the imperative mood. In other words, it is a command given to all Christians. Everyone in this room who claims to be a follower of Jesus Christ should right now at this very moment be filled with the Spirit. It is incumbent upon us. It is an imperative, a command.

It is also a present tense verb, and in the Greek language this implies continuous action; we are to be filled with the Spirit continuously, repeatedly, again and again, over and over.

It is also a plural verb. Paul here isn't just speaking to one person like you or me. He is addressing every person in the church. This verb is also in the passive voice. It doesn't mean "fill yourself," but "let yourself be filled." We can't fill ourselves with the Holy Spirit, but as we come to the Lord in full submission, He fills us with the Spirit, and so it is translated here, "Be filled..." or "Let yourselves be filled...."

A Contrast

Second, there is a contrast. Notice the conjunction. "Do not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit...." Don't do the one; instead, do the other.

A Comparison

Third, there is a comparison. There is a parallel between getting drunk and being Spirit-filled. That's a very strange thing to say, but notice that Paul didn't say, "Don't commit immorality, but be filled with the Spirit." He didn't say, "Don't commit murder, but be filled with the Spirit." He said, "Don't get drunk, but be filled with the Spirit." Because there are some ways in which being filled with the Spirit is a little like being drunk. When a person is pulled over by a police officer for drunk driving, he is charged with DUI--driving under the influence of alcohol. When we are filled with the Spirit we are under the influence of the Holy Spirit. When a person is drunk, he is being controlled by a force outside of himself. Being filled with the Spirit means that we are controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

A Change

That leads to my fourth point, there is a change that comes over the Spirit-filled person. There are supernatural Christ-like characteristics that develop in Spirit-filled Christians, three of them as given here in Ephesians. First, people who are filled with the Spirit can't help singing. They love the songs of Zion. They love the music of the church. In their heart there rings a melody.

Look at Ephesians 5:18-19: Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your heart to the Lord.

Now, the NIV divides this into three different sentences for clarity, but in the original, as Paul wrote this, it was one of his famous run-on sentences, and he uses participles: speaking to yourselves... singing... making music. How do you know if you're Spirit-filled? What is the evidence? Well, are you singing? Is there a song on your lips and a melody on your heart?

And notice the variety of songs we're to sing. We're to sing psalms--that is, we're to sing the Scripture, to turn the words of the Bible into songs. We do that when we sing songs like "As the deer panteth for the water, so my soul longeth after thee," which is from Psalm 42. Or, to use a completely different example, Handel's Messiah is essentially Scriptures set to music. It's really a shame that only during the Christmas season do we listen to Handel's wonderful rendition of Isaiah 9:6: For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given....

Ruth Graham tells of a musician who lived in a land where God's music was not allowed to be played. Daily he took out his score of Handel's Messiah and placed it on the dining room table. There, on the table, his fingers silently and diligently played through the entire score. He was making music that only God could hear.

Then, we're also to sing the hymns. A. W. Tozer used to say that a Christian was a person of two books--his Bible and his hymnbook. And I love the grand old hymns, especially the great body of English hymnody--most especially Watts and Wesley.

Jesus shall reign wherever the sun
Does his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

And then we're to sing spiritual songs, and I think that a lot of our contemporary choruses fall into that category. One of the things we try to do here at is to incorporate all these things into a blended service of worship and praise. But this command isn't just for Sunday mornings. We're to live with God's music in our hearts, in our minds, and on our lips seven days a week.

The second characteristic of being filled with the Spirit is an attitude of thanksgiving. Here, again, Paul is writing a run-on sentence with participles.

...singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This goes a little deeper into our hearts. It's often easy for us to have a song on our lips, but to have thanksgiving in our hearts is a greater challenge. But this, too, is the work and the evidence of the Holy Spirit.

One of the books we read to our children when they were younger was Alexander's Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day. It's about a little boy who has a hard day. It begins something like this, "I went to bed with chewing gum in my mouth and woke up with chewing gum in my hair, and I just knew it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day."

Well, on Monday or Tuesday of this past week, when I sat down for my devotions and started writing a few lines in my journal, it was something like this: "I woke up late, and Grace was late to school today (again), and the trash cans had to be taken out, and the dog nuzzled his dirty nose against my white overcoat, and the drive-in window McDonald's took five times longer than usual, and they poured my coffee out of an old pot, and I just know it's going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day."

I hadn't planned on writing those words, but they just showed up on the paper. As I read them, I thought of Alexander and burst into laughter. And I had one of the best days I've had in a long time. It's all in our attitude.

Yesterday I was flying back to Nashville from Tulsa, and the weather forecaster in Oklahoma had warned us that there would be terrible storms across the Southeast, so I was concerned about my flight. But the pilot pierced the clouds and got us above them. As I looked down on those magnificent, billowing, brilliant clouds, I thought to myself that storms are beautiful from the upper-side.

We all have terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days. We all have stormy days. But when we're filled with the Spirit--when we've placed every part and parcel of our lives under the control of Jesus Christ--it affects our attitude. We find ourselves always giving thanks to God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, there is a third characteristic of the Spirit-filled life, and this one is even deeper and more difficult. Look at verse 21: Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Here, too, in Paul's original, this is part of his run-on sentence, and we have a participle: ...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. In other words, people who are Spirit-filled are humble.

This week I've been reading a fascinating book, written in the 1800s--The Autobiography of Peter Cartwright. Cartwright was a circuit-riding Methodist preacher when Tennessee and Kentucky were still frontier areas, and he preached and ministered in this very area where we are today. I've never read such stories like the ones Cartwright tells. For example, in one of his preaching services there were two young men, both well-off and from respectable families, and they were distant relatives of each other. But they were both interested in the same young lady, and in their rivalry they had become bitter enemies. One day they got into a fight, and it left them so embittered that each of the young men swore to kill the other. Each heard that the other one was going to attend Cartwright's evangelistic rally, and so they both showed up on Sunday morning for church--with their pistols.

Cartwright warned the audience to flee from the coming wrath of God, to flee to Christ; and when he gave the invitation, he noticed that one of the young men responded and was kneeling at one side of the altar, and the other at the other side. He went first to the one, prayed with him, and asked for his pistol. Then he went and prayed with the other young man and took his pistol as well.

As the young men rose from the altar they suddenly saw each other and instantly started for one another. For a second, the

audience held its breath, but only for a second, because the young men instantly embraced each other and from that day they were brothers in Christ.

You know, most of the problems we have with other people would be resolved in we'd get our own hearts right with the Lord. We are too proud and stubborn by nature. But when we are filled with the Spirit, a new attitude grows with us. We become submissive.

This shows up in our marriages. In the remainder of chapter 5, Paul says, in summery, that if you have a marriage in which the husband and wife are both filled with the Holy Spirit, there will be humility and submission in that home. The wife will give her husband what he badly needs, which is respect. And the husband will give the wife what she badly needs, which is affection.

The same ideas continue in chapter 6 regarding parents and children, and employers and employees.

The teaching of the Spirit-filled life is one of the most beautiful and wonderful and life-transforming messages in the Bible, and I try to ask the Lord every day to fill me with His Holy Spirit.

But it requires full submission and surrender to Him. Is there something in your life today that is grieving or hindering the Holy Spirit? Is there an unconfessed sin? Is there an area that you're holding back from Christ?

Don't be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Or as the old hymn puts it:

Have Thine own way, Lord,
Have Thine own way.
Hold o'er my being
Absolute sway.
Fill with Thy Spirit
Till all can see
Christ, always, only,
Living in me.

CHILDHOOD IS GOOD

Ephesians 6:4

Today, I'd like to begin a series of summertime messages on the subject, "Life is Good!" This is a theme that comes across loud and clear in the Bible from the very beginning, for we read in the book of Genesis that God made the light and saw that it was good. He made the land and sea, and He saw they were good. He made the sun and stars and they were good. He made man and woman, and He said they were very good.

Even though in Genesis 3 sin and Satan entered the picture and tried to spoil God's goodness, the word "good" keeps recurring throughout the Bible. In fact, it occurs too many times to recount—over 600 times.

The Psalmist said that goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our lives. The Gospels tell us that Jesus went around doing good and preaching the "Good News," and on one occasion He said that if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will God the Father give good gifts to those who ask Him. James said, "Every good and perfect gift comes down from above, from the Father of Lights, from whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."

I believe that God wants to bless us with His goodness and with His good blessings at every stage of life. He certainly wants to bless our children, and that's the subject of my message today.

He primarily does that by placing them in loving families. For our text today, I'd like to direct your attention to Ephesians 6:4.

This is arguably the premier text on the subject of parenting in the New Testament. It's only one verse, but it's profoundly important. Let me say a word about the context. In Ephesians 5:18, the Bible tells us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Be sold out to Christ, be devoted to Him, be filled with Him and with His Spirit. The text says:

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then the next verse tells us that one of the evidences of being Spirit-filled is having a submissive attitude. Spirit-filled people are concerned about meeting the needs of others. Look at verse 21:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

And now the last part of Ephesians 5 and the first part of Ephesians 6 tells how this works out in the home, between husband and wife and between parents and children. And it's in that context that we come to Ephesians 6:4, which is addressed to parents.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.
(Ephesians 6:4)

Notice that this passage is addressed to fathers, and by extension to parents. The word Paul used here is *γονεῦς*, which comes from a word meaning to generate. It is usually translated in the New Testament as father, but the lexicons suggest that this word has a broader meaning as parents. In fact, this is the same Greek word that is used in Hebrews 11:23 when it says, "By faith, Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born." So here in Ephesians 6:4, it means parents, but with special stress on the father. In other word, it is the masculine form of the Greek word for parents.

Notice that it's addressed to parents and not to churches. Now, churches certainly have a role to play when it comes to the spiritual formation of children. That's why we're excited about opening our Children's Ministry Center. I want to reach and teach more children for Christ, and churches have been doing that for a long time.

I was telling someone the other day the history of the Sunday School movement. In the mid-1700s, just as George III and George Washington were battling it out during the American Revolution, there was a Christian newspaper publisher in Gloucester, England, named Robert Raikes who developed a burden for the children who lived in the city's slums. The youngsters (some of them very young), worked long hours in the factories six days a week, and there was no provision made for their schooling.

Robert Raikes, a wealthy Christian publisher, hired a woman to teach these boys to read and write on their one day off—Sunday. He used his newspaper to promote his Sunday Schools, and the Christians and the churches across England caught the vision. Many of these schools were held in churches, and the Bible was the primary textbook. In the course of time, Sunday School became a major tool in many churches for teaching children the Bible.

It has been a tremendous movement, and I'm indebted to my own Sunday School experiences as a youngster. I learned my first Bible verses in Sunday School, and it was there and in Vacation Bible School that I learned the great stories of the Bible.

It was in Sunday School, as a teenager, that I began to have some opportunities to teach and preach on my own. So I love the Sunday School. But one of the unintended consequences of Christian education in the church is that sometimes we get the idea that the church is the primary place where children are to learn about God.

The Sunday School and church have an important part to play in the process, but they are not the primary places where children are to learn about the Lord. This verse does not say, "Churches, do not exasperate children but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." It tells parents to do it, with fathers taking the leading role.

And that is the consistent teaching of Scripture. The book of Deuteronomy established this without question in the Jewish culture—in the home, in the home, in the home—that's where children are to learn about the Lord. We're to talk about the Word of God when we get up and when we go to bed, when we stay at home and when you walk along the way. We're to tell these things to our children and to their children after them.

Much of the book of Proverbs is simply made up of godly advice that a good father is sharing with his sons.

In the book of 1 Timothy, Paul talked about Timothy's spiritual heritage. Though He did not evidently have a Christian father, his mother and grandmother were women of faith, and from them he learned about the Lord and developed a spiritual foundation that served him all his life.

Here at TDF, our children's ministries should supplement what children are learning in the home, but we can't replace the home. So this verse is addressed to parents in general, and to fathers in particular. In this verse, we find three instructions for us as dads and moms.

Avoid Anger in the Home

First, avoid anger in the home.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children.

In other words, do not treat your children in such a way as to cultivate an angry attitude within them. You know, there are so many

angry people today; I've never seen so much anger. You see it at the airports and on the airplanes. You see it on television and in politics. But nowhere is anger more destructive than in the home, and if children grow up with angry parents, they'll grow up angry. Years ago, I saw a comic strip. In the first panel, a man at work was being chewed out by his boss. In the next panel he's driving home, and then, arriving home, he snaps at his wife. In the next picture, the wife is snapping at the oldest child, a son. In the next, the boy is snapping at his sister, and in the last panel, the little girl is kicking the dog.

There's a pass-along effect to anger, but we don't want to pass anger down to our children or to exasperate them. Now, all dads and moms sometimes become angry; I certainly did during our child-rearing years. Who wouldn't? I was interested in something I read recently from Virginia Satir, a leader in the field of family therapy, who put it very well:

Parents teach in the toughest school in the world—The School for Making People. You are the board of education, the principal, the classroom teacher, and the janitor.... You are expected to be experts on all subjects pertaining to life and living.... There are few schools to train you for your job, and there is no general agreement on the curriculum. You have to make it up yourself. Your school has no holidays, no vacations, no unions, no automatic promotions or pay raises. You are on duty or at least on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for at least 18 years for each child you have. Besides that, you have to contend with an administration that has two leaders or bosses, whichever the case may be—and you know the traps two bosses can get into with each other. Within this context you carry on your people-making. I regard this as the hardest, most complicated, anxiety-ridden, sweat-and-blood producing job in the world.

There's no way to avoid miscellaneous moments when your children get on your nerves, and there were certainly incidents in my own parenting years when I lost my cool. But by and large, I don't think that I was an angry parent.

But if your anger is just below the surface, if you fly off the handle easily, if you're always snapping at your kids, if you say hurtful things, if you are always walking around with a layer of anger around you—then you're creating an environment in which your children will become exasperated.

Anger begets anger, but the Bible says that human anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires (James 1:20).

Proverbs 29:11 says that a fool gives full vent to his anger and a wise man keeps himself under control.

Proverbs 15:1 says that a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Proverbs 17:1 says that it's better to have a dry crust of bread with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.

So if you're having anger issues in your own life, you need to get some help—perhaps seek some counseling. You can memorize some of those verses and check into anger management techniques and get some counseling; because anger in an adult creates an angry spirit in a child—and that violates God's primary New Testament rule for parents: Parents, do not exasperate your children.

Provide Discipline for your Children

But here's the counterbalance. That doesn't mean that we should be so easy-going that we don't provide meaningful discipline for our children. This verse goes on to say, (Parents), do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training.... And the Greek word here conveys the idea of discipline.

It's the word: παιδεία (paideia), which is usually translated discipline, even to the extent of chastening.

Somehow that idea is out of vogue nowadays, but I'd like to read you something that Elizabeth Eliot wrote. I love Elizabeth Eliot's books, and the other day at a book sale I found one I didn't have. In it, she included a chapter on this subject, and it was so timely that I thought I'd read a portion of it to you.

Too many parents today hate their children. We saw it a couple of weeks ago, and in church at that. Lars and I attended a very small church where there was a very large number of small children. The creaking of pews, rustling of books and papers, dropping of crayons and toys and offering-plate nickels, talking, crying, and traipsing up and down the aisles for trips to the rest room all made it quite impossible to listen to the sermon. One child who was sitting with his father in front of us was passed forward over the back of the pew to his mother. Immediately he wanted daddy. Back over the pew again, headfirst into his father's lap. In a few minutes, up to mommy. So it went.

A week later we went to a much larger church with over a hundred children present. They were quiet. We were amazed, and later questioned a couple who were members there. "We believe Christian parents should control their children," they said simply.

Where did they get that idea, we wanted to know. Well, from the Bible. The book of Proverbs speaks repeatedly of the use of the rod. One reference is in chapter 13: "A father who spares the rod hates his son, but one who loves him keeps him in order." (Elizabeth

Elliot, *All that Was Ever Ours* (Tarrytown, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1988), pp. 23-24.)

My father certainly had that attitude, and I remember him hauling me out of church more than once. Now, when we say things like this nowadays, it makes people uncomfortable because it's not politically correct. We've stigmatized spanking, but look at what an undisciplined age we're living in as a result.

Here's the biblical approach. Self-discipline is one of the most important qualities we can ever develop. The Bible says that a person without self-discipline is like a city without walls. The devil can rush in and pillage and plunder at will. If you develop the capacity of self-discipline, it protects you from so many of the devil's attacks. Satan has a hard time doing anything with a self-disciplined person.

But we aren't born self-disciplined; and so one of the most important functions of parents is building a sense of self-discipline into their youngsters. There are many ways of instilling discipline into a child, and spanking should be rarely used. But the Bible does allow for it. Look at this passage in Hebrews 12:4-11:

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons....

And now, the writer of Hebrews is going to quote from the Old Testament. Now, think about it. Here the writer of the book of Hebrews wanted to quote an Old Testament passage to encourage the Christians of his day who were going through a period of hardship and persecution. If you had to encourage someone who was going through a hard time, and you had to choose an Old Testament text, what would it be? The 23rd Psalm? The 40th chapter of Isaiah? The writer here pulls up a passage from Proverbs about a man spanking his son! And that passage was supposed to encourage them!

You have forgotten that word that addresses you as sons: My son, do not make light of the Lord's παιδεία paideía (the same word Paul used in Ephesians 6—discipline), and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son. Endure hardship as παιδεία paideía (discipline); God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes παιδεία paideía—discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

This is an amplification of Ephesians 6:4—we are to bring up our children in the παιδεία paideía or discipline of the Lord.

Nourish Your Children with Biblical Instruction

Third, we must nourish our children with biblical instruction: Parents, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Children need the Word of God, their hearts are hungry for it, and it needs to be written on their hearts at a young age. Jesus said, "Let the little children come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

Right now we're raising a generation of watchers instead of readers. They're more at home in front of a screen than in front of a book.

We're raising a generation of children who want to be celebrities instead of saints. A recent survey in Great Britain asked children what was the best thing in the world, and the #1 answer was being a celebrity.

We're raising a generation of children who are secular to the core instead of Christian in their thinking.

Whatever you can do to get the Word of God into your children's minds—do it. The verses I learned in childhood have stayed with me all my life, but the ones I've tried to memorize recently don't seem to stick as well. I've never outgrown the simple Bible stories I learned in Sunday School or the hymns I heard my mother sing as she did her housework. I've never forgotten my father reading his Bible or his buying copies for me at various points through my childhood. I think as parents we need to ask, "When was the last time I read the Bible to my children? When was the last time they saw me reading my Bible? When was the last time I helped them memorize a verse in the Bible? Is learning God's Word as important to me and my children as their school work, their sports, or their other accomplishments?"

We have a generation of children to save, they need the Lord and His Word, and there isn't much time.

All of us were horrified this week as we saw the twisted remains of the bridge that collapsed in Minneapolis, and without doubt the most poignant image was the picture of that school bus trapped amid the rubble. Inside were 50 small children, some as young as four years of age. When the bridge collapsed, the bus evidently plunged 65 feet into the chasm, and was instantly engulfed in a thick cloud of smoke and dust. The children began screaming, "We're going to go into the river. We're going into the river!" The youngsters and their adult sponsors realized they were trapped inside that bus, and they could feel it beginning to slide down the bridge, closer and closer to the water. Just a few feet away, a tractor-trailer burst into flame. The main door of the bus was wedged closed, but there was an emergency exit in the back; and a 20-year-old volunteer named Jeremy Hernandez ran back there and opened the door, kicked out the coolers, and started grabbing kids and lifting them off the bus. Some of them didn't want to go without their backpacks or towels. Others were trying to call their parents on cell phones. Others were paralyzed in shock and fear. He saved them all. Some of the children were hurt and bleeding, but only one required an overnight stay in the hospital, and people are calling it a miracle.

Our children need a miracle today if they're going to grow up healthy and strong in our collapsing culture; but our God is a God of miracles and I believe He's going to use our homes and our church to bring the little children to Him—if we obey His instructions and minimize anger within the home, provide godly and wise discipline, and teach them the Word of God.

Parents, do not exasperate our children, but bring them up in the nurturing discipline and in the instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

THE PRACTICAL SIDE OF HOLINESS

Ephesians 5:3-16

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, and now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth), and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:3-16)

I don't know if you heard about the preacher who was given a thesaurus for his birthday, but the next Sunday he began his sermon saying, "Today I would like to preach, admonish, edify, enlighten, exhort, instruct, sermonize about the role of the church, the disciples, the body of Christ, the family of God, the assembly of the saints, the household of faith, the company of the redeemed...." His normal half hour sermon went on for three hours and twenty minutes.

Well, we could stay here all day coming up with synonyms for the word "church," because the Bible uses so many different phrases, terms, words, nouns, and figures of speech to describe the church from God's perspective. In the passage we've just read, we have one of the most precise and poignant definitions, though it consists of just three words. Look at the end of verse 3: But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's Holy People.

Who are Christians? How are we described in the Bible? How should we appear in the eyes of the world around us? We are God's Holy People. Many theologians believe that holiness is God's central quality. Evangelist Billy Graham said in one of his books, "As I read the Bible, I seem to find holiness to be His supreme attribute."

In his book of systematic theology, Louis Berkhof wrote,

"It does not seem proper to speak of one attribute of God as being more central and fundamental than another; but if this were permissible, the scriptural emphasis on the holiness of God would seem to justify its selection."

Philadelphia pastor James Montgomery Boice once spoke to a discipleship group on the characteristics of God. He began by asking them to list God's qualities in order of importance. They put love first, followed by wisdom, power, mercy, omniscience, and truth. At the end of the list they put holiness. "That did surprise me," Boice later wrote, "because the Bible refers to God's holiness more than

any other attribute."

The Bible doesn't generally refer to God as Loving, Loving, Loving! Or Wise, Wise, Wise! Or Omniscient, Omniscient, Omniscient! He is all those things; but over and over we read the cry of the angels, Holy, Holy, Holy!

One man wrote,

"Just as all the colors of the spectrum come together to form the pure white light which illuminates our world, so all the attributes of God come together into His holiness."

For this reason, when we give our lives to Jesus Christ, we are endorsing the holiness of God and committing ourselves to emulate His holiness in our own lives. We are "God's Holy People."

1 Peter 1:15-16 says:

"But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (KJV).

So in the Christian's thesaurus, we are identified as "God's Holy People." Now, in light of this identity, we have here in Ephesians 5 a description of the practical side of holy living. There is a set of injunctions, followed by a rationale, followed by a summation at the end.

Not Even a Hint... - Verses 3 & 4

The injunctions are given in verses 3 and 4. These are New Testament "Thou-shalt-nots," a series of bans and taboos, some things that are out of place in the Christian's life. The first is sexual immorality. Verse 3 says:

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality. Not even a hint.

The Greek word that Paul used here is porneia (porneáia, por-ní'-ah), from which we get our English word "pornography." But this Greek term isn't limited to pornography. It is a broad word that covers sexual immorality in all its forms.

This injunction in Ephesians 5:3, for example, bans both pre-marital and extra-marital sex. It bans living together before marriage. It bans all kinds of pornography including internet porn. It bans homosexual behavior. All of these trends are powerful forces in today's culture. Sexual temptation is very strong in our day and age. I think our society struggles with it more than previous societies for five reasons. First, the breakdown of the traditional family lays us open to sexual instability and temptation. Second, the powerful images of the media--especially television and cinema--compound the problem a thousand-fold. We need to begin realizing that there is a sense in which our television sets are very often the devil's evangelists, designed to subtly persuade us of a philosophy of life that is exactly counter to the teachings of Scripture.

Third, the loss of our traditional Judeo-Christian framework of morality over the past fifty years or so in the Western world makes us vulnerable. Fifth, our technology today gives us easy access any kind of indulgence we desire.

And so the moral trends of America are tracking downward at an alarming rate. Perhaps the most disturbing moral pattern of our age is the crusade to legitimize homosexual behavior. The trend setters in America are determined to "homosexualize" our society, and anyone who disagrees with them is accused of homophobia, of hate, or at the least, of intolerance.

I read just this week that the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) organization is endorsing and making available a video which embraces same-sex families as part of a nationwide effort to fight "discrimination against homosexuals." The video, titled "That's a Family!" uses real-life examples of children from ages 8 to 13 to describe what it's like growing up in various non-traditional home situations. One little girl looks at the camera and explains, "My dads are gay, and gay means when two men or two women love each other. It's sort of like having a mom and dad who love each other. It's just that it's a man and a man or a woman and a woman."

What's wrong with that? Genesis 1:27 says that in the beginning, God created humanity "in the image of God...male and female." And both the Old Testament and the New Testament prohibits homosexuality.

I read this week in a book by Dr. David Stern that a full 75% of gay men do most of their sexual acts with men they don't even know, and about 30% of gay men rack up more than 1000 lifetime partners. One study was conducted of 100 so-called "stable" gay couples. After living together for a full five-years, not one couple had remained sexually faithful.

Perhaps some here are struggling with homosexual urges. Others may be battling temptations regarding pornography. Perhaps someone is on the verge of going to bed or with your boyfriend or girlfriend.

What I want to tell you this morning is that these are unhealthy choices, but they are not irresistible urges. They can be overcome.

Defeat is not inevitable. There can be victory.

In early Greek mythology, there were creatures named sirens--enchanted musicians having bodies like those of birds and beautiful human faces. They lived on a lonely, rocky island near the southwestern coast of Italy where they awaited passing ships. Their voices were so sweet that sailors passing by the island inevitably fell under their spell. These sailors either jumped off their ships to swim to the island and were drowned, or they changed the course of their ships in that direction, only to crash upon the rocks. The song of the sirens was thought to be irresistible.

But it wasn't. Even with the sirens, defeat was not inevitable. One brave captain, passing the island, planned ahead for the danger and played music of his own so loudly that it drowned out the song of the sirens. On another ship, the captain poured beeswax in the ears of the sailors and had himself tied hand and foot to the mast so that he could not be drawn away.

Perhaps you're struggling with sexual temptation or sexual sin, and you're discouraged and defeated. I want to say this to you: Don't give up.

When the Bible says here in Ephesians 5:3 that there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality among us, there is in that command an implicit promise. Every commandment contains within it the seed of a promise, for the Lord will never command us to do something that He cannot empower us to do. With God's help, you can arrive at more and more victory.

You do not have to be defeated by sexual sin in your life. It may take a lot of will power. It may take some Christian counseling. It may take an integrity group or some friends to keep you accountable. It may take daily Bible study. It may take a lot of prayer. But I want to dispel this myth that we are born with certain orientations or weaknesses that cannot be overcome by the grace of God. The Bible says, Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us.

Psalms 60:12 says, With God we will gain the victory.

The book of Jude ends with the words: To him who is able to keep you from falling... be glory, majesty, power and authority.

1 Corinthians 15:57 says: Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

So Ephesians 5:3 says,

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

And verse 4 goes on to tell us that we must exercise the same kind of control over the words we say:

Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

For Of This You Can Be Sure... - Verses 5-13

Now, in verses 5 through 13, the apostle Paul gives us the rationale for these prohibitions. He has already told us in verse 3 that these behaviors are "improper for God's holy people." He has told us in verse 4 that these activities are "out of place." But now he is going to be more specific.

First, these activities are improper and out of place because of the lost world around us. This is the way the world acts, and Christians are in the world, but not of the world. Look at verses 5ff:

For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure, or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.

This week CNN reported a bizarre story. In Ashland, Massachusetts, emergency medical technicians found a 39-year-old woman slumped in her bathtub, dead. The body ended up in a body bag at the funeral home. It was there that the funeral director, John Matarese, heard a gurgling noise coming from the body bag. He quickly unzipped it and held the woman's mouth open to keep her air passages clear. Apparently she had overdosed on drugs and experienced hypothermia the cold water in the bathtub and was cold and stiff and appeared to be dead--when she wasn't. Doctors say she's going to fine.

Christians shouldn't be wrapped up in the body bags of sin imitating dead people. We aren't to be mistaken for those who are dead in trespasses and sins. We aren't to be confused with those who are facing judgment. The Bible says, "Come out from among them and be ye separate."

The second rationale for keeping the Bible's prohibitions is given in verse 8: For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), and find out what

pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible.

When you go out into a field on a sunny day and turn over a rock, what happens? All those little insects and maggots and worms and bugs scurry away as quickly as possible. They can't stand the light. And when we walk with the Lord in the light of His word, those sins however stubborn don't have a chance.

I like the words of that song by Stephen Curtis Chapman:

Well I got myself a T-shirt that says what I believe
I got letters on my bracelet to serve as my ID
I got the necklace and the key chain
And almost everything a good Christian needs; yeah...
I got the little Bible magnets on my refrigerator door
And a welcome mat to bless you before you walk across my floor
I got a Jesus bumper sticker
And the outline of a fish stuck on my car
And even though this stuff's all well and good...
I cannot help but ask myself . . . "What about the change?
What about the difference?
What about the grace?
What about forgiveness?"

We're to be people who walk in the light. People of grace. People with changed lives. That brings us to the conclusion of this paragraph...

Be Very Careful Then... - Verse 15-16

Now in verses 15 and 16, we have a summation. What does all this mean? How can we sum it up? Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

This week I read about an Irish terrorist named Hugh Brown. He joined one of the Northern Irish terrorists groups as a teenager, and he was responsible for the deaths of several people. He also himself was targeted. One night, armed men broke into his house and drove him into a windowless room where he endured two hours of intermittent questioning and torture. Then he was taken outside and given a knee-capping, which consisted of a bullet shot into each knee-cap.

But an interesting thing happened to Hugh Brown. He was captured and arrested, and one night in prison he settled down to watch the movie, "Ben Hur." There was a crucifixion scene in the movie, and as he watched that scene, the story of the crucifixion of Christ became very vivid and real to him. Suddenly he felt a wave of guilt, not just for his terrorism, but for his thieving and fighting and drinking. He gave his life to Jesus Christ and was called to the mission field and went to Japan as a missionary. Today he is chaplain at the Kobe Prison, and because of his background he has a powerful rapport with the inmates, and his biography has just been published throughout Japan.

The power of Jesus Christ can turn around anyone's life. But when Jesus turns our lives around, He begins in practical, daily ways to cultivate within us holiness. Are you letting Him do that with you?

Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

HOW TO RAISE WELL ROUNDED, WELL GROOMED CHILDREN

Ephesians 6:4

I have a friend who has just co-authored a book called The Christian Parent's Guide to Guilt-Free Parenting. Her thesis is that despite our best efforts to meet our children's needs, most of us parents find ourselves feeling we are botching (or we have botched) the job. Many dads and moms are overworked, exhausted, and anxious. We worry about how we are doing, and about how our children are turning out. We often carry a lot of guilt.

I often tell parents in counseling that we cannot go back and change the past. We have all made mistakes in previous days, but we can only confess them to God and put them under the blood of Jesus Christ who has promised to forgive us and to bless us. Then we begin where we are now with our children and grandchildren and nieces and nephews, seeking to raise them to be well-grounded and well-rounded, seeking to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The New Testament's key verse on the subject is Ephesians 6:4-

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Context

Ephesians 6:4 does not appear in a vacuum. It is part of the fabric of a section of Ephesians that begins in chapter five, verse 15:

Be very careful, then, how you live-not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the spirit.

Let's apply these verses to parents:

Be very careful, then, how you parent, not as unwise parents, but as wise ones, making the most of every opportunity with these children, because they are growing up in evil days. Therefore do not be foolish in raising them, but understand what the Lord's will for them is. And as a parent, don't get drunk on alcohol. Instead, be Spirit-filled.

This is one of my favorite passages in the Bible. Being filled with the Spirit means being controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit, every part of your life and heart so yielded and consecrated to him that he possesses and controls and empowers you in every way.

How will we know if we are filled with the Spirit? Well, Ephesians 5 and 6 list the effects of Spirit-fullness. First, according to the next verse, we will overflow with Christian music:

Speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your heart to the Lord....

Next, there will be an attitude of thanksgiving:

...always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then, we will become increasingly characterized by humility. Verse 21 goes on to say:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

The following verses proceed to tell us that this spirit of song and thanksgiving and humility should characterize our most precious relationships in life. Verse 22 says:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.

Verse 25 says,

Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.

Chapter 6 goes on with this same theme:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

And then we come to verse 4:

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

I've taken time to connect verse 4 with its context, because it is impossible to obey this verse apart from the control and empowerment of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. We can't do it on our own.

There are several simple things I've always had a boyish urge to do. For many years, I had a dreadful urge to race up an escalator the wrong way. I could hardly go by a down-escalator without wanting to run up it. Well, about a year ago at Hickory Hollow Mall, I found myself alone near the escalators, and, if I may confess it, I completely gave in to my urges. I also have an insatiable desire to slide down a brass pole at a fire station, and would you believe that just last week Darin Coyle told me he now works at a fire station in Franklin with a brass pole. He has promised that I can slide down it. My third urge has been to ride in a hot air balloon. Last Sunday night, we had a hot air balloon here for the children at our Jamboree, but I don't think any of them enjoyed their ride more than I enjoyed mine. The basket was very small, with enough room for about three people, still quite heavy. I could not have lifted it into the air on my own. But when the balloon above me was filled with hot air, suddenly it ascended from the ground with no effort on my part. I was able to float above the world almost effortlessly.

Now, just as I could not raise that wicker basket by my own strength, I cannot raise my children in my own strength. It is only as my

life and my home are filled with the Holy Spirit that we ascend to a higher plain. Only Christ-committed, Spirit-filled parents can raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. That is what the context of chapters 5 and 6 tell us. We must be so yielded to God and so committed to Jesus Christ, so serious about following him, that our hearts are controlled and empowered by him and the helium of his Spirit fills us day by day.

Now, when that is true, we are ready to go on with verse 4. The first word is Fathers. It's very interesting that the Apostle Paul does not use the Greek word for parents the way he did in verse 1 when he told children to obey their parents. Here, the Greek word is pater - father. The Lord knows the powerful influence fathers have on their children and God places on fathers the primary responsibility for fulfilling the commands in verse 4.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children. This word exasperate is a Greek word meaning to frustrate, to anger. Do not frustrate your children or instill within them an angry disposition. This doesn't mean that we tip-toe around our children and go to great lengths to keep them from ever feeling angry. It means that we are not so strict, so angry, so overprotective, or so lax, so lenient, so absent, so critical that we make them frustrated and unfulfilled.

I read the other day about a professional football player named Dave Simmons. His father Amos, a military man, was a problem drinker and extremely demanding. He rarely said a kind word to Dave. Instead, Amos was always prodding Dave with harsh criticism to do better, and he buttressed his demands with verbal abuse and beatings. By constantly putting new goals in front of Dave, he never permitted him to feel any satisfaction from any success. Once when Dave was six years old, Amos gave him an unassembled bicycle, commanding him to put it together from scratch. Dave was unable to read the directions, and he struggled with it until he broke down in tears. "I knew you couldn't do it," shouted his father, who then assembled it for him. When Dave played football in high school, his father was very critical of him. After each game, he would take Dave into the backyard and show him all the things he did wrong. "Most boys got butterflies in the stomach before the game; I got them afterwards," Dave said. "Facing my father was more stressful than facing any opposing team." By the time he entered college, he hated his father and his harsh discipline. He chose to enter the University of Georgia simply because it was further from home than any other school that offered him a scholarship. After college, Dave heard the great news that he had just become the second round draft pick of the St. Louis Cardinals. He phoned his dad to share the news. Amos responded, "How does it feel to be second?" But Dave had become a Christian during college, and he began trying to build a bridge to his dad. He began talking to him, and he got him to open up a little bit. He learned for the first time that Amos's father had been a tough lumberjack, known for his quick temper. He had once destroyed a pickup truck with a sledge hammer because it wouldn't start. By the time Amos died, he and Dave had become good friends. But the story doesn't stop there. Dave married and had a son of his own, Brandon. Dave was shocked to find himself treating Brandon just as his own father had treated him. Once after a basketball game, they were driving home. Brandon had played badly, and Dave lit into him, telling him all the things he had done wrong. When they arrived home, Brandon ran into the house in tears, and Dave's wife turned to him angrily and said, "You are just like your father." Dave later said that no jolt on the football field hit him any harder than those words, and he suddenly realized how incapable he was of breaking life-long debilitating parenting patterns without the help of the Holy Spirit.

Fathers, we can exasperate our children by being too harsh, too strict, too protective. And we can frustrate them by being too lenient, too permissive, too lax. We can frustrate them by being too distant, too unemotional, too stoic. We can frustrate them by belittling them and kidding them too much. We need the grace and balance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit to touch our fathering and make us men of wisdom and men of God.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up...

This word in the Greek-ektrepheo-bring them up-is very interesting. It is found only twice in the Bible, here and in Ephesians 5:29: After all, no one hated his own body, but he feeds it and cares for it, just as Christ does the church. So it is translated in two different ways: to feed and to bring up.

The root word trepheo means to provide nourishment. This is the word Jesus used when he told us to consider how the Heavenly Father feeds the birds of the air. This is the word used in Acts 12:20 when the people of Tyre and Sidon approached King Herod to talk about their food supply. This is also the word used in Luke 4, when it says that Jesus returned to the town of Nazareth where he had been brought up. The idea is that parents are to provide the nourishment children need for growth. Not just the physical nourishment of food on the table, but the emotional and spiritual and mental nourishment children need.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training... the teaching. What kind of teaching? Well, this phrase is connected with the last three words of the verse: the teaching...of the Lord. There is no end to the verses in the Bible that tell us to instill a love for and a knowledge of the Scriptures into our children. I read just the other day about a woman, Cynthia Allen, who received a call from her daughter's high school vice principal who said, "I want to tell you something Charity has done. It happened during an all-school assembly in the gym. A new exchange student from China walked in after the meeting had started. She stood there, frightened by the crowd, not knowing where to go, where to sit. All 800 students were staring at her."

The vice principal cleared her throat and continued. "Charity got up from where she was sitting in the bleachers, worked her way down, walked across the gym, greeted the new girl, and led her back to a seat. I was so impressed that I wanted to call and tell you."

Cynthia Allen smiled to herself. She recalled that earlier in the week during family devotions they had discussed the verse in 2 Corinthians that talks about how we should comfort others with the same comfort we ourselves have received from God, the Father of all comfort. "Charity," said Mrs. Allen, "was simply acting on what she had taken in."

We have a terrific children's program here that I am very thankful for. But we must not depend on being the primary Bible teachers for our children. That job belongs to the fathers and to the mothers and to the home. Your children need to see you reading your Bible, enjoying Bible study, learning God's word. And parents are commanded to teach these things to their children at home, when they lay down and when they rise up, when they sit down and when they walk along the way. We must raise our children in the training - and in the instruction of the Lord: Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

The word instruction-nouthesia-comes from the word nous, meaning, mind; and tithemi, meaning, to deposit. So literally it means to deposit in the mind. It is often translated to warn, to admonish.

The Spirit-filled family is one in which the parents, especially (when possible) the fathers, are providing rather than provoking. Instead of raising frustrated children, we are to provide the spiritual, emotional, and physical nourishment necessary to raise them in the instruction and training of the Lord. And sometimes that kind of home has a different set of priorities than any other home on the block.

Debra Bruce and I have served together on the advisory board of a parenting magazine. She said that one day she became very busy helping her children in their various activities. She was in charge of the Brownie Scout cookie sales, in charge of the swim team awards and the adult choir retreat and the children's choir rehearsal and the mother's Bible study group. She was involved with her children at home and church and school. She was so busy, in fact, she felt like a spinning top wobbling precariously. One day she asked her Bible study group to pray for her. "I can't prioritize my activities," she said, "and I feel like I'm out of control." Two weeks went by, and she felt as frazzled and over-committed as ever. And then she caught the flu. It was a particularly nasty case of it-high fever, chest cold, aches and pains and complaints. All she could do was to lay in bed moaning while her husband desperately tried to find other people to assume all her responsibilities. She was miserable, pumped with medicine, with Vicks VapoRub on her chest and a thermometer popped in her mouth. "I spent a total of eight days in bed," she recalls, "and only the top priority items got completed: our three children were fed, bathed, hugged, and put to bed. As I recovered, I remained weak for another two weeks and moped around the house in my robe. I started to read and daydream and laugh more. Evenings were spent sitting with the family, talking, and playing games instead of running to meetings. My friends called to let me know that activities and organizations were functioning smoothly without me." She said that real moment of awakening for her came when her younger daughter, Ashley, lay down beside her in bed, looked up, and with childlike honesty said, "Mommy, I love you when you are sick. You have time to listen to me."

None of us are perfect parents, but those who know the Lord Jesus Christ, who love him and who are filled with his Spirit have the ability to get off the ground, to soar into the sky, to reach heaven and funnel some of it down for our children. We find time to listen and to love and, by God's grace, to bring up our children in the training and in the instruction of the Lord.

BATTLE DRESS

Ephesians 6:10-18

Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Genoa, has been mentioned as a possible successor to Pope John Paul II, but recently his future career has been jeopardized by criticism of a congregational letter he has published on the subject of Satan. He views the devil as a real and dangerous enemy, and he sent his parishioners a Lenten letter containing ten rules on how to resist his power. His first rule: Do not forget that the devil exists. Second, don't forget that he is a tempter; third, don't forget that he is very intelligent and astute. Tettamanzi went on to recommend prayer, worship, Bible study, and the power of the cross. But his critics have condemned his view of Satan as being medieval mumbo-jumbo and of ignoring the modern advances of psychology. Some observers think that the cardinal's conservative views on this subject may derail his path to the papacy.

Well, I'm with the cardinal on this--and so is the Apostle Paul. In our study through Ephesians, we're coming to the last grand division of the book. Ephesians 1-3 deal with our wealth in Christ—the riches of His blessings toward us. Chapters 4, 5, and 6a deal with our walk in Christ—how we are to live day by day in this world, our behavior, our speech, our conduct and attitude. Now we come to the very end of the letter, and the great apostle wants to say a word about our warfare. He views the devil as a shrewd and dangerous enemy who must be resisted in our daily lives. Ephesians 6:10-18 says:

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Our Adversary

The first thing I'd like for you to notice is how literally Paul deals with our adversary. He tells us that every one of us—every single person who calls on the name of Christ—instantly acquires a very literal and powerful adversary that will stop at nothing to harm or tempt or devour us. He is dangerous on three levels.

The first level of danger is referred to here at the devil's schemes (verse 11). The older translations say, "the wiles of the devil." We aren't very familiar with the word "wiles," but most of us have heard the adjective "wily," meaning, "crafty, clever." I'd like to show you how Paul actually put it as it wrote this in the original Greek. He tells us that we must take our stand against the *megadeiva* of *diabolo* – literally, the methods of the diabolical one.

One of the most important things about warfare is studying one's enemy, probing and exploiting his weaknesses. That's just what the devil does to you and me. He searches for our weak points, our weakest position, and he attacks us at that point. It might be a tendency toward lust or pornography; it might be greed and the availability of easy credit; it might be low self-image; it might be a proclivity toward addictive behavior; it might be a fearful spirit; it might be a short temper. Whatever it is, you can be sure that Satan, in effect, has a file with your name written on the tab, and he has observed you, analyzed your strengths and weaknesses, and he has developed a strategy for your undoing.

1 Peter 5:8 says, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

The second level of danger comes from the devil's storm troopers. Look at verse 12: For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Paul lists four different categories of devils or demons here. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers.... This refers to demonic rulers, the five-star generals in the devil's army of demons. Against the authorities.... These are the colonels and majors and captains and lieutenants over the demonic forces that surround the world. Against the powers of this dark world.... These are the sergeants and privates. And against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. In other words, there is an invisible malevolent army, perhaps billions and billions of demons, that blanket this world to sway world events, attack the church, discredit God's name, and they are aiming their artillery at you and me.

Now there is a third level of danger against us—the evil day. Look at verse 13: Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand.... What is the day of evil? Well, in military language it is Zero Hour. The moment when the attack is launched, the moment when the missiles are fired. For the patriarch Job, it was the moment when the demonic squadron, as it were, flew over his estate, causing the barbarians to attack his employees and seize his possessions, causing his children to be killed in a tornado, causing his health to break. The day of evil refers to those terrible moments in life when we're hit in the stomach with terrible news or with bad tidings, or when we're tempted with evil to a terrible degree.

Our Attitude

Now, the apostle Paul is going to tell us in simple, straightforward language what our attitude should be against such an enemy. It should not be fear or intimidation. We're to have two attitudes.

First, he tell us to be strong –The Greek says: *endunamoo en kurios kai en o kratos o ischu autos* - Literally: "Be inwardly strengthened in the Master and in the vigor of the personal strength of him."

When the Communists overran China, missionary Isabel Kuhn escaped on foot with her young son, Danny, across the dangerous, snow-covered Pienma Pass (10,998 feet). She finally arrived at Myitkyina in Upper Burma, but there she was stranded "at the world's end" without money, unable to speak the language, and still half a world away from home. "I cannot tell you the dismay and

alarm that filled me," she later wrote.

But in her perplexity, she made two decisions. "The first thing is to cast out fear," she said. "The only fear a Christian should entertain is the fear of sin. All other fears are from Satan sent to confuse and weaken us. How often the Lord reiterated to his disciples, 'Be not afraid!'" So Isabel knelt in prayer and spread her heart before him. "I refused to be afraid and asked Him to cast such fears out of my heart."

Her second determination was to "seek light for the next step." She had no idea how she was going to get out of Asia, but with God's help she could figure out what to do that day to provide food and funds, to find a safe place to stay, to find a means of communicating with the outside world.

Many times in life we must cast out fear and be strong in the Lord. The Psalmist said, "The Lord is my light and my salvation! Whom shall I fear?" Again, we read: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear!"

Second, we're to take our stand. He uses this term four times: Verse 11: "Put on the whole armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." Verse 13: "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Verse 14: Stand firm then...

This term has military overtones. In classical Greek it referred to resisting the enemy and holding a critical position in battle.

When Martin Luther was placed on trial for his views before the council in the German city of Worms, amid high drama he reaffirmed his views and said, "Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me, Amen."

To stand means that we aren't going to be drawn away from our theological beliefs on the one hand, or away from our moral principles on the other. It means that we aren't going to let the devil pull us into sin or into panic or into disbelief. There's an old song that says:

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
Ye soldiers of the cross;
Lift high His royal banner,
It must not suffer loss.
From victory unto victory
His army shall He lead,
Till every foe is vanquished,
And Christ is Lord indeed.

Our Armor

Now, if we're going to make this kind of stand, we've got to have some kind of protection, because this is a dangerous war.

I read an article recently in the magazine Popular Science about the high-tech body armor being developed for tomorrow's soldiers, and I was amazed at how advanced and sophisticated it is, but I was also surprised at how similar in description it was to Paul's list here in Ephesians 6. The article talked about new form-fitting, bullet-resistant fabrics to protect the chest and back, video-display goggles and headgear, a wrist-mounted weapons pod, and so forth.

Well, Paul wrote Ephesians 6 while a prisoner for the Roman Empire, and he was well acquainted with the body armor used by Roman troops. He was probably within sight of a Roman soldier as he wrote these words, and so he decided to give us instructions about our struggle with the forces of evil, using figurative language based on battle dress.

Rather than looking at them in the order given, let's dress our soldier head to foot. First, there's the helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:17). If you had gone up to a Roman soldier and struck him across the head with a baton, it would have stunned him but not killed him.

Satan cannot really harm, in any permanent or ultimate sense, a person who is genuinely born again and saved by the blood of Christ. He may harass us for awhile, but Jesus offered a very powerful prayer in John 17 when He prayed for His followers: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one." The blood of Jesus Christ is a crimson curtain of protection, and the helmet of salvation is the Christian's protection against the lethal blows of the enemy.

Peter Cartwright was a circuit-riding Methodist evangelist in this part of the country in the 1800s. In his autobiography, he tells of traveling to the Methodist General Conference in Pittsburgh where he lodged in a particular home where there appeared to be some sort of spiritual dysfunction. That evening, the host asked him to lead in family devotions, but as soon as he began, Cartwright later recalled, "thick darkness fell on me, and if ever I felt the power of the devil physically and mentally, it was just then. I was almost totally blind, literally blind, and the great drops of sweat rolled off my face."

He was so afraid of being unable to read that he turned to Psalm 1, which he knew from memory, but he found his memory as defective as his sight. He somehow stammered through a broken version of the psalm, then suggested the group sing together. He had a reasonably good singing voice, and he rose and started singing a very familiar hymn. But not one person joined him.

"I stopped short, and kneeled down to pray, but in all my life I was never in a worse plight to pray.... I then thought my head was as large as a house, and I now thought I had no head at all. It seemed to me that the devil was veritably present, and all around, and in everybody and everything."

The next day at the General Conference he was asked to lead in prayer, but he could hardly get out a few syllables. A dreadful sense of inward paralysis came over him, a foreboding and confusion that rendered him powerless. This oppression lasted for an entire week; and then one night he attended a prayer meeting. "It pleased God that night to roll back the clouds that had covered me in thick darkness." And his old sense of spiritual clarity and vitality returned stronger than ever.

The devil may hit us across the head and stun us—he has many ways of doing that—but Christians are remarkably resilient, and the blows of the evil one are blunted by the helmet of salvation that secures our head.

And then, there's the breastplate (or, as we would say today, the bullet-proof vest) of righteousness. There is great protection in living a righteous life. The devil can't do very much with someone who keeps a clear and clean conscience. He can stab at our arms and legs, but he can't get at our heart and soul, because they are covered by a protective layer of righteousness.

Third, there is the belt of truth. Verse 14 says, Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist. This is the person who has discovered the truth of Scripture, the truth of God, and has made it the foundation of all knowledge. I don't care whether you're a preacher, a physician, a scientist, a psychologist, or a financier, if you use the Bible as the ultimate textbook upon which you build your life and career, you're building on the truth.

I was reading the other day about a professor named Dr. Henry F. Schaefer III, who received his bachelor's degree in chemical physics from MIT and his Ph.D. from Stanford. For 18 years he served as the professor of chemistry at the University of California, Berkeley. He now heads a major department at the University of Georgia. He is the editor-in-chief of a London-based journal on molecular physics, and has written over 800 scientific articles on chemistry and physics. He is the 6th most highly cited chemist in the world, out of a total of 628,000 chemists whose research was cited. He is a five-time nominee for the Nobel Prize.

In the article I read, he said, "From time to time, people actually ask me, 'What is your most important discovery?' And I respond that the most important discovery in my life occurred during my fourth year on the faculty at Berkeley.... (It) was my discovery of Jesus Christ."

That's the belt of truth, the foundation of wisdom. Paul said we should wrap the truth around our lives the way a soldier girds himself with his leather belt, or a commando snaps on his utility belt.

And then there's the shield of faith, with which we can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

In the early days of World War II in Finland, the soldiers didn't have adequate weapons with which to attack their invaders, so they learned to fill bottles with a mixture of gasoline, sand, and soap suds, with a burning rag in its mouth. These little firebombs became known as Molotov Cocktails.

Soldiers today must have riot-shields when they're facing hostile demonstrators in the streets because of rocks and broken bottles and these Molotov Cocktails.

The devil throws these things—Molotov Cocktails, fiery darts—at us today, and we're in trouble if we don't have our riot-shield in hand. It's faith. The book of Hebrews says, "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith." Can we trust God and keep on going when things are tough? When things seem to be falling apart? When bad news comes in waves? There is strong spiritual and emotional protection in being able to do that.

And then there are the boots. This passage talks about having our feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In other words, are we available and ready for whatever assignment God gives us in the labor of the Gospel. Is our life one of constant alertness and availability?

There's also our communications gear, our radio. Ephesians 6:18 says:

Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me....

Now, having put on all these defensive pieces of armor and having strapped on the radio of prayer, we're ready to take up the one offensive weapon at our disposal—the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. I want to tell you something. If you are reading your Bible every day in a focused and earnest manner, and if you are finding verses from the Lord to meet the conditions and needs

in your life, and if you are finding those specific verses that counter the trials and temptation you're facing, the devil is going to become very discouraged with you

He can't do much with people who keep stabbing him with the Scripture.

We have a great adversary and a powerful enemy, but we can well withstand him in the power of Jesus Christ if we'll just keep our armor on. But we let our guard down, we're vulnerable and exposed.

Let me re-read this passage as it is rendered in the new Peterson's paraphrase:

God is strong, and he wants you strong. So take everything the Master has set out for you, well-made weapons of the best materials. And put them to use so you will be able to stand up to everything the Devil throws your way. This is no afternoon athletic contest that we'll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for keeps, a life or death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels. Be prepared. You're up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it's all over but the shouting you'll still be on your feet. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation are more than words. Learn how to apply them. You'll need them throughout your life. God's Word is an indispensable weapon. In the same way, prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare. Pray hard and long. Pray for your brothers and sisters. Keep your eyes open. Keep each other's spirits up so that no one falls behind or drops out. And don't forget to pray for me.

Keep your guard up. Keep your armor on, so that when it's all over but the shouting, you'll still be on your feet.

AN ANCIENT PRAYER

Ephesians 6:18-25

Today we're coming to the end of our Sunday morning Studies in the book of Ephesians. Before we look at the final message, I'd like to take a brief look at what's ahead. Next week, Dr. Jay Modha is going to pay us a return visit, and then on Easter Sunday we'll be looking at Matthew 28, and a sermon entitled "The Easter Outlook." On the following Sunday, April 22, I'd like to begin a new sermon series entitled "God's Little Medicine Shop." We'll take a dozen Sundays to visit a dozen Psalms which give us the tonics and cures we need for life's ills. On the evening of April 22, I'd like to begin a series of Sunday night messages entitled, "The Final Four" in which we will study the final four chapters in the Bible, Revelation 19-22. But today, let's wrap up our current study by looking at Ephesians 6:18-25.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you.

Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love (Eph 6:18-24).

Ephesians 6:18 is truly one of the Bible's great verses on the subject of prayer, and it is notable for its four-fold use of the word "all": And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

I just want to make three comments today: First, we're told to pray in the Spirit. Second, with all occasions. Third, with all kinds of prayers.

Pray in the Spirit

The verse begins by telling us to "pray in the Spirit." We have a very similar word in Jude, verse 20: But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy Faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. What does that mean?

The old commentator Matthew Henry said that "praying in this Spirit" is to pray "under His guidance and influence, according to the rule of His word, with faith, fervency, and earnestness; this is praying in the Holy Ghost."

In other words, it means that our prayer lives are meaningful, valuable, and effective only within the context of a spiritually real and

healthy life. In other words, you can't just live any way you want to, and then expect to have intimate, meaningful chats with God.

Isaiah 59 says: Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you.

I had an acquaintance back in Elizabethton who opened up an optometry practice. For the first day or two, he had not a single patient. Finally he saw a man walking up the sidewalk, and, wanting to appear busy, my friend picked up the phone and pretended to be talking on the phone, jotting down an imaginary appointment in his calendar. The man entered the office and waited patiently until my friend had finished the pretend conversation and hung up the phone. Then he looked up, smiled, and said, "May I help you."

"Yes," said the man. "I'm here from the phone company. I've come to install your telephone."

Most everyone prays. I think the last poll I say on the subject said that 95% or so of all American adults pray. But the question is, are they connected? Are the lines up? Is the phone operational? Paul is telling us here to "pray in the Spirit." That is, to pray within the context of a Spirit-filled life. To pray as the Holy Spirit prompts and helps and guides and strengthens us.

All Occasions

Let's read on. Ephesians 6:18 goes on to say that we're to pray on all occasions. We discover, as we read the Psalms, that King David took this approach. In Psalm 4 he prayed before going to bed. In Psalm 5, he prayed before beginning his day. In Psalm 5, he prayed when he felt like groaning. In Psalm 6, he prayed when he had sinned. In Psalm 7 he prayed when he was under attack. In Psalm 8, he prayed when he was overwhelmed with the beauty of nature. In Psalm 9, he prayed when he was happy and God seemed close at hand. In Psalm 10, he prayed when God seemed far away.

All Kinds of Prayers and Requests

Ephesians 6:18 goes on to tell us that we should pray with all kinds of prayers and requests.

How many different kinds of prayer are there? Well, I don't know. Maybe there are thousands. This morning I'd just like to briefly touch on ten different kinds of prayers.

First, there is memorized prayer. Back in 1873, in Istanbul, a brilliant theologian and orthodox archbishop was doing research in his monastery when he found a cache of ancient manuscripts. Among them was a document that we now call the Didache. It is recognized as the oldest document in the history of the church, apart from the New Testament itself. It may even date from the first century, and it describes how the very early church worshipped. Reading it is like peeking through the shutters of a local congregation at the end of the first century. What did they pray when they assembled together? They prayed words that we ourselves often pray today, in our assemblies and in our homes, 1900 years later: Our Father, which art in Heaven. Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come.... The wonderful thing about memorized prayers is that we can offer them over and over, with persistence and perseverance, so long as they don't become mere mindless repetitions. Every Thursday, for example, I pray a paraphrased version of the Lord's prayer for someone I love, and very often I'll employ the same prayer through the week. That's an example of a memorized prayer.

And then there are written prayers. Sometimes when I'm having trouble praying in any other way, I'll write out a prayer. If in the future when one of my great, great grandchildren uncovers my journal in a forgotten box in the attic, he'll find many prayers that I've written out. It's a biblical practice, for many of the psalms are written prayers. One of the most interesting stories I've ever read has to do with the Southern evangelist Mordecai Ham. In 1934 he was asked to conduct a citywide crusade in Charlotte, North Carolina, but in the beginning the crusade went badly. In my files, I have a copy of the prayer Mordecai Ham wrote out on the stationery of his Charlotte hotel. He prayed: "Lord, give us a Pentecost here. ... Pour out thy Spirit tomorrow. ... " His prayer was answered beyond his dreams, because it was during that campaign that Billy Graham was won to Christ.

Third, there are bedtime prayers. I read about one little girl who was having her bedtime prayers. Her mother heard her laughing up a storm. Going into her room, she scolded her for laughing and giggling during her prayer. But she replied, "It's okay, Mom. I was just telling God a joke."

I don't usually tell God jokes, but I hope that my prayer is as pleasant and natural and real as that. Katrina and I end each day by praying together in bed, and almost always my last waking thoughts are in prayer.

Fourth, there are Scripture prayers. Over the last few years, I've learned something about the power of turning the Bible into a prayer book. For example, it's one thing to pray, "Lord, bless this missionary." But how much better to use the words of our Scripture passage today here in Ephesians 6 and pray for them what Paul requested for himself, "Lord, I pray for so-and-so, that whenever he opens his mouth, words will be given him so that he will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel."

Fifth, there are quick prayers. I've recently learned a new prayer technique from the writings of missionary Amy Carmichael, who

learned it herself from the famous Bible teacher, Dr. F. B. Meyer.

She said that Dr. Meyer told her that when he was young he was very irritable, and an old man told him he had found relief from this very thing by looking up the moment he felt it coming and saying, "Thy sweetness, Lord."

Amy Carmichael said that she learned that whenever she came across someone she didn't like, to look up and say quietly, "Thy love, Lord."

On one occasion, Jesus offered a prayer that was nothing more than a sigh offered up to heaven. And I've found that sometimes I can just lift my heart up to heaven and say, "Your sweetness, Lord." "Your love, Lord." "Your patience, Lord." "O Lord... (followed by the name of a person for whom I'm concerned)."

Sixth, there are sung prayers. Many of the hymns and songs that we sing each week are prayers, and many of these we've memorized, some even from childhood. How wonderful, when taking a walk or driving along the road or standing in the shower, to be able to pray:

May the mind of Christ my Savior
Live in me from day to day;
By His grace and power controlling,
All we do and say.

Seventh, there are walking prayers. Over the last three or four years, I've head the term "prayer walking" in which people combine their physical exercise with their prayer times, and pray all the while they are walking. And other people literally walk around a particular geography, claiming it for the Lord. But this is nothing new. I've recently studied the life of the Civil War evangelist E. M. Bounds, and I read that every afternoon in his little town in Alabama he would go for a long afternoon walk and pray for every family in the houses that he passed. But there's an even earlier example. In the Old Testament book of Joshua, the children of Israel conducted a prayer walk of sorts around the city of Jericho, claiming it for the Lord.

Eighth, there is the regular, daily prayer time that helps comprise our quiet time. I'm afraid that too many of us pray on the fly, as it were. But the aforementioned E. M. Bounds, in one of his books on prayer, warns us that our quick and spontaneous prayers are of value only if backed up by longer, more extensive times in prayer.

I mentioned this briefly last week, but I want to share with you a little more fully something that I read recently in the magazine Christianity Today, which recently ran a profile of the British pastor, John Stott, pastor emeritus of the famous All Soul's Church in London, on his 80th birthday. The article was written by a former research assistant to Dr. Stott, who knew his daily habits intimately.

He said that Dr. Stott begins every day at 5 a.m. He swings his legs over the side of the bed and starts the day with a version of this Trinitarian prayer.

Good morning, heavenly Father; good morning, Lord Jesus; good morning, Holy Spirit. Heavenly Father, I worship you as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Lord Jesus, I worship you, Savior and Lord of the world. Holy Spirit, I worship you, Sanctifier of the people of God. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Heavenly Father, I pray that I may live this day in your presence and please you more and more. Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you. Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three persons in one God, have mercy upon me. Amen.

For decades, Stott has begun each day with a version of that Trinitarian prayer.

And then he has a small leather notebook, stuffed full of folded papers and held together with a rubber band. Each morning, having read three chapters of the Bible and meditated over them, he opens this prayer notebook and prays for families, friends, ministries, and even for strangers. He keeps a daily prayer list that is always under revision. Then he has a prayer calendar that lists missionary projects and people groups all over the world. He prays over these things without haste or hurry.

This is the way he begins each morning, and every one of us needs to develop a pattern of regular prayer in our lives. We may not do it just as John Stott does. After all, he is 80 years old, has never married, and perhaps has a quieter situation than most of us. But it is essential that we develop some sort of "quiet time" in our lives for regular daily prayer and Bible study.

Ninth, there are prayers of thanksgiving—times when we just praise God for all His benefits on our behalf. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all His benefits.

Tenth, there are corporate prayers—prayers that we pray with another person, or with a group of people.

When Dr. Paul White, missionary physician, was serving in a bush hospital in East Africa, a school-teacher named Yamusi Cikata came to him, carried on a stretcher from a nearby village. Parasites and disease had attacked his feet, swelling them to twice their normal size. He was no longer able to walk, or even stand.

"The disease is very bad indeed," Dr. White told him, following an examination. "The only way to save your life will be to cut both your legs off above the knee."

The man's face fell. "But there's no place for a man in our tribe who has no feet. How can I cultivate? How can I look after my garden and my cattle?" Yamusi pulled a worn Testament from beneath his scant clothing, turned to James 5:16, and said, "Read this." Dr. White looked at the verse, but couldn't read the tribal language. He asked his assistant to translate it: The very strong prayer of a man who is right with God is most effective.

"Do you believe that?" asked the patient.

"Yes, Yamusi, I do."

"Do you believe it enough to stake my life on it?"

The doctor pondered the question. "That depends on you as well," he finally replied. "It says in the Book, 'If two of you shall agree in anything that you ask, it will be done.'" Together the two men made a covenant, the doctor kneeling by the man's bedside. The prayers were accompanied by months of hot foot baths, injections, therapy, and treatment. After seven months, a slight improvement was seen, and the two men knelt together to thank God and ask for more progress."

One morning, Dr. White found Yamusi hobbling around the ward, beaming. Before the year was out he was able to walk without a stick, and without pain.

God doesn't always say "Yes" to all our requests, but He listens with unusual attentiveness when two or three gather in united prayer—and He responds in His own way and time with power and wisdom.

So I'd like to ask you to leave here today with a decision in your hearts to begin today, or tomorrow at the latest, to become more serious about prayer. It's the greatest force in the world, and it can be the means by which situations in your life can be altered, corrected, changed, improved, and redeemed.

Pray.

And pray in the Spirit.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

And the peace of God, that passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

BELOW ARE EXCERPTS FROM ROB MORGAN'S SERMONS IN WHICH THERE WAS SNIPPET THAT RELATED TO THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS...

There is a similar warning given in Ephesians 4:27: In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. We give the devil a foothold, or, to change the figure, we let him sink his teeth into us when we stay angry with someone too long. We all get angry from time to time, and sometimes we get angry with those we love the most. But we need to shake it off, to resolve it quickly. If we let the anger linger, it eat at us until we become embittered and we fall into the devil's trap.

What an encouragement to the Christian. Like those who light their lamp from power generated by the mighty Niagara, we plug our lives into the omnipotence of God, finding power for victorious living. Paul talked about God's "energy which so powerfully works in me" (Colossians 1:29, NIV), and he prayed that the Ephesians might understand the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe" (Ephesians 1:19-20). Much of our anger and anxiety in life comes from underestimating the implications of the omnipotence of God in our lives.

Ephesians 4:27 says, "Do not give the devil a foothold." Ron Handley, the head of Fellowship of Christian Athletes, spoke at a conference in New Mexico last week, and he said that the subtlety of sin and of

compromise is so great that he meets with a group of friends each Monday and they ask each other these 10 questions:

1. Have you spent daily time in Scriptures and in prayer?
2. Have you had any flirtatious or lustful attitudes, tempting thought or exposed yourself to any explicit materials that would not glorify God?
3. Have you been completely above reproach in your financial dealings?
4. Have you spent quality time with family and friends?
5. Have you done your 100% best in your job, school, etc.?
6. Have you told any half-truths or outright lies, putting yourself in a better light to those around you?
7. Have you shared the Gospel with an unbeliever this week?
8. Have you taken care of your body through daily physical exercise and proper eating and sleeping habits?
9. Have you allowed any person or circumstances to rob you of your joy?
10. Have you lied to us on any of your answers today.

Those are good questions to ask ourselves.

Ephesians 5:17 - That brings us to Ephesians 5:17 and this is a great verse to memorize: Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. When we do the will of God, we are the brothers and mothers and sisters of Jesus. But we can also choose to reject the will of God for ourselves. Our great need, then, is to be wise and not unwise, understanding what the will of the Lord is.

In other words, there are two ways to live—wisely and foolishly. There are two kinds of people—the wise and the foolish. What's the difference? What is the difference between a wise person and a fool? The foolish reject the will of God. The wise understand what the will of the Lord is.

That implies that the will of the Lord is understandable. We can find it for our lives if we want to. God will reveal it to us if we meet certain conditions. What are these conditions? Well, that brings us to our last passage, one that I touched on recently, but we can never refer back to these verses too often.

And the Bible also tells us to pray in the Spirit. Ephesians 6:18 says, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." We are praying in the Spirit when we sincerely bring before God those requests the Holy Spirit leads us to pray about with the earnestness and faith that the Holy Spirit gives.

What does the water represent? The water represents the Word of God. Look at Ephesians 5. In this passage, Paul is telling husbands that they should love their wives as Christ loves His bride, the church. Verse 25ff says: Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word.

In what sense does the Word of God cleanse us? In two ways.

First, as we confess our sins to the Lord, it is the Word of God that assures us of the forgiveness which has been purchased for us by the blood of Christ.

You might remember a little story I've used in the past to illustrate this. Corrie ten Boom, the Dutch Christian, shared it. There was a little girl who broke her mother's precious demitasse cup. Coming to her mother, she confessed what she had done. She felt so badly about it, that she cried and asked her mother to forgive her. Her mother did so, then hugged her and held her tightly before sweeping up the pieces and throwing them in the trash basket. But the little girl still felt badly, and after awhile she went to the trash basket and got the broken pieces back out again. Bringing them to her mother, she started crying all over again, and confessing what she had done. This time her mother told her, "Didn't I say that you were forgiven? Don't you believe me? Now, go, throw those pieces in the trash basket and leave them there."

How often we keep going to that trash basket and getting out the broken pieces. What we need to do is to go to the Scriptures and claim the assurances contained therein about the sufficiency of the blood of Christ. So the word cleanses us in that it conveys to us everything we need to know to claim the assurance of God's great forgiveness, regardless of our sins.

Second, the Word cleanses us in that it is the primary way in which the Lord makes our daily lives clean and whole. Evangelist D. L. Moody used to say, "Sin will keep you from the Bible, or the Bible will keep you from

sin.” The Word of God is the primary instrument by which God sanctifies us. Several years ago, I was speaking at a Southern Baptist event in Georgia. In my message, I quoted Proverbs 29:11: A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.

Afterward a big, burly man came up to me with his little wife beside him. He said, “You really hit me over the head with that verse. I have had problems with my temper, but I always justified shouting at my wife by telling her that it was good for me to express my feelings, that we should express our feelings openly in our marriage and get things off our chest. Now I realize that shouting and screaming at my wife is a mark of a fool, and I just wanted you to know how that verse opened my eyes tonight.”

Recently in a biography, I read about a Christian, a missionary, who was deeply hurt by another man who had criticized his wife. When it happened, he was angry enough to kill the man, and for several years he harbored a secret bitterness. One day as he was fasting and praying for revival, three words from a verse of Scripture suddenly came to his mind: Love your enemies.

The force with which those words came to him brought tears to his eyes, and he realized that in his anger he had never prayed for the other man to be saved. Down on his knees he wept and prayed and confessed his sin, and he prayed for this enemy. And suddenly the revival he was praying for began in him. He said, “When repentance washed the guilt away and the peace of forgiveness filled my soul, I knew an ecstasy of joy beyond description.”

Over and over again, it is the Word of God as we hear it, as we read it, as the Holy Spirit brings it to mind—it is the Word of God that sanctifies us.

God makes all of us just the way he wants us to be for what he wants us to do. Ephesians 2:10 says, “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared us in advance for us to do.” I want you to know that you have certain strengths that God wants to use. He gave you those strengths, and he gave you those gifts. Every one of you.
