

# COMMENTARY ON EPHESIANS

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### EPHESIANS 1:1-2

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

Following the convention of his day, Paul first identifies himself as the writer, and then addresses his readers and states his greeting. As usual, he fills this space with Christian content, so that even the greetings in his letters are full of theological richness, and the power to teach and edify.

Paul writes as "an apostle of Christ Jesus." He is sent with authority from Christ, who told his apostles that the Holy Spirit would instruct them after his resurrection and ascension, and that they would testify about him (John 15:26-16:16). So John could write, "We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood" (1 John 4:6).

Whereas the first apostles were with Christ "from the beginning" (John 15:27), Paul was not with him. Rather, Christ has made Paul a special case, so that he appeared to him on the way to Damascus, and converted him and called him to the apostle's ministry (Acts 9). As Paul writes, "Last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born" (1 Corinthians 15:8). Later, Paul went to the apostles who were with Christ in the flesh, and set before them the gospel that he had been preaching among the Gentiles (Galatians 2:2), not to obtain their approval, but to confirm their unity. These apostles – including James, Peter, and John – agreed with Paul's message and recognized his ministry as from God, giving him "the right hand of fellowship" (Galatians 2:9).

Christ sent the apostles to speak for him, and he said that those who would accept them also accept him (John 13:20). The church is built on the apostolic doctrine as its foundation, with Christ as the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20; also Acts 2:42), and so we must listen to Paul because we must listen to Christ. Therefore, Paul warns that those who disagree with his gospel are not Christians at all (Galatians 1:6-12).

Paul did not become an apostle by the will of men, and he did not become one by earning or seizing the office; rather, he was chosen to be an apostle "by the will of God." As Barclay says:

Paul never thought of himself as having chosen to do God's work. He always thought of God as having chosen him. Jesus said to his disciples: "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16).

Here precisely lies the wonder. It would not be so wonderful that man should choose God; the wonder is that God should choose man.<sup>1</sup>

God's sovereign decree was the foundation of the authority of his ministry and his theology. To doubt or oppose what Paul wrote as an apostle is to doubt or oppose God – there is no difference.

That said, God was the one who produced the Bible, and Paul was a mere instrument by which God delivered his revelation. In fact, since God moved men to write exactly what he wanted (2 Peter 3:16), he was the only actual author. A man could use a hundred pens to write a book, the pens varying in color, thickness, and so on. He could use various writing styles and literary forms, and write in several languages. Each section would then exhibit many differences, but there would still be one author and one book. Indeed, men are more than pens, but God is more than a human author. The human author purchases the pens, and he has limited mental ability to produce variety, but God made the men that he used to write the Bible, and with his infinite intelligence he held them by his Spirit as he caused them to write. Thus the instruments were secondary, but the central issue is that "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Although we make the usually harmless generalization that the apostles and prophets wrote the Bible, significant portions of the Bible were not written by them, or not known to be written by them. To address this, some people invent the principle that these documents were nevertheless written by those who were closely associated with the apostles and prophets. However, they arbitrarily dictate this principle without warrant, and they also arbitrarily decide how closely associated with the apostles and prophets these other authors need to be. In addition, the relationships of these authors to the apostles, and the scribes to the prophets, are often uncertain, and offer a weak foundation for something as weighty as divine inspiration. The entire difficulty is self-inflicted due to the false assumption that every word in the Bible must be written or approved by apostles and prophets.

However, once we point out that God is the author, even the only actual author, then it becomes evident that the matter of human authorship is unable to undermine the inspiration of Scripture, because it has no decisive relevance in the first place. God can write on tablets of stones, speak in a voice from heaven, enable a donkey to talk, make stones cry out, or cause a man to write his words. God is the one who speaks and writes. Although he often used the apostles and prophets, he could cause anything to happen through anyone he chooses. By his Spirit, he took hold of various men and caused them to write out his words. Then, by his providence, he secured these documents and compiled them into one final volume. Thus inspiration applies to every word in the Bible, not because every word was written by apostles and prophets, but because every word was written by God.

Although Paul addressed the letter to "the saints in Ephesus," several indications within the letter suggest that it could have been intended for a broader audience. He had preached in

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<sup>1</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians, Revised Edition*; Westminster John Knox Press, 1976; p. 77.

Ephesus for three years (Acts 20:31), two of which were spent in daily discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:10). The result was that "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10).<sup>2</sup> But in our letter, Paul says that he has merely "heard about" the faith of his readers (Ephesians 1:15), and that his readers must have "heard about" his ministry (3:2). Also, the letter lacks the personal references and greetings that are typical of his other letters. The implication is that Paul was writing not only to those whom he knew well, but also to those whom he merely "heard about." Therefore, it seems that his intended audience included more than the Ephesians.

This is considered the least occasional of Paul's letters. It was not written to address specific situations and heresies, and this is consistent with the view that it was probably a general or circular letter. At the same time, Paul's expressions related to "the spiritual forces of evil" (Ephesians 6:12) and his discussions about Christ's dominion over all the spiritual "powers" (1:18-2:2) remind us of the spiritual atmosphere of Ephesus, and some of the things that he encountered there.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, after several incidents in which the name of Jesus demonstrated its power (Acts 19:13-17) and the Christian message triumphed over pagan magic and superstition (Acts 19:18-20), "the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power" (Acts 19:20) to such an extent that it threatened the economic structure of Ephesus, which to a large extent depended on pagan worship (Acts 19:23-27). Demetrius the silversmith said that Paul's preaching had affected "large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia" (Acts 19:26). Luke writes that "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10).

So it is reasonable to assume that as Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians, he also had in mind all the other Christians throughout the province of Asia, and that he sent it to Ephesus, the area's chief city, and from which he published the gospel to the whole region for three years, with the intention to address these other Christians as well. Therefore, it is likely that our letter was meant to be read by the Christians in Ephesus and the surrounding areas.<sup>4</sup> In any case, because the letter is not situational, it is unnecessary to know the exact circumstances of its origin and circulation, since these things do not determine the interpretation of the letter.

Paul calls his readers "*the saints* in Ephesus"<sup>5</sup> and "*the faithful* in Christ Jesus."<sup>6</sup> He is speaking to Christians, those who have been consecrated to God through faith in Jesus Christ. He would jubilantly glory over all the spiritual blessings that God has given to "us"

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<sup>2</sup> "Asia" is today's Turkey.

<sup>3</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians*; Baker Books, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians*; Baker Books, 1967; p. 61.

<sup>5</sup> For an explanation of the word "saints," see Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on Philippians*.

<sup>6</sup> Or "the believers in Christ Jesus." Hendriksen argues that since the definite article is not repeated before the second word ("faithful"), the first and the second therefore form one unit, and that both of them should be taken as nouns and not adjectives. Thus he translates, "to the saints and believers who are in Ephesus in Christ Jesus." Hendriksen, p. 70.

and that "we" enjoy in Christ.<sup>7</sup> By noting that the "we" and "us" are restricted to Christians, we exclude the possibility that non-Christians can enjoy these spiritual blessings.

If a man has no faith in Jesus Christ, he is not a Christian. Perhaps he has a degree in theology, but if he denies the inspiration and authority of Scripture, he is doomed to hell just as much as an unrepentant prostitute or murderer. He may promote social welfare in the name of Christianity, but if he disagrees with the doctrines of Christianity, he is far from the kingdom of God. If a person claims to have faith in Jesus Christ but says that non-Christian religions are true and good, he is an imposter, and he portrays Christ as a friend of demons.

True faith in Christ is faith in him as he really is – Redeemer, Lord, and God – and not as your slave or your pet, to be adored or dismissed as you please. True faith in Christ makes you an enemy to the whole world, because it means that you despise their idols and values, and that you have become a light that exposes their foolishness and wickedness. If you disagree with this, your allegiance to Christ is false, and there is no warrant for you to have any spiritual assurance. As James writes, "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

Paul concludes the greeting with his usual benediction, that his readers would have "grace and peace." He combines the greetings of the Gentiles and the Jews, and fills the words with Christian meaning. The Gentiles wished one another "grace." To the Christian, this refers to the unmerited and undeserved blessings of God, and especially stresses God's sovereign kindness and initiative in salvation. The Jews wished one another "peace," or the Hebrew *shalom*. As with many other instances in the Bible, this "peace" does not refer to a subjective state, but an objective condition. Among other things, this refers to the reconciliation between God and his chosen ones, and also to the harmony among God's people.

Such grace and peace come "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." There is no grace and no peace apart from God, who authored our salvation, and Christ, who obtained our salvation. The preposition "from" introduces the entire expression "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," suggesting that the two are on the same level. The Christ of the Bible was God, who took up a human nature, and sacrificed himself for those whom God had chosen in eternity.

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<sup>7</sup> In 1:11-13, Paul distinguishes between "we" (the Jews) and "you" (the Gentiles) to make his point that the two are now united in Christ.

## 2. PREDESTINATION

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 possession – to the praise of his glory.**

Although our English translations divide this passage into sentences and paragraphs, in the original Greek it consists of one long sentence. And although the sentence is densely packed with theological content, it is not written in the form of a precise formulation or ordered argument, but in the form of a doxology.

Some people think that theology is lifeless and useless, but our relationship with God should consist of doxology. But what is the content of our doxology? And where does it come from? If worship and praise are so important, then it is also important to know whom we are worshiping and for what we offer praise. As we answer these questions, we are doing theology.

It is commonly asserted that right theology does not necessarily lead to right worship, and that right doctrine does not necessarily lead to right living. This is misleading – it is true only in the sense that a person may learn the right theology without really agreeing with it. If there is no right worship and right living, then either the theology is not right after all, or



there is no true assent to what God has revealed. This true assent occurs by the Holy Spirit through his work of regeneration and illumination.

Paul's doxology is filled with theology. He is praising God about certain things, and it would be impossible to share his reverent awe and enthusiasm without also knowing about these things. The less theology you know, the more shallow your worship will be, and an empty doxology is no doxology at all. Theology is the necessary foundation of doxology, and doxology is the proper context for theology.

Christian faith and practice are coherent and harmonious, so that you should not have to think one way when you are praying and another way when you are studying. There is no reason for a devotional book to be more practical or mystical than theological. Unless there is something wrong with the material or with you, a systematic theology or biblical commentary should produce thoughts of praise and thanksgiving such that they erupt in doxology. This is what happens to Paul as he reflects on God's grand plan for history and his goodness toward the chosen ones.

The passage consists of one long sentence containing a number of clauses and phrases whose relationship with one another is not always easy to determine, and each thought seems to crowd in on the previous one and blend into the next. For this reason, some commentators have concluded that it is impossible to clearly dissect and analyze.

Nevertheless, there are indications of deliberate structure and design. "Bless" is used three times in verse 3,<sup>1</sup> followed by a seemingly Trinitarian outline, describing the roles of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the plan of God and the work of redemption. In theological terms, it refers to election, redemption, and application.<sup>2</sup> Throughout, Paul repeatedly states the cause ("his will") and the goal ("his glory") of God's predetermined plan, as well as the means ("in Christ") by which God would accomplish it. The passage also anticipates some of the themes that Paul will develop in the letter.

## ELECTION

Paul begins with the doctrine of predestination. In fact, much of what follows in the letter is an exposition of what God has predetermined to perform in history.

In eternity, God had conceived and chosen an unchangeable number of specific individuals for salvation, and had decided that he would adopt them to be his sons through Jesus Christ. According to his foreordained plan, all would fall into sin in Adam, including the elect, whom he had already chosen. Then, out of this mass of sinful humanity, he would call and draw out his chosen ones, removing them from the kingdom of darkness and placing them into the kingdom of his Son (Colossians 1:13).

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<sup>1</sup> "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has *blessed* us with every spiritual *blessing* in the heavenly places in Christ" (NASB).

<sup>2</sup> For the third item, Hendriksen has "certification" instead. (*Ephesians*, p. 71; see v. 13-14). This is correct, but I have chosen a term that includes additional things, such as faith (v. 13).

His selection of each individual was not based on foreseen faith or works, but was made apart from the person's decision or merit. This is part of what Paul has in mind when he writes that God chose his people "before the creation of the world." In another place, when Paul refers to Jacob and Esau in the context of predestination, he writes, "Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad...she was told, 'The older will serve the younger'" (Romans 9:11-12).

The objection may be that although God did not base his choice on anything that they had already done, perhaps he based it on something that he knew they would do. However, Paul says that God announced his decision before the twins were born "in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls" (v. 11-12). When he denies that election was based on something that the twins had already done, he also denies the possibility that it was based on something that they would do. This is because he denies that election was based on anything in them at all, but that it was based on "God's purpose" and on "him who calls."

Paul assumes the same principle in Ephesians. God chose certain individuals not because of any foreseen faith or works in them, and not because of their decisions or merits, but election to salvation is based solely on his will (1:5), his pleasure (v. 5), his grace (v. 6-7), his plan (v. 11), and his purpose (v. 11). God's choice of individuals was done apart from anything foreseen in the individuals themselves. As Calvin writes:

By this he means that God did not seek a cause [outside] of Himself, but predestinated us because such was His will....In adopting us, therefore, the Lord does not look at what we are, and is not reconciled to us by any personal worth. His single motive is the eternal good pleasure, by which He predestinated us....By this he tells us that God embraces us in His love and favour freely and not on a wage basis, just as, when we were not yet born, and when He was prompted by nothing but Himself, He chose us.<sup>3</sup>

On the negative side, Paul makes a broad denial that election is based on anything in the individual. On the positive side, he insists that election is based on God's will, grace, pleasure, and purpose. Therefore, theologians who are faithful to biblical teaching refer to election as "unconditional."

Then, the objection is that perhaps Paul is speaking of a collective election, or that perhaps the object of election is Christ instead of the individuals. In other words, perhaps the only chosen one is Christ himself, and God had determined that whoever would freely choose to be in Christ by faith would be included in the elect group. However, the passage makes no hint toward this direction, but explicitly contradicts it. Over and over again, Paul uses expressions like, "he chose us," "he predestined us," and "he lavished on us" – on "us," not Christ.

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<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*; Oliver & Boyd/Eerdmans, 1965; p. 127.

The fact that God chose us "in him" does not suggest that we are the ones who place ourselves "in him." We as individuals never chose to be in Adam, but he was the federal head of humanity, and all fell into sin and death in Adam (1 Corinthians 15:22). Likewise, for the elect to be "in Christ" means only that Christ is the federal head of the elect. It does not mean that each individual could of himself choose to be in Christ and become one of the elect, and it does not mean that Christ himself was the object of election for salvation.

Moreover, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:27-30, "But *God* chose...so that no one may boast before him. It is *because of him* that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." He says that God was the one who chose us and placed us in Christ. This contradicts the suggestion that God chose Christ as the elect and then we place ourselves in Christ to become the elect. God's election for salvation refers to a selection of individuals – not of Christ, and not of a group.

It is unlikely that expressions such as "in Christ," "in him," and "in whom" can be used to support collective election in the first place. This is because they refer to Christ as the agent by which God acts, or to Christ as the head of the chosen ones, and not to Christ as a container so that people can choose to drop into him. Thus when Paul says that God "chose us *in him*," he means that God "predestined us to be adopted as his sons *through* Jesus Christ."<sup>4</sup>

When it is asserted as a denial of individual election, collective or corporate election is a silly fantasy invented to overturn biblical doctrine.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the very nature of God makes the doctrine impossible, because it is inconsistent with divine omniscience. The Bible teaches divine omniscience, that God knows all things; therefore, every Christian must affirm divine omniscience, or he is not a true Christian. Once divine omniscience is assumed, then for one to affirm God's sovereignty over groups of people obligates him to also affirm God's sovereignty over all the individuals in these groups. Since an omniscient being knows all things, he would not think of a group and not think of the individuals that make up the group.

For example, when I use the word "trees" without restriction, as in "these trees," I am using it as an universal, as in "all trees." However, I do not know all trees, I have made none of them, I have determined none of their properties, and I do not exhaustively know even one

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<sup>4</sup> Referring to the expression "in Christ," Peter O'Brien writes, "Often its use is instrumental, signifying 'through Christ's agency'" (*The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999; p. 97). He then makes several ambiguous statements about how it designates "Christ as the 'sphere' in which the divine decisions are made and put into effect" (98), but he has in mind "The idea of the incorporation of many into a representative head" (98). In other words, "in Christ" refers to Christ as the agent by which God acts, or to Christ as the head of the elect. This understanding of "in Christ" prevents distortions of the doctrine of predestination, and also corrects a number of false teachings based on the expression. As long as it remains ambiguous, people will remain susceptible to strange interpretations. It refers to Christ's agency and representation, and not being "inside" of Christ in a mystical or physical sense. In fact, *en* in the Greek can be translated "in," "by," or "with," and sometimes "the causal sense of *en* is more intelligible than the local" (Gordon H. Clark, *Ephesians*; The Trinity Foundation, 1985; p. 16). So "in Christ" often means nothing other than "by Christ" or "through Christ."

<sup>5</sup> See also O'Brien, p. 99.

tree. When I say "trees," the knowledge that corresponds to the word does not include all trees, or even one tree, although I intend to refer to all trees. So do I know what I am saying? On the basis of empiricism, there would be no warrant to claim that I know. Rather, I refer to the idea of trees as it exists in the mind of God.

On the other hand, when God uses the word "trees," he says it as one who has made all of them and who knows all of them. His knowledge of all particular trees corresponds to his concept of the universal "trees." Therefore, when God says that all trees are a certain way, he has in mind every tree, that every tree is a certain way, and not trees in the abstract without the actual content of all trees. Since God is omniscient, to him "trees" must mean the sum of all individual trees, and not trees in the abstract.

If you have two children, named Tom and Mary, then every time you say "my children," you are in fact referring to the individuals named Tom and Mary. By the general term "my children," you intend to include and express the particular items "Tom" and "Mary." You would not say "my children" and not mean "Tom and Mary." The words, "my children," mean the same thing as "Tom and Mary." Suppose you are omniscient, but you do not yet have children. In this case, "my children" would still mean "Tom and Mary," since you would know that you will have these children in the future.

If one possesses omniscience, then by definition he never uses a designation of a group without conscious knowledge of all the members of the group. The universal term for the group always represents the sum of all the individuals in the group. One who lacks omniscience uses the universal term for a group without knowledge of all the individuals in the group, but one who possesses omniscience uses the universal term with a conscious knowledge of all the individuals in the group. This is a necessary implication of omniscience.

Thus when God thinks of a nation, he also thinks of all the individuals that make up the nation, since this is what a nation means – it is the sum of all the individuals that God has ordained to belong to it. He has complete knowledge of these individuals; indeed, he is the one who designs and creates each one of them to be included in the nation. God does not decide to enforce a policy toward a group in the abstract, such as women, and then allow each person to choose to become a woman so that the policy would apply to that individual. Instead, God is the one who designs, creates, and arranges the person into the groups that God chooses for that person.

Therefore, it makes no sense to say that God exercises sovereignty over a group, such as a nation or the elect, without also affirming the necessary implication that he exercises sovereignty over each individual in the group. It makes no sense to say that God chooses a group for salvation without choosing which individuals would be in that group, or that he controls a nation without controlling the individuals in that nation. So the Bible teaches God's sovereignty over individuals, and even in places where it refers to his sovereignty over groups, it implies his sovereignty over individuals, because a designation of a group is only a shorthand to refer to all the individuals in the group.

Predestination refutes the popular assumption that man has free will. In theological and philosophical literature, free will is rarely defined, and almost never defined in a way that is relevant and accurate. Since freedom is relative – you are free *from* something – in defining free will, we must ask, "Free from what?" If by "free will" we refer to freedom *from God* in any sense, then we can never say that we have free will. However, if we refer to freedom from any other thing, then it is irrelevant, because the issue is whether we have freedom in our relationship with God, and not in our relationship with any other person or thing.

If we are not controlled by men but controlled by God, then we would not have free will, since we are controlled by one other than ourselves. If we are controlled by God, then we would not have free will regardless of whether we are controlled by men as well. Thus the only relevant issue is whether we are free from God. As Martin Luther writes, "But our question is this: whether he has 'free-will' God-ward, that God should obey man and do what man wills, or whether God has not rather a free will with respect to man, that man should will and do what God wills, and be able to do nothing but what He wills and does."<sup>6</sup>

True free will must be a freedom from God, so that even God cannot determine our choices and actions. This is the relevant issue when we consider if man has free will. With this in mind, the Bible never teaches that man has free will;<sup>7</sup> rather, it teaches that God has absolute sovereignty over man, even determining all his choices and actions. Nevertheless, the evil desire for autonomy is so ingrained in fallen man's thinking that he insists that he has such freedom, and even asserts that the Bible acknowledges it.

Some commentators cannot resist their sinful urge to undermine what the Bible teaches in our passage. For example, after admitting that the passage teaches the doctrine of predestination, Francis Foulkes adds, "This doctrine of election, or predestination...is not set in opposition to the self-evident fact of human free will."<sup>8</sup> He offers neither biblical references nor his own arguments, but simply says that free will is self-evident.<sup>9</sup> In other

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*; translated by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston; Fleming H. Revell, 1957; p. 310. I have explained the biblical doctrine of predestination in different places. This time I will cite Luther a number of times in the main text and the footnotes. Most Calvinists and Reformed theologians share some basic Arminian assumptions when it comes to divine sovereignty and predestination, and human responsibility and freedom, so that their theology is a mixture of incompatible beliefs. Then, they claim that these contradictions come from the Bible, so that Christians must embrace them. However, the contradictions do not come from the Bible, but from their disagreements with the Bible. In addition, it is impossible to affirm two contradictory propositions, because to affirm one is to deny the other. To affirm that God is sovereign is to deny that man is free, and to affirm that man is free is to deny that God is sovereign.

<sup>7</sup> "There are in existence expositions and discussions of mine in which I have constantly asserted, up to this very hour, that 'free-will' is a nonentity, a *thing* (I have used that word) *consisting of a name alone*" (Luther, p. 271).

<sup>8</sup> Francis Foulkes, *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries); InterVarsity Press, 1989; p. 55.

<sup>9</sup> "But the Scripture sets before us a man who is not only bound, wretched, captive, sick and dead, but who, through the operation of Satan his lord, adds to his other miseries that of blindness, so that he believes himself to be free, happy, possessed of liberty and ability, whole and alive....Hence, the work of Satan is to hold men so that they do not recognise their wretchedness, but presume that they can do everything that is

words, he will hold on to it no matter what the Bible says. However, it is not self-evident that man has free will; rather, it is self-evident that if predestination is true, then free will is false.<sup>10</sup>

Foulkes continues, "It involves a paradox that the New Testament does not seek to resolve, and that our finite minds cannot fathom."<sup>11</sup> There is a "paradox" now? How? Where? It is "self-evident" to me that he is a quack, and that his mind is indeed "finite" – very finite. As Luther writes, "There is no conflict in the words of Scripture, and no need of an 'explanation' to 'cut the knot.' The protagonists of 'free-will' create difficulties where none exist, and dream contradictions for themselves."<sup>12</sup> Foulkes insists that there is human free will when Scripture never teaches it, and then when he runs into the doctrine of predestination, which the Scripture teaches, he cries, "Paradox!" and "Mystery!" In the face of this idiocy masquerading as scholarly exposition, should we not cry in response, "Moron!" and "Lunatic!?" Let it be clear, then, that Scripture contradicts Foulkes, not itself.

If God is sovereign, then man cannot be free – that is, not free from God, his power and his control. However, this does not contradict the Bible's teaching that man is morally responsible for his thoughts and actions. A common confusion is that freedom and responsibility are either the same thing, so that they are sometimes even used interchangeably in theological and philosophical literature, or that one cannot exist without the other.

The assumed premise is that responsibility presupposes freedom, and this leads to the conclusion that if man is not free, then he is not responsible. However, this premise is false, because by definition, responsibility has nothing to do with freedom, but it has to do with whether one is held accountable. The first dictionary definition for "responsible" is "liable to be called on to answer."<sup>13</sup> Since God has declared his moral laws to humanity, and since he has declared judgment upon those who would disobey, this means that man is responsible, because God will hold him accountable. The issue of freedom does not enter into the discussion.

Although Calvinists and Reformed theologians claim to uphold what the Bible teaches about divine sovereignty, many of them also affirm this unbiblical and irrational

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stated" (Luther, p. 162). In other words, man thinks he has free will not because it is self-evident, but because he is deceived by the devil.

<sup>10</sup> "For if we believe it to be true that God foreknows and foreordains all things; that He cannot be deceived or obstructed in His foreknowledge and predestination; and that nothing happens but at His will (which reason itself is compelled to grant); then, on reason's own testimony, there can be no 'free-will' in man, or angel, or in any creature" (Luther, p. 317). By "foreknowledge," Luther does not refer to a kind of prescience in which God somehow passively receives information about the future, as if the future brings itself about without his will and power. Rather, consistent with biblical usage, Luther means that God knows the future because he has decided what he will cause in the future, so that his foreknowledge is the same as foreordination: "Do you suppose that He does not will what he foreknows, or that He does not foreknow what He wills?" (Luther, p. 80).

<sup>11</sup> Foulkes, p. 55.

<sup>12</sup> Luther, p. 236.

<sup>13</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*. See also *Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition*.

assumption that moral responsibility presupposes human freedom. They agree with the heretics that for God's commands to be meaningful, man must be free to obey them.<sup>14</sup> Thus when it comes to the doctrine of predestination, they encounter contradictions, antinomies, and paradoxes (or whatever they may call them), and then they present these as part of the Bible's teaching, when the Bible is contradicting the theologians, and not itself.

For example, J. I. Packer writes:

The particular antinomy which concerns us here is the apparent opposition between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, or (putting it more biblically) between what God does as King and what He does as Judge. Scripture teaches that, as King, He orders and controls all things, human actions among them, in accordance with His own eternal purpose. Scripture also teaches that, as Judge, He holds every man responsible for the choices he makes and the courses of action he pursues....

God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are taught us side by side in the same Bible; sometimes, indeed, in the same text. Both are thus guaranteed to us by the same divine authority; both, therefore, are true. It follows that they must be held together, and not played off against each other. Man is a responsible moral agent, though he is *also* divinely controlled; man is divinely controlled, though he is *also* a responsible moral agent. God's sovereignty is a reality, and man's responsibility is a reality too. This is the revealed antinomy in terms of which we have to do our thinking about evangelism.<sup>15</sup>

Packer defines "antinomy" as only an "apparent" contradiction,<sup>16</sup> but to him this does not mean that the human mind can resolve it. An antinomy is not a contradiction in God's mind, but it appears to be one to us, and it is not something that we can resolve, so it remains a contradiction to us. As he writes, "To our finite minds, of course, the thing is inexplicable."<sup>17</sup> He should speak for himself – to his very finite mind, the thing is inexplicable (since he made it inexplicable), but he has no right to impose his confusion on the rest of us and even on the Bible.

He says that we must affirm both sides of an apparent contradiction even while it still appears to be a contradiction. By definition, this is impossible. If X and Y contradict each other, then X is not-Y and Y is not-X, so that to affirm both X and Y is to affirm not-Y and not-X. Thus to affirm both sides of a contradiction is really to deny both sides in reverse order. Then, since not-Y is X and not-X is Y, to deny both sides of a contradiction is to

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<sup>14</sup> "But the Diatribe is so ruinously sunk in, choked with, and stifled by, this notion of its own carnal fancy, that it is pointless to command impossibilities, that it cannot control itself; but whenever it hears an imperative or hypothetical statement it straightway tacks on its own indicative inferences: 'something is commanded, therefore we can do it, else the command is stupid!'" (Luther, p. 237).

<sup>15</sup> J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and The Sovereignty of God*; InterVarsity Press, 1961; p. 22-23.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

affirm both sides in reverse order again. This continues forever and destroys all intelligibility. It is irrelevant whether this is an actual or apparent contradiction, since as long as it appears to be a contradiction, to affirm one side is to deny the other.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, Packer ends up affirming and denying the Bible, and denying and affirming the Bible. Since there is no definite and consistent affirmation of the Bible, he cannot even claim that he is a Christian or that he believes in the inspiration of Scripture, unless he is speaking nonsense when he says that he affirms both sides of a contradiction.

The meaning of a contradiction is elementary in logic, but even though Packer's "finite mind" is oblivious to what a contradiction means, he has the audacity to declare that if he perceives a contradiction and cannot resolve it, then no one in humanity is able to resolve it. All this talk by theologians about the "finite mind" is meant to be an expression of humility, but it reeks of arrogance because it sets them up as the zenith and limit of intelligence. If they cannot understand something, they assume it is not because they are especially stupid, but it must be because it is humanly impossible to understand.

What is the apparent contradiction? Packer says that it is between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. He correctly states that divine sovereignty means that man is "divinely controlled," so that man has no freedom. Then, to him this seems to contradict human responsibility, because he assumes that responsibility presupposes freedom.

However, Luther had refuted this nonsense long ago. As he writes in *The Bondage of the Will*:

Wherefore, my good Erasmus, as often as you confront me with the words of the law, so often shall I confront you with the words of Paul: "By the law is knowledge of sin" – not power of will! Gather together from the big concordances all the imperative words into one chaotic heap...and I shall at once declare that they always show, not what men can do, or do do, but what they should do!

Even grammarians and schoolboys at street corners know that nothing more is signified by verbs in the imperative mood than what ought to be done, and that what is done or can be done should be expressed by verbs in the indicative. How is it that you theologians are twice as stupid as schoolboys, in that as soon as you get hold of a single imperative verb you infer an indicative meaning, as though the moment a thing is commanded it is done, or can be done?

But there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip! – and things that you commanded and that were possible enough may yet not be done, so great a gulf is there between imperative and indicative statements

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<sup>18</sup> The status of an apparent contradiction is the same as an actual contradiction until the apparent contradiction is resolved. If one logically perceives that it is only an apparent contradiction, then he has already resolved it, and there would be no contradiction at all. As long as he still perceives a contradiction, he cannot tell if it is an apparent or an actual contradiction.



in the simplest everyday matters! Yet in this business of keeping the law, which is as far out of our reach as heaven is from the earth and just as impossible of attainment, you make indicatives out of imperatives with such alacrity that the moment you hear the word of command: "do," "keep," "choose," you will straightway have it that it has been kept, done, chosen, or fulfilled, or that these things can be done by our own strength!<sup>19</sup>

Packer is an especially appropriate example of how many Calvinists and Reformed theologians have gone strangely wrong. This is because he translated Luther's book! Certainly, he had read Luther before he published *Evangelism and The Sovereignty of God*, since it was released in 1961, and his translation of *The Bondage of the Will* was released in 1957, and he had probably read it a long time before that. Therefore, Packer either disagrees with Luther, although he offers no refutation, or as Luther says, he is just stupid. He claims that he wants to be biblical, but then he should not impose the unbiblical premise, "responsibility presupposes freedom."

We would expect an Arminian, who is wholly confused about election and conversion, to miss the simple distinction between responsibility and freedom. However, it is extra despicable for Calvinists and Reformed scholars, who claim to be so faithful to the doctrines of divine sovereignty and predestination, to miss the same distinction, to assume that responsibility presupposes freedom, and to make a paradox out of it and declare that no one can resolve it. Are they not lunatics and morons, and like the Arminians, also "twice as stupid as schoolboys"?

When it comes to God's sovereignty and predestination, the Bible contains no contradictions, no antinomies, and no paradoxes, but unfaithful and incompetent theologians "create difficulties where none exist, and dream contradictions for themselves."<sup>20</sup> The Bible teaches both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. They do not contradict each other, and responsibility does not presuppose freedom. In fact, it is divine sovereignty that imposes human responsibility, as God declares that he would hold man accountable, so that man is responsible precisely because he is not free.

Then, the issue becomes one of justice. The objection is that if God imposes his laws on people who cannot obey them, then it would be unjust for God to judge them. However, this is rather unintelligent, since it again joins together two different things by mere assumption. According to what argument or authority is justice necessarily related to the freedom or ability to obey?

Paul anticipates this irrational objection when he discusses divine election in his letter to the Romans. He concludes that God determines and controls all things, even the will of man: "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom

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<sup>19</sup> Luther, p. 159. In other words, God's commands impose responsibility on men, but this does not imply freedom or ability in men.

<sup>20</sup> Luther, p. 236.

he wants to harden" (Romans 9:18). But then he continues, "One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?'" (v. 19).

The objection is the same one that we face. Since God controls all things, each person will decide according to what God has foreordained, and no one can decide anything different. And since God chooses to harden some people, this means that they have no freedom to obey God's commands or to believe in Christ. But God has determined to judge disobedience and unbelief. Since the opponent falsely assumes that responsibility presupposes freedom, he complains, "Then why does God still hold me responsible, if I do not have the freedom to obey or disobey, to believe or disbelieve?" In response, Paul rebukes the opponent, and writes:

But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? (Romans 9:20-24)<sup>21</sup>

God is the only standard of justice, and we must submit to his standard instead of imposing our own standard on him. He has the right to create some people for salvation, and to create others for damnation.<sup>22</sup>

As for the charge that the doctrine of predestination encourages licentiousness, there must be something wrong – something depraved and sinister – in those who make this objection. Before I encountered this, it never crossed my mind that God's grace could be a license to sin. It is right for man to submit to God and obey his commands (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Those who make this objection speak as if sin necessarily follows grace, but the doctrine of predestination does not suggest this. The objection poses no challenge, but it tells us that these people are filled with evil intentions, that they are the ones who would pervert grace into sin, because they are the ones who think this way. In contrast, Paul writes that God has predestined us "to be holy and blameless in his sight." Predestination leads to holiness, and not licentiousness. Predestination is the very thing that overcomes sin.

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<sup>21</sup> "He is speaking of men, comparing them to clay and God to a potter. The comparison is surely pointless – inappropriate, indeed, and futile – if he does not think that our freedom is nil" (Luther, p. 219).

<sup>22</sup> "God is He Whose will no cause or ground may be laid down as its rule and standard; for nothing is on a level with it or above it, but it is itself the rule for all things. If any rule or standard, or cause or ground, existed for it, it could no longer be the will of God. What God wills is not right because He ought, or was bound, so to will; on the contrary, what takes place must be right, because He so wills it. Causes and grounds are laid down for the will of the creature, but not for the will of the Creator – unless you set another Creator over him!" (Luther, p. 209).

## REPROBATION

Speaking of those who have been "prepared for destruction," we turn to the doctrine of reprobation. This is the negative aspect of predestination, so that in election God chooses whom he would save, and in reprobation he chooses whom he would damn.

Since Paul is talking about Christians in our passage, he stresses the positive side of predestination. However, some commentators cannot resist their sinful urge to oppose another biblical doctrine, and so they hurry to declare that although the Bible teaches election (but as demonstrated, they distort even this doctrine), it certainly does not teach reprobation.

For example, Arthur Patzia writes, "Election to salvation does not imply that God, therefore, predestines the rest of humanity to damnation."<sup>23</sup> But this is exactly what it implies. Likewise, William MacDonald writes, "The Bible never teaches that God chooses men to be lost."<sup>24</sup> So it is as if the reprobates came up with the idea of damnation, and then damn themselves by their own will and ability.

As with the doctrine of election and the heresy of free will, Calvinists and Reformed theologians also compromise with false assumptions when it comes to the doctrine of reprobation. For example, R. C. Sproul writes:

The Reformed view teaches that God positively or actively intervenes in the lives of the elect to insure their salvation. The rest of mankind God leaves to themselves. He does not create unbelief in their hearts. That unbelief is already there. He does not coerce them to sin. They sin by their own choices. In the Calvinist view the decree of election is positive; the decree of reprobation is negative.<sup>25</sup>

He adds that active reprobation is "hyper-Calvinism," "sub-Calvinism," or even "anti-Calvinism."<sup>26</sup> However, if this is the case, then the Bible teaches "hyper-Calvinism," "sub-Calvinism," and "anti-Calvinism," because it teaches both election and reprobation, and that both election and reprobation are active and unconditional.<sup>27</sup>

Labels are convenient but unimportant. In fact, they become destructive if they become their own issue and take on a crucial role in theological discussions, so that people are as interested in defining and defending them as they do the Bible. Then it is futile for theologians to argue about Calvinism and Arminianism, because they are all under condemnation as idolaters, eager to uphold their religious heritage rather than the word of God.

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<sup>23</sup> Arthur G. Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon* (New International Biblical Commentary); Hendrickson Publishers, 1990; p. 152.

<sup>24</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995; p. 1908.

<sup>25</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*; Tyndale House Publishers, 1986; p. 142-143.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>27</sup> As with election, "unconditional" means that the reason of reprobation is in God, and not in what he sees in the individuals. This is another way of saying that the reprobates do not design themselves in eternity and then create themselves in history.

Moreover, when the followers of a tradition is not clear on what their own tradition teaches, then the labels are no longer convenient, but confusing and unproductive. These Calvinists and Reformed theologians so zealously argue for their tradition, but their effort backfires because they contradict the Reformers themselves.

Luther maintains that the reprobates and the devil are "a work of God," and therefore they are subject to God's action in the same sense as "all the rest of God's creatures and works." God "moves and works" to operate these evil instruments for his own righteous purposes, and causes them to continue in evil:

So that which we call the remnant of nature in the ungodly and in Satan, as being a creature and a work of God, is no less subject to Divine omnipotence and action than all the rest of God's creatures and works. Since God moves and works all in all, He moves and works of necessity even in Satan and the ungodly....

Here you see that when God works in and by evil men, evil deeds result; yet God, though He does evil by means of evil men, cannot act evilly Himself, for He is good, and cannot do evil; but He uses evil instruments, which cannot escape the impulse and movement of His power. The fault which accounts for evil being done when God moves to action lies in these instruments, which God does not allow to be idle. In the same way a carpenter would cut badly with a saw-toothed axe. Hence it is that the ungodly man cannot but err and sin always, because under the impulse of Divine power he is not allowed to be idle, but wills, desires and acts according to his nature.<sup>28</sup>

As for the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, Sproul writes, "Active hardening would involve God's direct intervention within the inner chambers of Pharaoh's heart," and so he suggests a "passive hardening"<sup>29</sup> instead. But Luther writes:

So God's hardening of Pharaoh is wrought thus: God presents from without to his villainous heart that which by nature he hates; at the same time, He continues by omnipotent action to move within him the evil will which He finds there. Pharaoh, by reason of the villainy of his will, cannot but hate what opposes him, and trust to his own strength; and he grows so obstinate that he will not listen nor reflect, but is swept along in the grip of Satan like a raging madman.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Luther, p. 204.

<sup>29</sup> Sproul, p. 144.

<sup>30</sup> Luther, p. 207.

Although Luther says that God moves within Pharaoh,<sup>31</sup> he also refers to "the evil will which He finds there." This sounds like Sproul when he refers to the evil that is "already there," but they do not mean the same thing.

What does Luther mean by "the evil will which He finds there"? How does this evil get there? He writes, "It is true that Judas acted willingly, and not under compulsion, but his willing was the work of God, brought into being by His omnipotence, like everything else."<sup>32</sup> The reprobates "willingly" sin, in the sense that they decide to sin, but this willing or this deciding is "the work of God, brought into being by His omnipotence, like everything else." All of this is active, not passive. As if this is not clear enough, Luther also writes:

Paul teaches that faith *and unbelief* comes to us by no work of our own, but through the love and hatred of God.<sup>33</sup>

The king's will cannot escape the action of the omnipotent God by which all men's wills, good *and bad*, are moved to will and to act.<sup>34</sup>

What I assert and maintain is this: that where God works apart from the grace of His Spirit, He works all things in all men, *even in the ungodly*; for He alone moves, makes to act, and impels by the motion of His omnipotence, all those things which He alone created; they can neither avoid nor alter this movement, but necessarily follow and obey it, each thing according to the measure of its *God-given power*. Thus all things, *even the ungodly*, co-operate with God.<sup>35</sup>

As Paul says: "We were all the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph. 2.3), *created such by God Himself* from a seed that had been corrupted by the sin of the one man, Adam.<sup>36</sup>

Luther indeed teaches that the ungodly have an evil nature, and it is this evil nature that God works and moves. However, Sproul means something different when he says that the evil is "already there," as if God has nothing to do with it being there. Rather, Luther refers to this evil nature as a "God-given power," and those who are evil by nature have been

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<sup>31</sup> "Those who are moderately versed in the Scriptures see that for the sake of brevity I have put forward only a few of many testimonies. Yet from these it is more than evident that they babble and talk absurdly who, in place of God's providence, substitute bare permission – as if God sat in a watching tower awaiting chance events, and his judgments thus depended upon human will....And surely *unless he worked inwardly in men's minds*, it would not rightly have been said that he removes speech from the truthful, and prudence from the old men (Ezek. 7:26); that he takes away the heart of the princes of the earth so they may wander in trackless wastes (Job 12:24)" (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; The Westminster Press; p. 231).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228-229.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.

"created such by God Himself." The evil is "already" there only relative to what God has done in "there" before.<sup>37</sup> In other words, the evil is already there, because God has already put it there.

This is the position of Luther the Reformer. As for Calvin, we find the following in his writings:

Now a word concerning the reprobate, with whom the apostle is at the same time there concerned. For as Jacob, deserving nothing by good works, is taken into grace, so Esau, as yet undefiled by any crime, is hated [Rom. 9:13]. If we turn our eyes to works, we wrong the apostle, as if he did not see what is quite clear to us! Now it is proved that he did not see it, since he specially emphasizes the point that when as yet they had done nothing good or evil, one was chosen, the other rejected. This is to prove that the foundation of divine predestination is not in works.

Then when he raised the objection, whether God is unjust, he does not make use of what would have been the surest and clearest defense of his righteousness: that God recompensed Esau according to his own evil intention. Instead, he contents himself with a different solution, that the reprobate are raised up to the end that through them God's glory may be revealed.

Finally, he adds the conclusion that "God has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills" [Rom. 9:18]. Do you see how Paul attributes both to God's decision alone? If, then, we cannot determine a reason why he vouchsafes mercy to his own, except it so pleases him, neither shall we have any reason for rejecting others, other than his will. For when it is said that God hardens or shows mercy to whom he wills, men are warned by this to seek no cause outside his will.<sup>38</sup>

Here they have recourse to the distinction between will and permission. By this they would maintain that the wicked perish because God permits it, not because he so wills. But why shall we say "permission" unless it is because God so wills? Still, it is not in itself likely that man brought destruction upon himself through himself, by God's mere permission and without any ordaining. As if God did not establish the condition in which he wills the chief of his creatures to be! I shall not hesitate, then, simply to confess with

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<sup>37</sup> This is how we must understand passive language like, "Therefore God *gave them over* in the sinful desires of their hearts" (Romans 1:24). The passive expression is true, but only relative to something that God has actively done. When we are not speaking relatively, but absolutely, so that we must consider how something is "already there," we must speak of God's action as active rather than passive.

<sup>38</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*; p. 946-947.

Augustine that "the will of God is the necessity of things," and that what he has willed will of necessity come to pass, as those things which he has foreseen will truly come to pass.<sup>39</sup>

There are many more such passages in the writings of the Reformers, but there is no need to pile up more quotations – they clearly teach that reprobation is both active and unconditional, just like election. But now who is Reformed? And who is the Calvinist? Both Luther and Calvin teach what Sproul calls "hyper-Calvinism," "sub-Calvinism," or even "anti-Calvinism." Thus theologians like Packer and Sproul would have condemned Luther and Calvin as extremists and heretics.

Sproul maintains that in the reprobates, evil is "already there" as if God did not put it there. But then how did it get there? Is there another Creator? Did the reprobates create themselves? He says that God "leaves to themselves" the reprobates to sin "by their own choices." But who causes them to make these choices? Are these choices free from God? Is there another God – another omnipotent principle or metaphysical power – by which the reprobates function? If Sproul thinks there is another God, then he is a non-Christian – he does not even believe in the Christian God, who is the only omnipotence that controls all things. If he thinks there is not another God, then he must affirm active and unconditional reprobation. Passive reprobation follows from a form of dualism, or an impossible theory of spontaneous generation, but Christian theism necessarily implies active election and active reprobation, because nothing can happen apart from God's active will and power.

Although it seems most Calvinists and Reformed theologians make the same errors as Packer and Sproul, a few are more biblical and intelligent. For example, G. H. Kersten writes:

From the scriptures quoted it is very evident that reprobation is more than letting one lie in the state wherein he fell. It is a *predetermination* of the state of perdition, both of angels and of men, for God also determined to decree some of the angels to perdition, reserving them in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. The reprobate are appointed, ordained, and fitted to destruction....Reprobation is therefore no more a passive decree than election is; it is an active decree.

The Cause of reprobation does not lie in anything outside of God, not even in sin, but in God's absolute sovereignty....Thus reprobation is the independent decree of God from eternity, the sovereign, the decreeing God Himself. It is an act of the Father's good pleasure....

Sin, unbelief, hardness, and whatever else is mentioned as a reason for the righteous judgment of God, all follows the decree of God, and is *not the cause of the decree*. God is sovereign in election, but

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 956.

also in rejection. Both depend on nothing but God's sovereign pleasure, and, being God's decree they cannot be dependent upon some one or some thing outside of God....

As election is not general, neither is reprobation....It concerns certain people, known to God by name.<sup>40</sup>

Although active reprobation is consistent with Calvinism and Reformed theology, this is relatively unimportant. If a tradition is wrong, then let it die. We will not miss it. If a tradition is correct, then it is correct only because it agrees with Scripture, and we can agree with Scripture without identifying with any tradition. So we are interested in what Scripture teaches. Paul writes:

Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls – she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? (Romans 9:10-24)<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> G. H. Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics*; Netherlands Reformed Book and Publishing Committee, 1980; p. 137-138. Just as collective election is false, Kersten also rejects collective reprobation.

<sup>41</sup> Many other passages affirm active reprobation. For example, consider 1 Peter 2:8. Wayne Grudem writes, "This verse does not simply say that God destined the *fact* that those who disobey would stumble,



From this passage, we can derive four points about the doctrine of reprobation.

First, reprobation is biblical. Some commentators affirm election but reject reprobation. This is an inexcusable error, most likely driven by the personal values and biases of the scholars. The Bible teaches both, and here it teaches them in the same passage.

Second, reprobation is individual. Just as collective election has been invented to overturn individual election, there are those who admit that reprobation is biblical, but that it is a collective reprobation. However, Paul considers Jacob and Esau as individuals – not the nations that would arise from them, but "the twins."<sup>42</sup>

Third, reprobation is unconditional. We have observed from this passage that election to salvation is unconditional, so that God selected the individuals for salvation not because of anything foreseen in them. Paul teaches reprobation in this same passage and in the same way; therefore, reprobation is unconditional in the same sense that election is unconditional.

Wayne Grudem blatantly slanders and opposes Scripture when he writes, "So in the presentation of Scripture the cause of election lies in God, and the cause of reprobation lies in the sinner."<sup>43</sup> This is both unbiblical and impossible. It is unbiblical because it contradicts the Bible. Paul says that God had decided to treat Jacob and Esau differently "before the twins were born or had done anything good *or bad*." It is impossible because there is only one God. Just as election is not based on "anything good" in the person, reprobation is not based on "anything bad" in the person. It is not as if the man could create and control himself while God passively watches him.

Kersten writes, "Sin is the *meriting cause* of punishment. The *determining cause* of the state of reprobation is the sovereignty of God."<sup>44</sup> As a longtime professor of theology, Grudem should have the clarity of mind to make this simple distinction. Nevertheless, even this can lead to misunderstanding, or to a weak view of reprobation, unless we add that God is also the determining cause of the meriting cause. Sin, the meriting cause, is an effect of reprobation, the determining cause. God has determined that the individuals would be damned, and this results in their sin and unbelief, so that they deserve to be damned.

As a seasoned professor, Grudem must have read what we cited from Calvin: "If, then, we cannot determine a reason why he vouchsafes mercy to his own, except it so pleases him, neither shall we have any reason for rejecting others, other than his will. For when it is said that God hardens or shows mercy to whom he wills, men are warned by this to seek no cause outside his will." If he disagrees, then he should refute Calvin, but then he must also

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but speaks rather of God destining certain *people* to disobey and stumble" (*Systematic Theology*; Zondervan Publishing House, 1994; p. 685).

<sup>42</sup> As mentioned earlier, God's sovereignty over groups presupposes his sovereignty over individuals. Just as collective election (as an attempt to deny individual election) is nonsense, collective reprobation (as an attempt to deny individual reprobation) is nonsense.

<sup>43</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*; p. 686.

<sup>44</sup> Kersten, p. 138.

refute the Bible and become a non-Christian. Like most theologians on this topic, his position dishonors God, slanders Scripture, confuses the unlearned, and wastes our time.

Fourth, reprobation is active. Theologians often claim that even if reprobation is biblical and individual, it must nevertheless be a passive decree. God does not decide to make it happen, but to let it happen. Again, the Bible teaches the opposite.

Paul explains that just as some people are "prepared in advance for glory," others are "prepared for destruction." The two happen in the same way. Refusing to accept active reprobation no matter what, some suggest that "prepared for destruction" is meant in the passive sense, so that it is as if the reprobates prepared themselves for destruction. But even when there is a variation in expression, it does not always signify a variation in sense. Suppose I say, "I bought this book for myself. The other was bought for my friend." The second sentence is passive, but it does not mean that whereas I bought the first book, someone else bought the second one, or worse, the second book bought itself and walked out the store. The context shows that I bought both books – one for myself, and the other for my friend.

The context of our passage is clear. Paul writes in verse 18, "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden." He does not say that God shows mercy to some, but allows others to harden themselves. Rather, he shows mercy to some, and he hardens others. He is the one who does both. Then, Paul writes in verse 21, "Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?" He does not say that the potter makes the noble ones, but the common ones make themselves. Rather, the potter is the one who makes both the noble ones and the common ones. This is the context for the expression, "prepared for destruction" (v. 22).

God said, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (v. 13). Just as God decided to treat Jacob a certain way without consideration of anything found in Jacob, God decided to treat Esau a different way without consideration of anything found in Esau. Scholars are often eager to defend their bias and tradition, and so they suggest that the "hate" in this verse means merely to "love less." But what does that mean? And how much less? Spinach I love, but eggplant I love less. How much less? I hate it. God loves the reprobates so much less that he would torture them in hellfire forever. In other words, he hates them.

Many Calvinists and Reformed theologians teach that although God must actively select and summon out the elect for salvation, he merely passes by the reprobates, as if to exonerate God from some shameful crime. However, active reprobation is no crime – it is God's righteous decree to reveal his wrath and his power (v. 22), and to show forth his mercy toward the elect (v. 23). All things are done by God's will and power, and he needs no excuse for his decrees and actions.

Both election and reprobation are individual, unconditional, and active. The difference is that there is an additional step in the execution of God's decree for the elect. God designed and decreed the creation of both the elect individuals and the reprobate individuals, and

decreed that both would fall into sin through Adam, but he also decreed that he would save the elect through Christ. When Adam fell into sin, both the elect and the reprobate individuals fell with him. The reprobate individuals are then in their foreordained position, prepared for destruction, whereas the elect individuals await the application of redemption in God's appointed time.

One popular objection against the doctrine of divine sovereignty, the doctrine of predestination, and especially the doctrine of active reprobation, is that they make God "the author of sin." Calvinists and Reformed theologians scramble to deny this,<sup>45</sup> even the few who agree with the Bible on active reprobation. They invent all kinds of distinctions and qualifications to distance God from sin.<sup>46</sup> However, the difficulty is often self-inflicted, the effort to solve it is always unintelligent.

In the first place, the phrase is usually ambiguous. What does "author" mean in this context? When God inspired the Bible, he did not physically take up the pen to write, but he caused men to take up the pen. If we consider authorship in the superficial sense, then the men were the authors. However, if we consider authorship in the absolute or fullest sense, as in the origin of the intention to write, the source of the thoughts and the words, the creator and sustainer of the men, the pens, the scrolls, the circumstances, and the whole world, the power that took up the men and held them as they wrote, the intelligence that collected and arranged the documents, and the providence that preserved the book, then we must say that God is not only an author, but the only author of the Bible.

When it comes to sin, if one acknowledges these things about God – origin, source, creator, sustainer, power, intelligence, providence – then he must also acknowledge that God is the author of sin in the metaphysical or ontological sense. But if he denies even one of these things about God, then he must acknowledge another God who takes on one or more of these roles, and this means he is not even a Christian. God is the author of sin, because he is the author of all things.

The fact that God is the "author" of sin does not make him the "doer" of sin – that is, a sinner. First, by "author" we refer to metaphysical power. It is a matter of ontology, not morality. Second, sin is a transgression of God's law. Since God is the only lawgiver, and the only standard of right and wrong, for him to become a sinner, he would have to impose a law upon himself, break this law, and the judge himself as a transgressor. However, Scripture declares that God is righteous in himself and in all that he does.

As long as God approves himself, he is righteous by definition, and he is never a sinner or wrongdoer. It is wrong for God to be the author of sin only if he has declared that it is wrong for him to be the author of sin. It is not up to theologians to invent a problem for him, and then rescue him from it. They are so eager to stress their finitude and humility, but we can hardly find a stronger example of arrogance. In making themselves God's lawgivers and guardians, their insolence rivals that of the devil.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Sproul, p. 144.

<sup>46</sup> Kersten, p. 125.

<sup>47</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *The Author of Sin*.

Theologians appeal to "secondary causes" to distance God from sin and evil. They claim that even if God controls these things, he does it through secondary causes, and thus only in an indirect sense. However, this is another unintelligent excuse. It does not in fact distance God from sin and evil, because God must directly make the secondary causes work the way he wants them to work, and he must directly make the objects supposedly affected respond the way he wants them to respond. Otherwise, there must be another metaphysical principle or power that is different from God – there must be another God – which is the heresy of dualism.<sup>48</sup>

As Calvin says, "Indeed, not even an abundance of bread would benefit us in the slightest unless it were divinely turned into nourishment."<sup>49</sup> Although God has ordained bread to nourish the body, and the body to be nourished by bread, he remains the direct cause of nourishment, because bread in itself has no power to exist and to nourish. It cannot remain in the world and affect it apart from God's immediate power; otherwise, the bread itself would be God, the "I AM" (Exodus 3:14).

Since so-called secondary causes require God to directly act on them, and then apart from them, to directly act on the things supposedly affected by them, this means that secondary causes are meaningless. Even if they appear to have a correlation with the effects, they do not really cause anything. There seems to be a correlation between bread and nourishment, but God is what directly causes nourishment, and he can do it without the bread. We might refer to correlates as if they are causes in a manner of speaking, but God is the only actual cause.

Therefore, it is futile to appeal to secondary causes to distance God from an event or the effect as a theodicy. God is in direct contact with all things, or they can never exist or occur. Since God is the author of all things, God is also the author of sin in the metaphysical or ontological sense. However, this is not a problem, because there is no biblical or rational argument to show that there is something wrong with this. Rather, God is righteous by definition.<sup>50</sup>

The doctrine of predestination is controversial not because the Bible is unclear or because there are good arguments on all sides. It is controversial because sinful man lacks

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<sup>48</sup> Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 1*; Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004; p. 226-227.

<sup>49</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*; p. 909.

<sup>50</sup> James writes, "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed" (James 1:13-14). This is sometimes used to deny that God is the author of sin. However, James says only that God is not tempted by evil and that God does not tempt anyone. Both points are irrelevant, since our claim is that God is the author of sin in the metaphysical or ontological sense. He is not the one who tempts, but the one who causes men, their lusts, and the devil to tempt. He is not the one who surrenders to temptation, but the one who causes people to surrender to temptation. Rather, as Isaiah says, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things" (Isaiah 45:7, KJV). Of course, many people insist that "evil" means "calamity" in this verse – as if this makes things better! "Calamity" certainly includes wars, murders, rapes, robberies, corruptions, political upheavals, and so on.

intelligence to grasp the truth and integrity to admit the truth. He demands salvation from God but refuses to give him the glory. He reserves a decisive role for himself, and declares that although God makes salvation possible for everyone, he makes it actual for no one until each person permits God to save him.

He convinces himself that he is the master of his soul, and that no one can take it out of his hands. Jesus said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you" (John 15:16), but sinful man retorts, "You have 'chosen' me only because you know that I would choose you, so that my will logically precedes and determines your will!" He says, "If conversion is necessary, then by my will I will turn against my wickedness, even my own evil will, by my might I will escape from Satan's hold and sin's grip, and by my power I will turn to Christ and permit him to save me, as if I need him at all."

The religious sinner resents this representation. He obscures his thoughts with beautiful words and reverent expressions, but he is driven by such wickedness and defiance that he makes himself the center of the universe, so that even God must bow down and serve him. Thus "free will" is Satan's slogan, and Arminianism is his creed. On the other hand, the Christian faith declares, "Salvation comes from the LORD" (Jonah 2:9) – really and wholly from God.

The doctrine of predestination is controversial, so that some of those who claim to agree with it suggest that we should not preach about it. But then do they really agree? Predestination is interwoven with biblical theology and the gospel. Their suggestion insults God, as if he was stupid, or that he erred in revealing this doctrine. As Luther writes:

It is, then, fundamentally necessary and wholesome for Christians to know that God foreknows nothing contingently, but that He foresees, purposes, and does all things according to His own immutable, eternal and infallible will....<sup>51</sup>

As I said above, what may be found in or proved by the sacred writings is both plain and wholesome, and so may safely be published, learned and known – and, indeed, should be. So your statement, that some things should not be exposed to everyone's hearing, if made with reference to the contents of Scripture, is false; and if you spoke of other things, your remark was irrelevant and out of place, and a waste of your paper and time.<sup>52</sup>

As for the argument that predestination is best left untaught because of the tumult and disunity that it causes, Luther replies:

What a fulsome speaker you are! – but utterly ignorant of what you are talking about. In a word, you treat this discussion as if the issue at stake between us was the recovery of a debt, or some other trivial

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<sup>51</sup> Luther, p. 80.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

item, the loss of which matters far less than the public peace, and therefore should not so upset anyone as to make him hesitate to give and take, yielding the point if need be, in order to ensure that no occasion for public disorder arises. You make it clear that this carnal peace and quiet seems to you far more important than faith, conscience, salvation, the Word of God, the glory of Christ, and God himself.

Let me tell you, therefore – and I beg you to let this sink deep into your mind – I hold that a solemn and vital truth, of eternal consequence, is at stake in this discussion; one so crucial and fundamental that it ought to be maintained and defended even at the cost of life, though as a result the whole world should be, not just thrown into turmoil and uproar, but shattered in chaos and reduced to nothingness. If you do not grasp that, if it leaves you unmoved, then mind your own business, and leave those to grasp it and be moved by it to whom it is given of God!<sup>53</sup>

Some people will say that even if the doctrine must be taught, it should be taught only to mature saints, or at least only to believers, but it should certainly not be mentioned to non-Christians in evangelism.

However, Jesus flatly tells his hearers, including the unbelievers, that no one can know the Father unless "the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matthew 11:27), that no one can come to him for salvation unless the Father "draws him" (John 6:44) and "has enabled him" (John 6:65). This means that it is appropriate to preach, even to unbelievers, "You will be saved only if you come to Christ and believe the gospel, but unless God chooses and enables you, you cannot come and you will not believe." Moreover, Jesus says to the unbelievers, "You do not believe because you are not my sheep" (John 10:26). This means that it is appropriate to preach, even to unbelievers, "If you do not believe, it is because you are not one of God's people, but one of the reprobates, destined for destruction."

You say, "This will offend some hearers, and drive them away." Yes, it will offend the reprobates and drive them away, and our churches will have fewer false converts. The chosen ones, on the other hand, will rejoice to hear about God's sovereign power and mercy, revealed for his glory and for our salvation. As Paul writes, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Romans 10:15). There he cites Isaiah 52:7, which brings the message, "Your God reigns!"<sup>54</sup> God's sovereignty in saving his people is the message of the gospel.

This is what we find in the ministry of Christ, so that when he said, "I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him," many people "turned back and no longer followed him." In contrast, Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>54</sup> The verse says, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"

the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:65-69). Therefore, because of the teaching of Scripture, the example of Christ, the doctrine of the apostles,<sup>55</sup> and also the preferable effect, it is suitable and desirable to speak on both election and reprobation in teaching and in evangelism.

While those who claim to believe the doctrine of predestination remain hesitant, others are boldly proclaiming the false gospel of free will, that people must save themselves on the basis of what Christ has done, that God has taken the first step but now they must take the final and decisive step, and that God can do nothing with them without their consent. It is a sin to neglect any part of the Christian system of truth, especially such a foundational doctrine. Then, as the false gospel continues to spread, to refrain from declaring the doctrine of God's sovereignty in predestination would be devastating, and has been devastating, to the church's strength and progress.

There are those who consider this a secondary issue, too trivial to bicker over; however, we have shown that the doctrine is not trivial, and it is not just a matter of preference or perspective. Rather, it has to do with the very nature of God and the gospel. Is our God as the Bible describes him – sovereign and almighty – or is he like the pagan gods, who are no gods at all – limited and struggling? Is salvation really "from the Lord," or is it partly from God and partly from man? Does God overstate his own role in salvation? Does he boast too much about himself? Should he share the credit with man?

Luther writes that the issue is "of eternal consequence."<sup>56</sup> He calls the topic "the real thing," "the essential issue," "the hinge on which all turns," and "the vital spot," compared to which other disputes are but "extraneous issues" and "trifles."<sup>57</sup> Luther and the Reformers understood the significance of the dispute, that without a God who does all things by his sovereign power and who saves his people by his sovereign mercy, there would be no Christian faith. Therefore, let us not be ashamed of the gospel, that God saves his chosen ones by his grace, according to his will and his pleasure, and for his glory.

## **REDEMPTION**

Predestination pervades the whole passage (1:3-14), and Christ's agency and headship also appear throughout, but there appears to be a progression in emphasis from the Father's work in predestination, to the Son's work in redemption, and then to the Spirit's work in application. Nevertheless, it seems Paul does not intend to create rigidly defined sections in the passage, but rather to compose a doxology that blends these ideas together. Now we come to the Son's work in redemption (v. 7).

Redemption refers to deliverance by ransom. As Barclay writes, "In every case the conception is the delivering of a man from a situation from which he was powerless to

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<sup>55</sup> The apostles preached on divine sovereignty and predestination in their "evangelistic" sermons (Acts 2:23, 17:26), and they also taught it in the church (Acts 4:28). There was no controversy among them – they affirmed God's sovereignty over everything, including sin and salvation.

<sup>56</sup> Luther, p. 90.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 319.

liberate himself or from a penalty which he himself could never have paid."<sup>58</sup> Sinful man is wholly depraved, so that a little grace from God would not benefit him, but salvation must be all of grace.

Christ performed the work of redemption "through his blood." The blood atonement is crucial in salvation. He did not die on the cross as a mere moral example or as a random martyr, and the atonement was not accomplished just because some red liquid came out of his body. Rather, the expression refers to the fact that Christ, as the head of the chosen ones, offered up himself to die as a perfect sacrifice to render complete satisfaction toward divine justice, which otherwise would have demanded the everlasting punishment of all sinners.

Since this is what the expression means, Hendriksen translates it as, "deliverance as a result of the payment of a ransom,"<sup>59</sup> adding that "He gave his blood," "He gave his soul," and "He gave himself" are equivalent in meaning.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Barclay translates, "a deliverance which cost his life."<sup>61</sup> This is the right understanding, and these translations or paraphrases correct some of the false doctrines and mystical interpretations taught by some preachers and heretics.

On the other hand, "translating" the expression in a way that removes mention of the blood takes away the essential allusion of Christ's sacrifice as the fulfillment of the Old Testament blood sacrifices. As Leviticus says, "It is the blood that makes atonement for one's life" (17:11); however, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4), and so the animal sacrifices symbolized and anticipated the only sacrifice that could actually "take away sins," that is, the sacrifice of Christ.<sup>62</sup> In trying to translate the "meaning" of the expression instead of the words, those translations have also changed the meaning of the verse. In this case, the best solution is not to translate the meaning instead of the words, but to educate the believers and refute the heretics.

The expression has been distorted to support a number of perverse doctrines and grotesque practices. For example, some Christians advocate "pleading the blood." This is the teaching that in the face of demonic powers and at times of desperation, a person could verbally call upon the blood of Jesus for deliverance. The emphasis is not on the sacrificial death of Christ by which he has purchased our salvation and blessings, but it seems that they appeal to the blood itself – that is, the liquid – as if it has some mystical power in the spiritual realm to exorcise evil spirits and to confer blessings. However, the significance of "the blood of Christ" is the death of Christ as a sacrifice, and not the bodily liquid itself.

In this letter, Paul also tells us about overcoming the "powers" and inheriting the blessings. There was much concern about magical forces and demonic powers. Instead of teaching the people chants and formulas of exorcism, or offering them crucifixes and amulets, he

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<sup>58</sup> Barclay, p. 81.

<sup>59</sup> Hendriksen, p. 69.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>61</sup> Barclay, p. 81.

<sup>62</sup> See also Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Revelation 5:9.



sends them a letter of high theology. He shows them that Christians overcome demonic powers by an intellectual understanding of the decree of God in predestination, the sacrifice of Christ in redemption, and the reign of Christ in exaltation.

We exorcise by theology. The anti-intellectuals think that theology is dull and useless, and this is indeed true of false theology. Their anti-intellectualism is often a reaction to the unbelief of Christian scholars, who zealously defend their creeds and traditions, even if they must explain away the word of God in the process. Nevertheless, to reject theology itself is also to reject the word of God, and so the anti-intellectuals remain confused and powerless. On the other hand, Christian theology, in which God is sovereign and Christ is exalted, has "divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Hebrews 9:22 says, "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness," but because of Christ's perfect atonement, we now have the "forgiveness of sins" (Ephesians 1:7). Since salvation from sin requires a perfect blood atonement, since God has chosen only Jesus Christ to make such an atonement, and then since only Christ has made such an atonement, this means that salvation from sin is found only in Christ, and that there is no salvation elsewhere. The fact that there is no salvation elsewhere means that the full wrath of God will descend, and even now rests upon, all non-Christians. It means that God will condemn not only atheists and agnostics to burn in hell forever, but he will condemn all non-Christians – Mormons, Muslims, Buddhists, Catholics, and so on – including all who affirm a false gospel (Galatians 1:8-9).

Another implication of the atonement is that, since Christ made an actual atonement (not just a potential atonement), and since it rendered complete satisfaction toward divine justice (not just partial satisfaction), this means that for those whom Christ made atonement, he made a perfect, complete, and final atonement for all their sins. Therefore, there remains no sin for which God will condemn them, and this in turn means that every individual for whom Christ died shall be saved. However, this does not tell us for whom Christ made atonement – it only indicates that all those for whom Christ made atonement will be saved.

Then, since Scripture declares that many people will not be saved but will be condemned to hell, this must mean that Christ did not die for every person. Again, if Christ made atonement for all your sins, then there is nothing left for which God will condemn you, which means that you will be saved. If Christ made such an atonement for everyone, then everyone will be saved; however, since Scripture insists that not everyone will be saved, this means that Christ did not make atonement for everyone.

Rather, Scripture teaches that Christ died only for his church, his people, his sheep, for God's chosen ones (John 10:14-15, 25-29). The Scripture teaches this by necessarily implication and by explicit mention. It is the doctrine of effective particular atonement. God had a specific design in redemption, and Christ was the agent by whom God carried out the design.

As expected, many people, including those who claim to be Christians, detest this biblical doctrine. Sinners will oppose any teaching that exalts the sovereignty of God over the freedom of men. So they insist that Christ made a universal atonement, that he died for every person who would exist in human history. However, this view necessarily entails either an imperfect atonement or universal salvation. But since Scripture affirms a perfect atonement and denies universal salvation, this means that universal atonement must be false.

One objection is that even if Christ made a perfect atonement, we must have faith in what he has done in order to receive the benefits; therefore, although he made atonement for everyone, not everyone is saved. But what is faith, and how does it come? The objection seems to assume that although we cannot make atonement for our own sins, we have a free will to manufacture faith even in our sinful state. It suggests that while spiritually dead and depraved, we can still freely make the most important and most positive spiritual decision in our lives. This is irrational, unbiblical, and heretical.

We have refuted free will, and in our spiritually dead condition, it is impossible to have the positive spiritual disposition required to have faith in Christ. Also, the objection assumes that Christ did not make atonement for the sin of unbelief, so that he did not resolve the issue by the atonement, but it is up to us to have faith in him. Therefore, the objection does not apply to a perfect atonement, in which Christ made atonement for all sins. But since Scripture teaches a perfect atonement, the objection is irrelevant.

Moreover, Scripture never teaches that faith is something that we conjure up by our own power in order to obtain God's blessings; rather, it depicts faith as one of those blessings Christ obtained for those he redeemed. We often refer to faith as something by which *we obtain* the benefits of the atonement, and this is correct in the sense that faith leads to the other blessings, but when the issue is the source of faith itself, we should refer to faith as something by which *God applies* the benefits of the atonement to us. We do not benefit from the atonement because we have faith, but we have faith because it is a benefit of the atonement. It is not that we take from God through faith, but that God gives us faith, and then gives to us through faith. Faith is "a gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8) – it is something that God gives, and not something that we produce.

Salvation is really and wholly from God, from start to finish (Hebrews 12:2). Faith is not something that comes by our own decision or by our own power, but it is a "faith that comes through him" (Acts 3:16). As Luther writes, faith is "a special and rare gift of God."<sup>63</sup> Therefore, the teaching of the Scripture is that Christ's blood atonement is perfect, complete, final, actual, effective, and particular, and that faith itself is a gift that he obtained for us by his sacrifice, so that there is no room for us to boast, except in what Christ has done.<sup>64</sup>

When Scripture teaches that Christ's atonement completely satisfied God's justice, it does not suggest that there was a disagreement in the Godhead. It is not as if God the Father is

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<sup>63</sup> Luther, p. 155.

<sup>64</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology*.

a God of wrath, so that he is concerned only with exacting vengeance on those who have transgressed his laws, and that God the Son is a God of grace, so that he is concerned only with redeeming sinners. This would be a ludicrous and unwarranted inference from the doctrine of the atonement.

Paul states that it is God who has chosen us to be saved, and that it is "in accordance with the riches of God's grace" that he sent Christ to make atonement for us. Therefore, there is no disagreement among the members of the Godhead, and justice does not contradict grace. Rather, it is because of God's grace that he made a way to satisfy his own justice,<sup>65</sup> so that he could be both "just and the justifier" (Romans 3:26, NASB) of those whom he has chosen for salvation. Justice and grace are in harmony, and the Father and the Son are in agreement.

Hebrews 9:15 summarizes what we have said about the atonement: "For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant."

Christ is the "mediator" between God and man, so that only through him can man know God and be saved. He is the agent through whom God performs his foreordained plan and redeems his chosen ones, and he is the federal head through whom all the chosen ones are saved. Outside of Christ, there is only darkness and death. The Christian faith is the only way that leads to heaven, but all non-Christian religions and philosophies lead to hell.

Christ is the mediator of the "new covenant." He is the fulfillment of all the expectations and anticipations, and all the types and shadows of the previous administration of God's grace, that is, "the first covenant." The blood sacrifices of the past were types of the perfect sacrifice that God would provide for his people, and Christ's sacrifice was the complete fulfillment.

Christ "died as a ransom," not as a mere moral example or a random martyr. He died not just to inspire others to do something, but he died to do something himself, namely, to render complete satisfaction to divine justice and redeem the chosen ones. Since he died as an actual ransom, his death did not obtain the mere possibility of salvation for the elect, but it accomplished salvation for the elect. He did not just start to save his people, but he did save his people. He did not just take the first step, but he did all that he needed to do. The rest, including the faith of the chosen ones, is the application of what Christ has done.

Christ died for his people to "set them free from the sins committed." Atonement is made to obtain forgiveness, and actual atonement guarantees actual forgiveness. Once the payment is given, there is no more debt. Thus the atonement does not provide a mere possibility of forgiveness, but the reality of forgiveness. Therefore, all those for whom Christ died will be saved. There is no chance that even one of them will be lost.

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<sup>65</sup> God did not disregard or contradict his own justice, but he satisfied it by the atonement of Christ.

Christ died, not to save everyone, but only "those who are called." Although the atonement of Christ guarantees the forgiveness of all those for whom he died, it does not imply universal salvation, because he did not die for everyone, but only for the chosen ones. If God has chosen you and given you faith in Christ, then it is only right for you to serve him with reverence and gratitude. You must not think that you had the good sense or moral clarity to choose Christ, as if God did not sovereignly and irresistibly cause you to so choose. The doctrine of free will represents the height of impiety and the essence of false religion.

Christ died to save us from our sins, and those who are called will "receive the promised eternal inheritance." Paul writes, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him – but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). The inheritance that awaits us, and indeed what we have already received, is so great and precious that, if God had not revealed it, we would never have conceived it. But for the unbeliever, death is his destiny, and hellfire is his inheritance. "Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness" (Romans 11:22, NASB).

## ILLUMINATION

In eternity, God selected those whom he would save. In time, Christ satisfied divine justice on behalf of these chosen ones. Then, throughout history (even before Christ arrived, but in anticipation of his arrival), the Spirit applies the blessings foreordained by God and obtained by Christ to the chosen ones by (giving them and energizing their) faith in Christ. One of the foundational blessings is intellectual – it is the gift of "all wisdom and understanding" (1:8).

The word translated "wisdom" is *sophia*. It has a rich background in Greek thought, and stresses acuity and insight in the academic, theoretical, and philosophical. In our context, since Paul is referring to what God gives us by revelation and impartation, it would include acuity, insight, knowledge, and intelligence regarding the doctrinal and theological. The context accentuates this aspect of the word, but it remains under the broad meaning of *sophia*. Thus it is by our biblical wisdom and theological insight that we address the philosophical issues, the ultimate questions that non-Christians struggle in vain to answer. God has made us master philosophers through Jesus Christ.

The word translated "understanding" is *phronēsis*, and is elsewhere translated "insight," "prudence," and "sound sense." Although the two words are not always precisely distinguished, in this context it seems correct to maintain a difference, so that whereas "wisdom" emphasizes the philosophical (or in a biblical context, the theological), "prudence" emphasizes practical wisdom, or insight concerning the right use of means to attain the desired ends, and that leads to right action. So the first word stresses the theological, and the second stresses the practical.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> To address one point of confusion, the words refer to qualities that God gives, and not qualities that God exercises. The context lends itself to this understanding, and the parallel verse in Colossians 1:9 is clear that Paul refers to something that God gives us: "...asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding."

Barclay writes, "It is Paul's claim that Jesus brought us *sophia*, the intellectual knowledge which satisfies the mind, and *phronēsis*, the practical knowledge which enables us to handle the day to day problems of practical life and living."<sup>67</sup> God has made us philosophically and practically competent. Christians are people who know how to think and how to live. Max Turner notes that this wisdom and prudence are "at the heart of our walk with God."<sup>68</sup> Therefore, "Christian" anti-intellectuals and irrationalists are enemies of the gospel.

This wisdom and prudence come from God's grace, which he "lavished" on us (v. 8). The word refers to a superabundance, an excessive amount, and an overflowing measure. Paul is speaking of "an oversized grace,"<sup>69</sup> out of which God confers upon us all wisdom and prudence – all philosophical, theological, ethical, and practical knowledge. This does not mean that God has given us omniscience<sup>70</sup> – the emphasis is probably on every kind of wisdom – but it means that God has given us something comprehensive, something that is more than sufficient.

What treachery it is to say that the Bible is insufficient as a comprehensive intellectual foundation! What blasphemy it is to say that the Bible is insufficient to address every need! God's revelation is more than enough to produce a complete worldview and philosophy, and to provide definite answers to our practical and ethical issues. Yet Christians glibly say, "The Bible does not address this," and then proceed to think about their problems as if this is indeed the case. They are very quick to assume that the Bible is insufficient, but very slow to admit that they are too lazy and stupid to find out what the Bible says.

Instead, a Christian should say: "The Scripture claims to be sufficient to make me 'thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:17). Since I have this problem or this decision to make, the Bible must have an answer. The problem is never in the Bible, but in my ignorance of what it teaches, and in my laziness. If there is something that the Bible does not address, then it means that I do not need to know it in order to have a comprehensive worldview, or to make wise and ethical decisions. The Bible contains all the information necessary for me to be a good and growing Christian in every way. Although I might not live up to all that it teaches, all the information that I need is in there, and it is my duty and delight to study and obey it."

There is hope for someone who thinks this way. The Bible promises, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). On the other hand, many people set up their own ignorance as God's judge. They assume that if they do not know what the Bible says about something,

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<sup>67</sup> Barclay, p. 83.

<sup>68</sup> Max Turner, "Ephesians," in *New Bible Commentary: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Edition*; InterVarsity Press, 1994; p. 1226.

<sup>69</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest, *Ephesians and Colossians*; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953; p. 42.

<sup>70</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians*; Hendrickson Publishers, 2001; p. 368.

then the Bible does not say anything about it. This sinful attitude brings destruction upon themselves.

Since the Bible is sufficient, it is shameful for Christians to seek answers to the ultimate questions from scientists and philosophers, who know nothing themselves, and to seek instructions on practical living from psychologists, self-improvement experts, or gurus and fortune-tellers. Are these so-called Christians stupid and spineless, and in desperate need of proper teaching, or they are in fact non-Christians, who are as dogs returning to their vomit, and pigs returning to the mud (2 Peter 2:22)?

Paul teaches that God's revelation to us covers all that is needed for human thought and conduct, and all that is needed for salvation and holiness. Thus the Christian faith addresses both the philosophical and the practical. In connection with this, Foulkes writes, "If this is correct, it follows that the wisdom of God is not merely intellectual or academic...it is also the source of understanding in the details of daily living."<sup>71</sup> Many others make this point; however, they often forget that this also works the other way. Paul just as clearly shows that the wisdom of God is not merely "the source of understanding in the details of daily living," but that it is also "intellectual or academic." If biblical wisdom is not only philosophical but also practical, then it is not only practical but also philosophical. And if there are indeed some who stress the intellectual too much – as if this makes sense to say, since even practical wisdom cannot be non-mental, or non-intellectual – there are many more who do not stress it enough.

Many writers fail to grasp that it is misleading to "balance" the intellectual with the practical, or the practical with the intellectual. In this verse, both "wisdom" and "prudence" are by definition given to the mind. It is not as if "wisdom" is given to your mind, and "prudence" is given to your toes. In this sense, both wisdom and prudence are "intellectual." The difference is not that one is intellectual and the other one is non-intellectual, but that they refer to intellectual wisdom about different things. Therefore, God's gift of "wisdom and prudence" refers to a comprehensive revelation and impartation of intellectual wisdom, granting us understanding regarding all philosophical issues and practical things. Let us destroy all traces of anti-intellectualism in our thinking. An anti-intellectual Christianity is anti-Christianity.<sup>72</sup>

## REVELATION

Faith in Christ has been the basis for salvation under both the old and the new administrations of God's grace. Nevertheless, under the new administration, there is a fuller revelation of "the mystery of his will" (v. 9). The revelation of this "mystery" corresponds to God's gift of "wisdom and prudence." This means that when God gives us this wisdom and prudence, he endows us with intellectual potential and capabilities, and he also reveals to us actual information to learn and apply.

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<sup>71</sup> Foulkes, p. 59.

<sup>72</sup> Scholars perpetuate the myth that "wisdom" in the Bible is mainly practical and ethical, but our passage and many others show that biblical wisdom is both philosophical and practical, and that these are one in Christ. The scholars take their position because of their false piety and anti-intellectual assumptions.

Anti-intellectuals love the word "mystery," and they abuse it. When they use the word, they refer to something that we cannot understand, and so they sometimes add that we should not think too much about it. They often use the word to escape a doctrine or argument that they cannot refute but at the same time refuse to accept. When they do this, they behave like the non-Christians, who are intellectually dishonest and incompetent.

Sometimes when I explain a doctrine to someone, he would sigh and say, "Well, I guess it is a mystery, and we cannot understand it." I would explain it again, and answer all his objections. After he runs out of excuses, he would say it again: "Well, I guess it is a mystery." I would explain it to him once more, until he cannot tell me what he does not understand, and until he cannot come up with more questions. And then he would say it again: "Well, I guess it is a mystery." He is a liar. He understands the doctrine, but he refuses to accept it, and he avoids it by putting on a false piety. If God has revealed a doctrine in plain words, then to call it a "mystery" in the sense of something still hidden, is to defy him to his face. We must condemn the illegitimate appeal to mystery, because it is an attempt to excuse unbelief and rebellion.

In the Bible, "mystery" does not refer to something that is unknowable or incomprehensible. Paul writes that God gives us "wisdom and prudence," and that "he made known to us the mystery of his will" (v. 8). He says the "mystery" is something that has been "made known." So it does not mean something that we cannot know or understand, but something that, even if it was hidden, has now been revealed and explained.<sup>73</sup>

Therefore, O'Brien calls the mystery an "open secret."<sup>74</sup> Markus Barth is more elaborate, and writes:

But the one *mystērion* of God, even the "secret" of God, is for Paul far from unknowable. It is known by revelation and is to be made known all over the world. Certainly he has the highest respect for the revelation and gospel entrusted to him – but it is respect caused by knowledge rather than by ignorance and incompetence....The "secret" of which he speaks can therefore not be identified with a mystery wholly or partly, always or temporarily, actually or intentionally shrouded in a cloud bank. He does not engage in paradoxical logic or glossolalia. Plain, frank, sober, courageous talk, though tinted with characteristics of the diction of prayer, is the way he speaks of God's secret. In short, when he speaks of one *mystērion*, then he means a mystery that is revealed; all he has to say is based on the manifestation of the formerly hidden.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> In another context, Luther writes, "Does not Paul acknowledge it to be wisdom hidden in a mystery, foretold indeed by the prophets but revealed only by the gospel, so that it was from eternity secret and unknown to the world (cf. 1 Cor. 2:7)?" (Luther, p. 306). A "mystery" refers to something foretold by the prophets, and explained by the gospel. See also Romans 16:25-26; 1 Corinthians 2:7-10; Ephesians 3:2-6, 6:19; Colossians 1:25-27, 2:2-3, 4:3.

<sup>74</sup> O'Brien, p. 109.

<sup>75</sup> Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1-3* (The Anchor Bible, Vol. 34); Doubleday, 1974; p. 126.

The Bible leaves no room for anti-intellectualism, and offers no excuse for withholding agreement or obedience. The appeal to "mystery" as something unknown or incomprehensible sounds pious to those who are out of touch with the Christian faith, as one pretends to be overwhelmed by the depth and wonder of divine wisdom. However, when this appeal is made in the face of clear revelation, it only betrays the person's laziness and defiance. If God has revealed something, then we should learn it and believe it.

## **RECONCILIATION**

What is this mystery? What is this "secret" that was once hidden, but now has been revealed? Paul would elaborate on this later, but the immediate context gives us some indications.

First, whatever this "mystery" concerning "his will" is about, it is founded on God's sovereignty, and performed by the Son. Paul writes that it is "according to his good pleasure" (v. 9), which "he purposed in Christ" (v. 9), and to be executed at his appointed time (v. 10).

Then, Paul states that the mystery of his will is "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (v. 10). The word translated "to bring...together" or "summing up" (NASB) designates, in mathematics, the practice of adding up a column of figures and placing the sum at the top, and in rhetoric, the conclusion of a speech or argument. God's "secret" plan is to "sum up" "all things in heaven and on earth" under Christ.

There is a general sense in which God is summing up all things in Christ. Paul first refers to a cosmic unity. This is not restricted to salvation or to believers, but it covers "all things"; however, it does not mean that all things will be peaceably reconciled to God in Christ. Rather, Paul has in mind the same thing that he speaks of in Philippians 2:9-11, that God has exalted Christ to the highest place, so that all will "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Many will do this not out of reverence, but by compulsion under God's judgment. In this sense, when God brings together "all things" under Christ, this includes all the things that will never come to God in peace, such as Satan, the demons, and the reprobates.

In other words, God will put everything in its proper place by defining and showing its relation to Christ. This does not mean that every person will be saved, since not every relationship with Christ is a relationship that saves. As Christ himself said, "He who is not with me is against me" (Matthew 12:30). No one is neutral. Every person is either his friend or his enemy – the Christian is his friend, and the non-Christian is his enemy.

Since God is the one who directs all of history, and since this teaching states the purpose toward which God directs all of history, it is therefore a necessary principle for the true interpretation of history, or historical events, times, and persons. That is, since God directs all of history – every detail of it – with the intent to sum up all things in Christ, this means that the only way to have an accurate view of history is to adopt this principle as the



presupposition for the understanding of history. This must apply to all historical events, times, and persons, even to the least significant decisions and occurrences.

It follows that non-Christians cannot be good historians. No matter how knowledgeable they claim to be, unless they presuppose the sovereignty of God and the primacy of Christ, they are incompetent and inaccurate. Since all of history follows God's plan, to exclude Christ in historical investigations is also to destroy the possibility for understanding. To neglect the intent and design of the one who causes history is to guarantee the misinterpretation of history. Christ must be our intellectual starting point, and the principle of interpretation in the study of history.

Then, there is a specific sense in which God is summing up all things in Christ, as he brings together his chosen ones under Christ in salvation. After Paul says that God will "bring all things" together under Christ, he immediately continues:

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... (Ephesians 1:11-13)

He makes a distinction between Jews and non-Jews (or Gentiles).<sup>76</sup> However, he does not make the distinction to emphasize the difference between them; rather, he makes the distinction so that he may point out how the two groups have now been united by the foreordination of God, the atonement of Christ, and the work of the Spirit.

This unity in Christ is founded on God's predetermined plan. It was God who decided that he would choose both Jews and non-Jews for salvation. To be more precise, it was God who decided that he would *create* some as Jews and some as Gentiles those whom he has conceived in his mind and chosen in eternity. The Jews and Gentiles did not create and present themselves to God for his choosing, but God created some of his chosen ones as Jews, and created some of his chosen ones as Gentiles.

To paraphrase, "The mystery of his will is that he will sum up all things under Christ. Specifically, he has predestined some of us Jews to first believe in Christ, but he has predestined some of you Gentiles to also believe in Christ. By causing us to have faith in the same gospel, God has placed you Gentile believers in Christ in the same way that he has placed us Jewish believers in Christ." Paul clearly has this in mind. As he writes later in the letter:

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<sup>76</sup> See also Ephesians 2:11-13, 3:1-6, and 4:17.

Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the *mystery made known* to me by revelation, as I have *already written briefly*. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand *my insight into the mystery* of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as *it has now been revealed* by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 3:2-6)

Verse 6 explains the "mystery" in plain words: "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus." By a common faith in Jesus Christ, the Gentile Christians are "heirs together," "members together," and "sharers together" with the Jewish Christians. As Paul writes elsewhere, "For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'" (Romans 10:12-13).

In the general sense, the mystery is the unity of the cosmos under Christ (everything is put into its proper place in relation to him), and in the specific sense, the mystery is the unity of the elect under Christ (Jews and Gentiles are one and equal in him). This is so easy to understand that the issue becomes why it is a "mystery" in the first place. The answer corresponds to the nature of what the Bible means by "mystery," that it is something that was hidden, but now revealed. As R. B. Kuiper writes:

...salvation is for gentiles as well as Jews. For us who live in the twentieth century after Christ it is difficult, if not impossible, to grasp the novelty of that truth for the Jews of the first century of the Christian era. It impressed them as being exceedingly radical. So deeply was the fact that God showed His word unto Jacob, His statues and His judgments unto Israel, and that He dealt thus with no other nation (Ps. 147:19f.) ingrained into the very fibre of the Jewish soul, that it rebelled violently against the notion that the middle wall of partition between Jew and gentile had been broken down and that peace was to be preached to them that were afar off as well as to them that were nigh (Eph. 2:14, 17).

The Jews of that day were almost totally blind to what appears to us to be, and really is, the plain and emphatic teaching of the Old Testament: that the national church would one day blossom forth into a universal church. In spite of the fact that the Master had on numerous occasions commanded the disciples to be His witnesses to the utmost parts of the earth, it required a vision and a voice from

heaven to convince the apostle Peter of the propriety of preaching the gospel to a Roman...<sup>77</sup>

Therefore, we might not regard this doctrine as a mystery because it has now been revealed and explained, so that we already know it and assume it.

Nevertheless, the doctrine is still necessary and relevant. Christians often contradict it. For example, it is popular to assume that God regards the Jewish people as especially chosen and superior to the Gentiles. However, this rejects the "mystery" that has now been revealed and explained for so many centuries. It regresses to the unbelief and blindness of those who crucified Jesus Christ.

First, Gentiles are equal heirs in Christ; therefore, Jews are not superior in Christ. Then, the Jews who do not believe the gospel are not in Christ at all, and they are certainly not superior to anybody. Non-Christian Jews are doomed to burn in hell just as much as the most vile and wicked non-Christian Gentiles. "There is no difference" (Romans 3:22, 10:12).

When Jesus told the Jews, "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Matthew 21:43), he was not making an empty threat. The church now mainly consists of Gentiles, not Jews. The Jews have no special place in the kingdom, but they must enter like everyone else, through faith in Jesus Christ. They are to receive no special treatment and no special respect in the church (Galatians 3:28).<sup>78</sup> This is basic to the Christian faith.

## **CERTIFICATION**

According to God's foreordination, he would save the Jewish elect and the Gentile elect in the same way, by giving them faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Paul writes, "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you'" (Galatians 3:8). Although the Jews were chronologically "the first to hope in Christ" (Ephesians 1:12), the Gentiles "also were included in Christ" by hearing and believing the gospel (v. 13).

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<sup>77</sup> R. B. Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die?*; Wipf and Stock Publishers; p. 31. Thus a "mystery" is not always even completely hidden, since what is now fully explained has been "the plain and emphatic teaching of the Old Testament." God stated his intention to save the Gentiles long ago, even in his promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3), and he said it over and over again by the prophets.

<sup>78</sup> Of course, they should not receive worse treatment and less respect than others, but they should never be considered superior just because they are Jews. Romans 3:1-2 mentions an advantage that the Jews had in the past, because they had the Scripture. However, they no longer possess this advantage. First, the Jews have rejected the Old Testament, which told them to believe in Christ (John 5:46-47). Second, Gentile Christians also have the Old Testament, so that the Jews do not have an advantage over them. Third, Gentile Christians believe in Christ, so that they understand and believe the Old Testament more than the Jews. Fourth, Gentile Christians have the New Testament, so that they have the complete Scripture, more than the Jews. If a Jew were to repent and believe in Jesus Christ, then he would become equal to a Gentile Christian, but he would not be superior. Race is irrelevant. As Paul continues to say, "What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin" (Romans 3:9).

Then, Paul says, "Having believed, you were *marked in him with a seal*, the promised Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13). In the ancient world, a seal was often applied to a letter, a legal document, a piece of property, or an important shipment in order to protect it, and to serve as a proof of ownership or authenticity. A sealed letter or shipment was meant to be opened only by the designated recipient, and depending on the person whose seal marked the item, to illegally break a seal could result in grave consequences.

When we believed the gospel, God sealed us with his Holy Spirit. By this, he officially declares that he owns and protects us, and that we are not to be tempted with by anyone else. And we have been sealed for a purpose. As Paul writes later in the letter, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed *for the day of redemption*" (4:30). The seal of God upon us means that, by his authority and power, he has decreed that we will remain in the state of faith and grace, and that we will reach the completion of our redemption.

Indeed, God has sealed us by the Holy Spirit, who is "a deposit *guaranteeing* our inheritance" (v. 14). A "deposit" refers to a down payment or first installment provided by the buyer. This is to signify his intention to complete the purchase and to reserve the item so that it becomes unavailable to any other party.

Today it is possible to forfeit the deposit if a person no longer desires the item or if he cannot produce the rest of the money, but at that time, it seems that the "deposit" refers to a partial payment or a pledge guaranteeing that the full payment would follow. In any case, Paul's use of "deposit" indicates much more than a mere gesture of God's intention, because he states that it is a guarantee that God will complete what he has started in us. He repeats the same thought to the Corinthians: "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 1:21-22), and "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" (5:5).

Therefore, Paul teaches that once a person becomes a Christian, it is impossible for him to become a non-Christian again. After God causes a person to have faith in Christ, it is impossible for him to lose the faith (John 10:29). Although Christians often stumble, sometimes even into great sins, it is impossible for them to be truly and finally lost (Luke 22:32). Rather, if a person truly and finally denounces the faith, it means that he has never been a true Christian in the first place, no matter how much he appeared to be one. As John writes, "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us" (1 John 2:19).

This does not mean that once a person becomes a Christian, then he may constantly and deliberately sin and still remain a Christian. If he is a true Christian, he would not behave this way. And if he behaves this way, he is not a true Christian. Since a Christian is one who has been inwardly changed by God, he will not truly and finally adopt a licentious lifestyle. A Christian who has temporarily stumbled into a sinful way of living might lack

assurance of salvation. Although he is still saved, he is not certain of it, and this disturbing condition is often one of the means by which God restores the believer. The Christian receives assurance of salvation by the witness of the Spirit (Romans 8:16), and he maintains and strengthens it through knowledge and holiness (2 Peter 1:10).

Some people call this the doctrine of "eternal security." Then, others call it "the perseverance of the saints." This is not wrong, since Christians indeed persevere in their faith; however, we *persevere* in faith only because God *preserves* us by his power. As Paul writes in the same context where he mentions God's seal and deposit, "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:21; also see 1 Peter 1:3-5). Therefore, we should prefer to call it "the preservation of believers" or "the preservation of the saints."

In connection with the "deposit," Paul calls us "God's possession" (v. 14). This seems to be an allusion to how God addresses Israel in the Old Testament. For example, God says in Exodus 19:5-6, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be *my treasured possession*. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me *a kingdom of priests* and *a holy nation*." Peter takes up the same expressions and applies them to the church: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (1 Peter 2:9, NASB). And he clearly has Gentile believers in mind: "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (v. 10; see Romans 9:23-26).

Gentile Christians are just as much "God's people" as the Jews were in the past. In fact, the Jews who did not believe in Jesus Christ of Nazareth through the types and promises about him were never considered God's people. As Paul says, "For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel" (Romans 9:6). If a Jew wishes to become one of God's people, he must believe in Jesus Christ. Just because he is a Jew means nothing: "For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham" (Luke 3:8). It means nothing to have the blood of Abraham, because only those who follow the faith of Abraham are the descendants of Abraham (Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:7). He was a Christian, for he saw Jesus, and rejoiced (John 8:56).

"The Lord knows those who are his" (2 Timothy 2:19). If God has given us faith in Christ, then we are among his chosen ones; if we are among his chosen ones, then we are his special possession; and if we are his special possession, then he has given us his guarantee that he will jealously protect and preserve us to the day of redemption by his almighty power.

## CONCLUSION

Our doctrine is consistent with the purpose of God, that he does all things "to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:14; also v. 6 and 12), only when we ascribe the initiative and the power in every aspect and every stage of our salvation to him alone. God is one "who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (v. 11), and not one who

considers man's permission and opinion. Since there is divine sovereignty, there is no human freedom, or free will – "only an insane person could believe both of these."<sup>79</sup>

Paul's doxology introduces his letter and contains the main themes of the letter. He makes predestination the foundation of the doxology, and therefore he makes predestination the foundation of the whole letter. God is the one who foreordained all things in eternity, and who executes his decrees in time and in history. The rest of this letter discusses how he has been carrying out his decrees, and our proper response as believers.

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<sup>79</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *Today's Evangelism*; The Trinity Foundation, 1990; p. 58.

### 3. REGENERATION

#### EPHESIANS 1:15-23

**For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.**

**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.**

From the doxology of 1:3-14, Paul turns to thanksgiving and prayer in verse 15.<sup>1</sup> Then, as Patzia notes, "It is possible to regard 1:20-3:13 as a long doctrinal parenthesis in which the apostle develops his ideas on the unity of Jew and Gentile in the church (2:11, 12) and expounds upon his personal role as a messenger of the gospel (3:1-13)."<sup>2</sup> He takes up the prayer again in 3:14-19, as if to continue what he started in 1:15. After 1:3-14, the next major section appears to be 1:15-2:10, and so this will be the focus of this chapter of the commentary.

Many people complain that the biblical doctrine of divine sovereignty turns prayer into a meaningless exercise. They claim that if God predetermines all things, then there is no reason to pray. However, this objection arises from false assumptions about prayer, and the false assumptions result in a concept of prayer that contradicts various biblical doctrines.

The objection is blasphemous. Since they think that divine sovereignty makes prayer meaningless, and since they insist on keeping prayer meaningful, they must reject the biblical doctrine of divine sovereignty. This kind of thinking cannot stop here, but it must continue to strike at the nature of God. As Jesus says, "Your Father knows what you need

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<sup>1</sup> See D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*; Baker Books, 1992; p. 167-180.

<sup>2</sup> Patzia, p. 163.

before you ask him" (Matthew 6:8). If prayer is pointless because God foreordains all things, then prayer should also be pointless because God knows all things. He already knows what they wish to tell him.

The objection obligates them to reject multiple divine attributes, not only the one that they despise. They must reject God himself. In other words, they claim that God – his very existence – makes prayer meaningless, and they must reject God so that prayer would not become meaningless. However, if anything truly makes prayer meaningless, it is the rejection of God. Thus the objection condemns itself by its blasphemy, and then consumes itself by its irony.

If their concept of prayer involves dictating the plan of God or informing the mind of God, then it is not Christian prayer, because it contradicts what God has revealed about himself. The Bible does not teach that prayer makes God do something that he does not already want to do, or tells him something that he does not already know. Rather, prayer is one of the means by which God performs what he has already decided to do, and to provide what he already knows that we need. This accords with both divine sovereignty and divine omniscience.

God is sovereign, and he foreordains and causes even our prayers to him. For one to think that prayer becomes meaningless if God predetermines all things, he must either assume that God does not in fact predetermine all things, or that he cannot cause our prayers and then use them as the occasions to perform what he has predetermined. The first fails to represent divine sovereignty, so that it fails to attack divine sovereignty in relation to prayer. The second is arrogant and blasphemous, as if we could tell God how he should perform his decrees.

Paul does not think that God's sovereignty and predestination make prayer meaningless. In fact, he prays on the basis of what he has just said about God's sovereignty and predestination. Our confidence in prayer is founded on the fact that God controls all circumstances. Our faith in praying for the conversion and progress of people is founded on the fact that God controls all people, including their thoughts, desires, and motives. Prayer is meaningful precisely because of God's sovereignty, and not apart from it or in spite of it.<sup>3</sup>

Paul's prayer follows from what he has stated in 1:3-14, and especially verses 13 and 14. He gives thanks because God is sovereign, because God has predestined believers for salvation, because God has chosen to sum up all things in Christ, because God has decided to save and unite Jews and Gentiles in Christ, and because God is carrying out this decree in the lives of his readers.

Hearing about their "faith," Paul says that he gives thanks "for" them, not "to" them. This is because faith is not initiated and controlled by the people themselves, but it is a gift from God. As D. A. Carson notes, "If we hear of substantial numbers of people in another city or country who have been genuinely transformed by the gospel, we would not think of

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<sup>3</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Prayer and Revelation*.



going to them to thank them for becoming Christians. Instead, we thank God for so working in them that they have become Christians. That is what Paul is doing."<sup>4</sup>

If faith comes from men's "free will," then it would not be outrageous to attribute some of the thanksgiving and praise to them. Thus the false doctrine of free will is inextricably blasphemous. Rather than thanking the converts for becoming Christians, or praising them for their good sense in accepting the gospel, we must thank God alone for causing them to become Christians, and praise him alone for his wisdom and kindness in rescuing the people from sin and death by his sovereign grace and power.

Paul directs his prayer to "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father." Religions are different from one another. The Christian faith is the only true religion from the only true God. All other religions, philosophies, and worldviews lead to hell. Thus Paul does not pray to Allah or Buddha, or any other god, but he is praying to one who is different from, greater than, and hostile to Allah and Buddha, and all other gods. His idea of God is definite and exclusive. He does not pray to a generic deity, and there is no such thing as a generic deity. Rather, he prays to him who has a specific relationship with Jesus Christ, and who has a specific relationship with believers through Jesus Christ.

Although Paul is thankful to God for their conversion and for the spiritual stability they enjoy, he prays that God would grant them greater progress. This is because his aim has never been conversion alone, but it is to "present everyone perfect in Christ" (Colossians 1:28), so that conversion is only the beginning of what should happen in the people. Therefore, the apostle and the converts could not become complacent, but they must strive toward perfection by the power of God, by the ability that God gives them.

For this reason, Paul prays that God would give them "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation." The word translated "spirit" in itself can refer to the Holy Spirit, the human spirit, or a quality or condition of the mind. The meaning is not always immediately obvious, and so one must take into account the context.

Some commentators observe that when "spirit" is preceded by the definite article ("the"), the expression often refers to the Spirit of God, and so would be rendered "the Spirit." In this case, the definite article is absent, but this does not automatically mean that Paul is referring to the human spirit. The other possibility is that it refers to an endowment or manifestation of the Spirit of God.

The context points to the last interpretation. Paul is asking God to give the readers this "spirit," when we know from verse 13 that they have already received the Holy Spirit, and because they are human beings, each of them already have a human spirit. Moreover, his request for "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation" parallels what immediately follows, that is, his request that "the eyes of your heart may be enlightened."

Therefore, because they have already received the Holy Spirit, Paul's prayer is not that God would grant them the Holy Spirit, and because they are already human beings, his prayer

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<sup>4</sup> Carson, *Spiritual Reformation*; p. 171.

is not that God would grant each of them a human spirit. Rather, Paul is asking God to grant them the intellectual quality of "wisdom and revelation," or as he puts it in his letter to the Colossians, he is asking God to give them "spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Colossians 1:9). So some translations say, "*a spirit* of wisdom and revelation." Of course, this wisdom is the result of the Holy Spirit's work in the human mind. Therefore, Wuest concludes:

The word *pneuma* has among its various uses the meaning, "a disposition or influence which fills and governs the soul of anyone." What Paul is praying for is that God might so work in the lives of the Ephesian saints that they will have the spiritual wisdom and a revelation from Him that is the result of the Holy Spirit's work of energizing their human spirit. That spiritual disposition should characterize these saints.<sup>5</sup>

The foundation of this request must be God's sovereignty over all things. Praying for wisdom presupposes God's control over the mind of man and his direct contact with it. It is blasphemy to say that God does not have control over all things, and it is unbiblical and inconsistent to say that God has control over all things, but that the human mind somehow has free will to control itself. Scripture testifies that God enlightens some and confounds others according to his will and pleasure.<sup>6</sup> His sovereignty extends to the mind of man. Nothing escapes his control.

Paul's priority is intellectual, and his prayer reflects this. A Christian operates by an intellectual understanding of revelation from God. He strives to learn the biblical doctrines, and then he obeys them and lives by them. He lives and grows by knowledge, by knowledge about the things of God. When Paul prays that his readers would receive spiritual wisdom, that they would receive an intellectual acuity about spiritual things, he is in effect praying that God would open to them the way to sustained spiritual blessing and progress.

Spiritual wisdom is something that Paul asks God to give his readers, implying that it is not something we can attain solely by human effort. Although God employs human ministers to teach and to convince, only God himself can make this work effective (1 Corinthians 3:6). He sends human agents to approach and confront those who are spiritually blind, but the words become effective only when he directly works in the minds of the hearers, causing spiritual light to break forth from within (2 Corinthians 4:4-6).

Even after conversion, spiritual progress can come only from the work of God within the mind of man. God sends men to speak from the outside, but this provides only the occasion upon which God might choose to illuminate from the inside. Therefore, just as we cannot boast about our conversion, except for what Christ has done in us, we cannot boast about our progress in sanctification, except for what Christ continues to do in us. Although we

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<sup>5</sup> Wuest, p. 52.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel 1:17-20, 4:29-37, 5:21.

are speaking of biblical soteriology (Matthew 16:16-17), this point is an explicit biblical teaching in itself, and a necessary implication and application of biblical epistemology.<sup>7</sup>

Paul's request for "a spirit of wisdom and revelation" parallels his request that God would enlighten "the eyes of your heart." There are those who construe this to mean that we should expect revelations of new doctrines and extra-biblical information. Then, based on the language of this passage, some people suggest that it is insufficient for us to grasp the word of God only in our minds, but our knowledge must move "from our heads to our hearts," and that we must not believe the word of God "only in our heads, but also in our hearts."

However, although it is true that God continues to speak to people even after he has completed the Bible, the passage is referring to something else, and there is nothing here to justify the "head-heart" distinction.

When we examine verses 17 and 18 in context, what comes before and what comes after these verses tell us precisely what Paul wants his readers to understand. The prayer is merely an acknowledgment that although human ministers can teach about spiritual things, God must directly work within to cause comprehension and agreement. It does not refer to extra-biblical revelation.

As for the teaching about the "head" and the "heart," this is an unbiblical distinction, and it is unbiblical to suggest that man thinks with his "head" in the first place. The teaching assumes a heretical view of man's construction and operation. If man really thinks with his "head," as in his physical head or brain, then no thinking can remain after the body dies, but this would contradict biblical teaching on man's continual consciousness after death. Rather, man thinks with his incorporeal mind. This might or might not produce corresponding effects in the brain, but the man does not think with his brain, and he can continue to think even after the brain dies and the spirit leaves the body.

It is often asserted that the "heart" refers to the "whole personality," and that this must include "the mind, the will, and the emotions." However, the Bible does not divide the "heart" into these parts, but it seems that they were derived from non-Christian psychology. The idea is absurd in itself – it implies that the will and the emotions are somehow different or separate from the mind, that they are non-mind or non-mental. This is obviously false. Our decisions and emotions are mental – there is no such thing as a non-mental decision or a non-mental emotion. The mind thinks, makes decisions, and exhibits emotions. Now if the "heart" is the "whole personality," and this refers to all of the mind's operations in its thoughts, decisions, and emotions, then this means that the mind is the heart. The whole mind of man *is* the "whole personality" of man, or the heart of man.

Therefore, "the eyes of your heart" is just another way to say "the understanding of your mind." Paul is emphasizing a person's "thinking."<sup>8</sup> He is praying for his readers to receive an intellectual understanding about spiritual things, especially the doctrines that he

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<sup>7</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions*.

<sup>8</sup> O'Brien, p. 134.

mentions in this letter. As Psalm 119:18 states, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."

This point has tremendous implications for Christian life and development. As long as Christians think that spiritual wisdom entails something "beyond" the intellectual understanding of spiritual things, they will keep trying to grasp biblical truths with this non-mental part of the person. The problem is that there is no such non-mental part in man, so that they will always be striving to accomplish something that cannot be done, with a part of the person that does not exist. We should not chase after mystical fantasies but embrace the simplicity of the biblical model, that the mind is the foundation for spiritual progress, which consists of learning and obeying what God has revealed.

Another implication of Paul's prayer is that spiritual enlightenment comes from God, who is a personal intelligence, and by using the means that this God has ordained. It does not come from harnessing one's own abilities, or manipulating impersonal forces or demonic powers. In fact, Scripture contradicts the idea that we possess inherent abilities to attain spiritual enlightenment, and of course, to cooperate with impersonal forces or demonic powers can only lead to disaster.

The biblical way to spiritual growth opposes mystical, occult, and deistic tendencies. Although God has ordained various means for us to make spiritual progress, and although they are founded on an intellectual understanding of what he has revealed, God's direct action remains necessary to render them effective. Thus rejecting anti-intellectualism and mysticism does not result in deism; rather, biblical intellectualism depends on God's immanence – his power constantly at work in our lives and our minds. Therefore, while we take advantage of the means that God has provided for our spiritual progress, we continue to petition him for spiritual enlightenment.

Biblical intellectualism stands against the occult and counterfeit spiritual teachings. It opposes the kind of "meditation" in which one empties his mind, repeats a mantra, or focuses on the self or the world. Biblical meditation is not passive non-thinking, but it is deliberate and rigorous theological thinking, disciplining the mind to focus on God's word. The purpose is not to deify the self or to become God, but to humble the self and to honor God. Non-Christian attempts at spiritual enlightenment are not only absurd and useless, but they are destructive.

One young man tried to improve his intellect and attain spiritual power through a studious lifestyle of occult study and meditation. Instead of gaining what he desired, this so crippled his mind that sometimes he had difficulty performing even basic mental functions. Then, God sovereignly and suddenly converted him, and inwardly moved him to read through the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation. Although he could not appreciate all that he read, by the time he reached the end of Revelation, his mind was cured, and even made better than before.

The process was not mystical or spectacular, and appeared rather intellectual and ordinary, but it was by this seemingly mundane practice that true spiritual power was finally

unleashed in his life. The God-ordained means of reading the Bible provided the occasion for divine power to work within, resulting in a great deliverance and true spiritual enlightenment. The damage that had accumulated over many years was reversed in a matter of days by just "reading a book." This is the power and wisdom of God.

Christians often blaspheme God in their unbelief and hardness of heart by claiming that his power has ceased in its miraculous operations. These are already defeated, and enslaved by the devil. Then, there are those who exchange true spiritual power with counterfeit spiritual power. Rather than wielding intellectual weapons inspired and energized by "divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4), they have embraced mystical practices inspired and energized by their own flesh. The strongholds that we must demolish consist of intellectual "arguments" (v. 5). Many people misunderstand the nature of this conflict, that we are to "take captive every thought," and so they spend their time screaming prayers and rebukes at demons in the sky.<sup>9</sup>

We ought to examine our priorities in prayer and in life. What do we ask for in prayer? What do we emphasize in life? Where do we invest our money? How do we spend our time? When it comes to spiritual progress, how do we pray? Paul prays for spiritual wisdom and understanding, and he expects the answer to come in conjunction with the means that God has ordained, that is, through the doctrines of Scripture. He is unlike those who pray to God for spiritual enlightenment, but think that it will come apart from the intellectual means that God has ordained. Therefore, we do not just pray "open my eyes," but we pray, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things *in your law*" (Psalm 119:18).

Paul's priority is intellectual, and under this general concern, there are specific doctrines that he wishes his readers to understand. Just as God grants us not only intellectual potential (v. 8) but also gives us definite information about "the mystery of his will" (v. 9), Paul prays that they will receive not only intellectual potential (v. 17) but also knowledge about specific doctrines. He prays that his readers will "know him better," that they will know "the hope which he has called you," "the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints," and "his incomparably great power for us who believe." In short, he prays that they will know "His calling," "His inheritance," and "His power" (NASB).

It is popular to make a sharp distinction between "knowing God" and "knowing *about* God." However, this is misleading and destructive, because it is impossible to assert, "I

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel 10 tells us what happened in the spirit world when Daniel prayed *to God*. It does not teach us to pray directly against demons or to angels, but we pray to God and trust him to do what needs to be done. Then, we participate in the spiritual conflict and wage war against Satan mainly by preaching and reasoning against demonic ideas in people. Nevertheless, when evil spirits who possess people manifest themselves through them, we should directly address them and cast them out. Since our divine weapons are derived from spiritual wisdom, we must not argue against non-Christian ideas with non-Christian wisdom. For example, it would be futile to argue against secular science only with better secular science, because all non-Christian beliefs and theories are false. Rather, by God's wisdom and power, we demonstrate the superiority of divine wisdom over the entire spectrum of non-Christian ideas. We declare the triumph of Christian theology over all non-Christian thoughts, whether the debate has to do with science, history, politics, ethics, or any other subject. Our strategy is the application of biblical revelation, made effective by divine power.

know God very well, but I know nothing *about* him." The statement is nonsense. To know someone at all is to know something about the person, and to know someone better necessarily means gaining knowledge about him.

In our passage, to "know him better" appears to be a general request that Paul makes more specific by what immediately follows. As Patzia explains, "The following verses reveal the spiritual direction of this request and how it is illustrated and developed. To know God is to 'be enlightened' (1:18a); enlightenment leads to an understanding of the hope of God's call (1:18b), God's blessing (inheritance, 1:18c), and God's power (1:19), as demonstrated in Christ's resurrection (1:20) and exaltation (1:21-23)."<sup>10</sup>

Many people claim that they want to "know God," but they are unwilling to use the means that God has ordained to discover him, because many of them are in fact seeking feelings and experiences instead of knowledge. It is possible that they have no interest in God at all. If one truly wants to know God, then he should take up a systematic theology or a biblical commentary, and read it with prayer.

Knowing God better entails understanding "the hope to which he has called you," or "the hope of His calling" (NASB). Since Christians have been called by God, Paul refers to the "hope of *your* calling" later in the letter (4:4). Here the apostle seems to continue his emphasis that salvation is wholly initiated and effected by God, and so he speaks of "*His* calling." Although the Christians are the ones called by God, Paul stresses that it is God who has called the Christians.

The Christian "hope" is not subjective. It is not a feeling or opinion about God's plan or the Christian's destiny. Rather, it is an objective reality and expectation founded on God's promises. Since the Gentiles were "separate from Christ," they were "*without hope* and without God in the world" (2:12). Non-Christians are in the same condition as these Gentiles were before their conversion – they are hopeless and godless people, living meaningless and worthless lives. When they die, they are thrown into a lake of fire to suffer endless torture.

God has sovereignly rescued these Gentile readers from their futile existence, and has given them hope in Jesus Christ. Paul prays that they would understand what has happened to them, and that they would learn the content of the hope to which God has called them. The content of this hope includes all that the apostle has mentioned, and also what he continues to discuss in the rest of the letter.

Paul prays that his readers will also know "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (NASB). He has mentioned "our inheritance" in verse 14. It seems to parallel Colossians 1:12, which says that "the Father...has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light." So it is certain that Christians possess an inheritance from God.

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<sup>10</sup> Patzia, p. 165.

Nevertheless, some commentators insist that Paul has in mind God's inheritance. Both the broad context of biblical motifs and expressions and the narrow context of this letter permit this understanding. It is appropriate to think of God's people as his possession or inheritance (v. 14b). Scripture teaches both ideas, that Christians have an inheritance from God and that Christians are the inheritance of God. Paul might have the latter in mind in verse 18, and if so, he prays it "dawns on them that God intends to make them with all the saints a wonderful inheritance for himself."<sup>11</sup>

After Paul prays that the Christians would know the hope of God's calling and the glory of God's inheritance, he prays that they would also know "the surpassing greatness of His power" (NASB). It is this power that undergirds the calling and secures the inheritance. The word translated "surpassing" ("incomparably" in NIV) is *hyperballon*, and "it suggests that the conception it is attached to is thrown over into another sphere altogether."<sup>12</sup> When it is followed by *megethos* ("greatness"), the combination "brings out in a most emphatic way the greatness of the power towards those who believe."<sup>13</sup> It denotes an overwhelming superabundance of power.

Then, he presses the point by stacking one synonym on top of another, and writes, "That power [*dynamis*] is like the working [*energia*] of his mighty [*kratos*] strength [*ischys*]" (v. 19). Although the Greek is "highly poetic,"<sup>14</sup> so that a crude English paraphrase cannot do it justice, he is essentially praying that the Christians might know something about the powerful force of the powerful power of God! He adds emphasis on top of emphasis in an attempt to describe the magnitude of God's power.

Paul is referring to not only God's *potential* power, but his *demonstrated* power. He is speaking of not just the power that God *could* exercise, but the power that God *has* exercised. He writes, "That power is like the working of his mighty strength, *which he exerted* in Christ" (v. 20). What did God do with this power? How did he demonstrate it? Paul explains that it was exerted in Christ when God "raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand." It was demonstrated in the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees the resurrection of all those who trust in him (1 Corinthians 6:14, 15:23). This fact is properly understood when considered in connection with his exaltation to God's right hand, that is, to the highest place of authority. God has placed him "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" (v. 21). He fulfills the prophecy of Psalm 110.

Some commentators observe that Paul's readers reside in a region where idolatry, the occult, and various superstitions run rampant (Acts 19:17-19, 24-28), and he probably

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<sup>11</sup> Turner, p. 1227.

<sup>12</sup> A. Skevington Wood, *Ephesians* (The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 11); Zondervan Publishing House, 1978; p. 30.

<sup>13</sup> O'Brien, p. 137.

<sup>14</sup> Patzia, p. 167.

intends to show that "none of the powers they were prone to fear could compare with Jesus."<sup>15</sup> Our struggle is "against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (6:12). Christ has been exalted above all of them, and God has equipped us to stand our ground (6:13-17).<sup>16</sup>

Paul declares that, without exception, Jesus Christ is over "all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in *the present age* but also in *the age to come*." Regardless of who, what, or when these entities are, "God placed *all things* under his feet and appointed him to be *head over everything*" (v. 22). Jesus Christ sits on the right hand of God and rules all things together with God. There is nothing above him or equal to him. His authority secures our protection and victory, because it is "for the church" (v. 22) that God has exalted him, so that his supreme authority directly benefits and empowers those who believe in him.

Some people might think that this revelation of God's power and Christ's exaltation is less relevant today. In this scientific era, surely there is no room for serious consideration of "the powers of this dark world" and "the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"! This is not so. It has been demonstrated that science itself is irrational<sup>17</sup> and superstitious.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, our struggle is still against "the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" (2:2).

Much of the world's population is blatantly idolatrous and superstitious. Most of the rest (including the scientific community) is not essentially better, but only more sophisticated in their idolatries and more "scientific" in their superstitions. Divination is as popular as ever among westerners, and they have added eastern religions and superstitions to their repertoire. Even those who claim to be Christians sometimes affirm that their lives are governed by planetary movements and other natural forces, when Scripture condemns this belief. Some of them even think that if they will rearrange their furniture according to the Feng Shui manual, then wealth and fortune will come their way.

Scientists might deride parapsychology and paranormal research as pseudo-sciences, but they cannot establish their own disciplines of natural sciences on rational grounds. The scientific method cannot even prove empiricism, that when a scientist thinks that he sees something, he really sees what he thinks he sees, and what he sees is really what is real and true. This point alone removes all rational justification from science, even before we get to discuss the logical flaws of scientific reasoning. Since science cannot even tell me if my pencil drops to the floor when I let go of it, or why it drops, it can never refute Feng Shui, because it is just as arbitrary and superstitious.

In contrast, the biblical doctrines of the sovereignty of God, the predestination of men, and the exaltation of Christ constitute the definitive answer to all idolatries and superstitions. Because God is sovereign over all things, because he has predestined all men (either for

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<sup>15</sup> Turner, p. 1228.

<sup>16</sup> Clinton Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians*; p. 52-56.

<sup>17</sup> Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, and Captive to Reason*.

<sup>18</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Sceptical Essays*, "Is Science Superstitious?"



salvation or for damnation), and because he has exalted Christ over all powers, we stand upon a rational and infallible foundation when we deride idolatries and superstitions, condemn all non-Christian religions and philosophies, and refute the ridiculous theories of science.

The missionary preaching in the jungle has no reason to fear the witch doctors, and the believer living in the city has no reason to fear that his window is facing the wrong direction. Likewise, the student studying at the university has no reason to think that his professor's irrational and superstitious method can learn any truth, let alone refute his faith.<sup>19</sup> The convert from a culture that is prone to ancestor worship is now free from the blasphemous practice, and obligated to condemn it. Whether we are speaking of ancient idolatries or modern superstitions, pantheistic mysticism or atheistic science, they are all nonsense. Therefore, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

In fact, the biblical worldview answers not only "adult" superstitions, but it also provides a direct answer to children's fear of ghosts and monsters. Non-Christians might tell their children that there are no ghosts and monsters, but how do they know this? On the basis of science or empiricism, it is impossible to comfort a child who thinks that he has seen a monster. The parent can say nothing unless he suspends his empiricism. Perhaps he should not tell his son, "Believe only what *you can* see and feel," and instead tell him, "Believe only what I tell you *I can* see and feel"! However, this would no longer be scientific or empirical, but it would be the kind of dogmatism that he raises his child to despise, and now he sets up himself as the God who knows all that exists and all that does not exist. The child would have to be as gullible as the parent is stupid and arrogant to put up with this.

On the other hand, Christian parents can tell their children that even if there are ghosts and monsters, Jesus Christ is above all of them, and he will protect and vindicate those who trust in him. Of course, we should teach our children about angels, demons, and the supernatural, and dispel false ideas about them, but even before we do that, the sovereignty of God and the exaltation of Christ provide us with a broad and direct answer to all things concerning the spiritual "powers."

Thus there is no need to act like academics when we deal with theological knowledge and act like mystics when we deal with spiritual power. In effect, Paul is praying that his readers might become better theologians, not greater mystics. But much worse than the mystics are those who disguise their unbelief with the claim that God's power has ceased in its miraculous operations so that we would not have to deal with it at all. A theology that is biblical is also a theology that is powerful. It is a theology that is accompanied by signs, wonders, and healing miracles. For the church to lay hold of God's power for this generation, it needs to understand the sovereignty of God, the predestination of men, and the exaltation of Christ. Faith in these doctrines will inevitably lead to a demonstration of power.

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<sup>19</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *The Philosophy of Science and Belief in God*; The Trinity Foundation, 1996.

Paul writes that God made Christ the head over everything "for the church," and that the church "is his body" (v. 23). The metaphor is rich with meaning and encouragement; however, some people have turned it upside down to reach an application that is the opposite of Paul's intent. For example, William Barclay writes, "To say that the Church is the Body means that Jesus is counting on us."<sup>20</sup> Really? Why? The letter has been telling us that we are the ones counting on him.

The metaphor is intended to illustrate our dependence on Christ and our unity in him, but it has been distorted to portray Christ as helpless and impotent, as one who would be paralyzed without the church. He desperately hopes that we would follow his directions, or as some people teach, that we would "grant him permission" to act on the earth through our prayers and actions. This is blasphemy, and it is the opposite of what the Bible teaches and what Paul writes in this letter.

Metaphors have specific applications, so that they can become misleading when taken out of context. In this case, the metaphor is so clear that it is difficult to misinterpret. Paul writes that God has determined to sum up all things in Christ, and to unite the Jewish elect and the Gentile elect "in Christ." Thus the most natural thing is to say that this "body" of believers are now united under one "head," which is Christ.

When it comes to the physical body, one finger has no direct and inherent relationship with another, and the elbow has no direct and inherent relationship with the knee, but all of these are united by one "head." Likewise, people from various cultures and backgrounds may seem to have little in common, and at first may even be hostile to one another, but they have become one in Christ. This must be at least part of what Paul means, since he writes later in this letter:

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. (Ephesians 2:14-16)<sup>21</sup>

He intends to convey even more by the metaphor. When he refers to it later, he applies it to the relationship between a husband and a wife. He writes, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is *the head* of the wife as Christ is *the head* of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything" (5:22-24).

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<sup>20</sup> Barclay, p. 94.

<sup>21</sup> God gathers his people under one head; therefore, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Anyone who joins himself to another "head" is outside of Christ and the body of God's people. He is doomed to endless torment in hellfire.

When he says that the husband is the head of the wife, he does not mean that the husband is "counting on" the wife, and he does not mean that the wife must "grant him permission" before the husband can do anything. He means the opposite. He explicitly states that, by the "head-body" metaphor, he means that "wives should submit to their husbands in everything." So this is also what he means when he says that the church is Christ's body – it is not that Christ is "counting on" us, but that he is ruling over us. For the church to be Christ's body means that "the church submits to Christ."<sup>22</sup>

As his body, the church indeed functions as an expression of Christ (v. 23b), but we must not suggest that he is helpless without us. Christ himself teaches, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). In contrast, false teachers distort the Bible to claim that "without us, he can do nothing."

The final portion of verse 23 presents several difficulties, but O'Brien's summary is appropriate enough:

By speaking of the church as Christ's "body" and "fulness," he emphatically underlines its significance within God's purposes. Its glorious place in the divine plan, however, provides no grounds for boasting, arrogance, or the display of a "superior air," for the church is wholly dependent on Christ. In itself, it is nothing. Its privileged position comes from its relationship to the One who as head graciously fills it with his presence.

God's predetermined plan to save his people is not based on wishful thinking, because his superabundant power causes it to happen and brings it to completion. Our faith becomes steadfast and immovable when we have an intellectual grasp of the surpassing greatness of this power that he exercised for our benefit (1 Corinthians 15:58, NASB). And our attack against unbelief and heresies will become effective when we boldly preach about the greatness of this power that he unleashed in redemption (Matthew 22:29).

God is zealous to exercise his power to bless his people and to subdue hostile forces. There is no reason for Christians to cower in the face of opposition. The church will succeed in its mission, because Christ is already on the throne. "Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them" (Numbers 14:9).

#### **EPHESIANS 2:1-10**

**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**

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<sup>22</sup> The metaphor communicates other valuable lessons. For example, the fact that Christ is the head implies that he sustains and cares for believers, and that he causes the church to grow (Ephesians 4:16; Colossians 2:19). See O'Brien, p. 148.

**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 by 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.**

Ephesians 2:1-10 continues from 1:15-23 and also prepares for what follows. After Paul discusses the divine power that has been demonstrated in Christ's resurrection and exaltation, he now applies the reality of this power to the believers.

He first defines the original condition of the converts, so that they may understand the context in which God exercised his power in their lives. He uses death to describe their former spiritual condition: "You were dead." He is not speaking of physical death, but spiritual death. He means that they were dead in their "transgressions and sins."

He is referring to not only violent criminals and idol worshipers, but he has in mind all those who "followed the ways of the world." When used in the spiritual and the ethical sense, the "world" designates the sphere of living and influence that is outside of the church, and outside of God's precepts and promises. From this perspective, Scripture recognizes only two groups of people – the Christians and the non-Christians, the believers and the unbelievers, or the church and the world. A person belongs to either one group or the other. There is no third category, and there is no neutral ground.

Many non-Christians consider themselves independent thinkers. They claim that they are free from religious dogmas and common assumptions – they think for themselves. However, if this is true, they would independently investigate the nature of reality. They would discover by themselves every single piece of knowledge about anything they claim to know. Instead of blindly believing what their professors and scientists claim about language, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, archaeology, history, politics, economics, religion, and any other subject, they should directly examine every theory, every assumption, and every piece of "evidence" by themselves, and come up with their own conclusions; otherwise, there is no rational justification for them to go along with theories concerning atoms, evolution, and so forth. But without doing this, they go along with what they are taught anyway.

They are stupid liars. They are not independent thinkers. In fact, they are barely thinkers at all; rather, they follow "the ways of this world," being carried along by the latest dogmas

in science and philosophy. When their theories are no longer fashionable, they change their minds in the name of "progress." What they insisted as true, they are now happy to discard as false. Then, they would hold to this new thinking until "progress" happens again, and again, and again. In other words, they have never been right about anything, and they always affirm the false, the temporary, the worthless.

To follow the ways of the world is not only unintelligent but also demonic, because the thinking of the world is controlled by and patterned after "the ruler of the kingdom of the air." By this expression, Paul refers to "the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." Those who follow the ways of the world are in rebellion against God. As James writes, "Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

By making a distinction between "you" and "us" (v. 1, 3), Paul again distinguishes between the Gentiles and the Jews. As before, he does this only to emphasize the way that the two groups have been reconciled -- he will return to this starting from 2:11. His current emphasis is that the non-Christian Jews were in the same spiritually depraved condition as the non-Christian Gentiles.

Paul describes the depravity of non-Christian Jews from a different angle. Whereas he focuses on the external and demonic influences when he describes the Gentiles, such as the world and the devil, he stresses the internal factors when he describes the Jews. He writes that the non-Christian Jews were following the "desires and thoughts" and satisfying the "cravings" of their "sinful nature."

Of course, the Jews were also affected by external factors, but God had imposed his laws upon their culture, so that these influences were comparatively weaker. There were fewer restraints upon the Gentiles when it came to demonic religions, occult practices, and pagan philosophies.

Just as the Jews submitted to evil external influences like the Gentiles, the Gentiles were also driven by a sinful inward nature like the Jews. As Paul writes, "*All of us* also...*Like the rest*, we were by nature objects of wrath." The Jews and the Gentiles had the same sinful nature. Therefore, he declares, "What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin" (Romans 3:9).

Although the non-Christian claims that he is free and that he is good, he is in fact a slave to sin. He follows the flesh (v 3, NASB), the world, and the devil (v. 2). He is characterized by disobedience (v. 2), transgressions, and sins (v. 1). All of this amounts to a state of spiritual death, which implies spiritual inability and passivity.

Paul is referring to not only those who are usually considered the worst and the most violent criminals, and he does not limit this spiritual depravity to people of certain races, cultures, and backgrounds. Rather, he says that "all of us" and "the rest" fall under this description, that all of humanity is spiritually dead in their transgressions and sins. It is also wrong to

assume that a person becomes a sinner only after he commits his first sin, because all of us are "by nature objects of wrath." Therefore, no one can claim that he is not spiritually dead because he is not sinful, since he is sinful by nature, and out of this nature flows a multitude of sins.

Anyone who is a non-Christian follows the flesh, the world, and the devil, and anyone who follows the flesh, the world, and the devil is spiritually "dead." Therefore, anyone who is a non-Christian is spiritually dead. If this description is meaningful, it must mean that anyone who is spiritually dead is spiritually helpless.<sup>23</sup> Spiritual death entails complete spiritual inability and passivity. A non-Christian can do nothing to contribute to or move toward his salvation. There must be a power other than himself to do something to him. Thus salvation is a divine work that is done *to* man, not *by* man or *with* man.<sup>24</sup>

Paul offers us a wholly negative picture of man's spiritual condition. He has made it impossible for man to do anything to change or improve. However, he does not stop here, but he says that God did something for the chosen ones, and he did it because of his "mercy" and "love." In another place, Paul states that God's mercy and love are sovereignly given, that he bestows them on whomever he wills without consideration of the conditions in those who receive from him (Romans 9:13, 15).

God shows mercy and love to a person not because that person is willing to receive; rather, the person is willing to receive because of God's mercy and love. God decides to show him mercy and love, and therefore makes him willing to receive. As Paul explains, "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Corinthians 2:14, NASB). A spiritually dead person cannot decide to receive from God, but a person receives from God because God has first made him spiritually alive.

Our passage states that because of his mercy and love toward the chosen ones, he "made us alive with Christ." In the same verse, Paul reminds us that God made us alive because we were "dead in transgressions" – spiritual resurrection is the only solution to spiritual death.<sup>25</sup> The apostle remains consistent. By saying that we were spiritually "dead," he means the kind of deadness that requires a resurrection. So when he says "dead," he means dead, and not just weak or sick. There was no superficial solution. It really took a spiritual resurrection to save us from our state of sin.

This agrees with what we have stated about the sovereignty of God in salvation, including the biblical doctrine of unconditional election. Now we are dealing with the doctrine of regeneration – because man is spiritually dead, he must be spiritually resurrected. This spiritual resurrection occurs solely due to the sovereign decision and power of God, without

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<sup>23</sup> James White, *The Sovereign Grace of God*; Reformation Press, 2003; p. 56-59.

<sup>24</sup> Theologians call this biblical view "monergism," in which salvation is entirely a sovereign gift and work of God. The unbiblical and heretical view is "synergism," in which man possesses freedom, and he must exercise this freedom to cooperate with God in salvation. However, Scripture insists that any "cooperation" is itself a sovereign gift and work of God, so that there is no room for man to boast.

<sup>25</sup> If a man is dead, then rehabilitation is impossible and worthless, especially rehabilitation by other "dead" men, using theories and methods invented by their "dead" minds. Jesus Christ is the only solution to sin.

man's decision or cooperation, for a dead man cannot decide or cooperate. As Loraine Boettner writes:

Sinners are compared to dead men, or even to dry bones in their entire helplessness. In this they are all alike. The choice of some to eternal life is as sovereign as if Christ were to pass through a graveyard and bid one here and another there to come forth, the reason for restoring one to life and leaving another in his grave could be found only in His good pleasure, and not in the dead themselves.<sup>26</sup>

Jesus also teaches the necessity of regeneration. He says, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3). And he also teaches that this is a sovereign work of God: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (3:8). Regeneration is something that God controls, and not something that man decides. Contrary to a common misconception, the Bible never teaches that a man is regenerated by faith; rather, it teaches that a man is *justified* by faith, and he has faith because he has been regenerated. God first sovereignly regenerates the man, then he produces faith in him, and through this faith, he justifies the man.

All this means is that "it is by grace you have been saved" (v. 5). The teaching that we were in ourselves powerless to improve, to change, to please God, or to cooperate with God, is not strange or extreme, but it is what the Bible means when it declares that salvation must be by grace. To reject or dilute this teaching is to deny that we are saved by the grace of God. Therefore, Arminianism (that man has free will, that faith precedes or causes regeneration,<sup>27</sup> that salvation is synergistic,<sup>28</sup> and so on) is inconsistent with even general evangelical doctrine<sup>29</sup> – its adherents must either contradict themselves at multiple points, or as many of them have done, embrace pagan concepts but retain biblical terms in their theology.

Paul states that God "made us alive with Christ," establishing the relationship between the resurrection of Christ and our spiritual resurrection (as well as our physical resurrection in the future).<sup>30</sup> He teaches in the previous passage that God raised Christ from the dead by his great power, and now he indicates that because Christ is the head of the chosen ones,

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<sup>26</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*; Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1932; p. 71.

<sup>27</sup> Arminians usually believe that faith comes before regeneration, or that God regenerates a man *because* that person exercises faith. However, a person is spiritually dead before regeneration, and therefore cannot exercise faith; rather, regeneration precedes and produces faith. We have faith because God has first sovereignly regenerated us.

<sup>28</sup> This is the idea that an unconverted man can and must cooperate with God even in the initial stages of his salvation. However, since the unconverted man is spiritually dead, he cannot and will not cooperate. He is hostile toward God and the things of God.

<sup>29</sup> "Only those views which ascribe to God *all* the power in the salvation of sinners are consistently evangelical" (Boettner, p. 173).

<sup>30</sup> Our physical resurrection is patterned after Christ's physical resurrection. In fact, because Christ is the head of the chosen ones, his physical resurrection guarantees our physical resurrection.

Christians have been raised together with him. The same power that God exerted in Christ's resurrection has effected our spiritual resurrection, and will effect our physical resurrection. The fact that God raised his people "with Christ" also means that all who were not in Christ were not raised with him. They will forever remain in spiritual death, in this age and in the age to come.

When God "raised us up with Christ," he did not make us just barely alive, but he "seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (v. 6). He did this so that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus" (v. 7).

The meaning of "in the coming ages" appears to differ from the meaning of "in the one to come" in 1:21. Whereas Paul makes the typical two-age distinction in 1:21 ("not only in the present age but also in the one to come"), now he is likely referring to all the coming centuries of time relative to the writing of the letter, but probably also including "the age to come."

In other words, God's chosen ones are seated with Christ so that he might demonstrate his grace and kindness to us, not only in the age to come, but also throughout these centuries in which Christians live and labor on the earth. Just as God has demonstrated "the surpassing greatness of His power" (1:19, NASB) in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, he now demonstrates "the surpassing riches of His grace" (2:7, NASB) in the raising and seating of Christians with Christ. God's will is to demonstrate the same power and grace in all centuries and generations. Therefore, the claim that this power and grace has ceased in its miraculous blessings and operations is heresy. It is a doctrine of demons, a satanic deception.

Christ has been exalted over all the "powers," and Paul says that God has "seated us with him." Because we are in Christ, we now enjoy victory over all evil powers. There is no need to placate the entities and the forces of pagan religions. This teaching condemns heresies and superstitions that are distortions of the Christian faith. For example, it is foolishness to appeal to saints, angels, and Mary to help us in intercession, or to function as mediators. We are already seated with Christ – there is no closer place to God. As Paul writes in this letter, "For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit" (Ephesians 2:18). We have access through Christ now, and nothing more is needed. The teaching that someone other than Christ could or should function as a mediator between God and man, or between Christ and man, is a damnable heresy. At least because of this, Catholicism is not Christianity, and Catholics are not Christians.

Then, in verses 8-10, Paul states the theological implication and summary of what he has said in verses 1-7. He writes:

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.



For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

God's power and grace effected our justification and sanctification, and because justification is "not by works," and even the works of our sanctification have been "prepared in advance," the conclusion is that "no one can boast" about any part of salvation.

Commentators disagree as to whether the words "and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" are referring to "faith," or to something else, such as the whole idea of salvation by grace. The disagreement arises because whereas "this" is neuter in the Greek, "faith" is feminine, and some contend that the neuter pronoun cannot refer to the feminine noun.

The discussion is important because some false teachers take advantage of the disagreement to assert that faith is not something sovereignly given by God, but that it is something men decide to have by their free will. However, for the following reasons, this verse cannot be used to support them.

First, I have argued in this commentary and in other places that, when we need to be precise about it, faith is not so much the means by which *we obtain* salvation from God as it is the means by which *God applies* salvation to us. Moreover, the Bible testifies that it is something God sovereignly produces in us, and not something that we conjure in our minds by free will, when we do not have this free will in the first place.

Second, it is wrong to assume that a neuter pronoun can never refer to a feminine noun in Greek. Even if "this" does not strictly refer to "faith" in this case, but to the whole idea of salvation by grace, this would not *exclude* faith – it would refer to something more than, but including, faith. Also, even if the words "this not from yourselves" do not directly refer to "faith," we cannot go beyond what the verse *does* say and impose upon the word what the verse *does not* say. The verse never says, "This faith *is* from yourselves, it is *not* a gift of God."

Third, other than a grammatical argument, there is reason to believe that "this" refers to "faith" in verse 8. The verse says, "For it is by *grace* you have been saved, through *faith* – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." Since the "grace" in salvation is by definition something that God gives and exercises, and not something produced or exercised by men, it would appear redundant and unnecessary to say that the "grace" is "not from yourselves."

On the other hand, since faith is something that happens in our minds instead of in God's mind, there are those who mistake it as a product of our own will and power, thinking that we have faith because we decide to believe by our "free will." Since sinful man prefers to think that faith is a product of his own will, but since faith is in fact a gift from God, it makes sense for Paul to clarify the matter, so that we would not conclude that grace comes from God but faith comes from ourselves.

Fourth, even if we ignore the debate on the Greek and ignore all other parts of the Bible, the immediate context of the verse (2:1-10) forbids the idea that man has any positive role in his own salvation.

Verses 1-3 describe our spiritual depravity before conversion, saying that we were dead in transgressions and sins, that we followed after the flesh, the world, and the devil. Then, verses 4-7 teach that it is by God's initiative – his love, grace, and kindness – that he has raised and seated us with Christ. We see expressions like, "his great love for us," "God...is rich in mercy," "[God] made us alive with Christ," "God raise us up with Christ," "[God] seated us with him," "that...he might show...his grace," "...expressed in his kindness to us," and so on. Verses 8-10 continue from the above and are clearly intended to ascribe all the power and initiative to God in our salvation. The verses include expressions like, "by grace you have been saved," "this not from yourselves," "it is the gift of God," "not by works," "so that no one can boast," "we are God's work," "created in Christ Jesus to do good works," "which God prepared in advance for us to do."

The whole passage emphasizes our depravity and inability, and then God's grace and God's work. We were altogether sinful and impotent, and every spiritual good produced in us comes from God's sovereign grace and power. So how do we suddenly get a faith that comes from "free will"? It would contradict the content and the intent of the entire section.

Therefore, even if we do not settle the grammatical disagreement, it makes no theological difference. Every facet of salvation is wholly "the gift of God" and "not from yourselves." Whether we are speaking of grace or faith, or any other aspect of salvation, none of it comes from us, so that "no one can boast."

Justification by grace through faith does not lead to licentiousness, but to sanctification, since God "created [us] in Christ Jesus to do good works." If we cannot boast about our justification, we also cannot boast about our sanctification, because the very good works that we are to perform have been "prepared in advance for us to do." In his sovereign grace, God has foreordained all things in salvation, including both our faith and our works.

Although our faith is rightly said to be "our" faith, in the sense that it happens in our minds, it is in fact a gift from God – he is the one who produces this faith in us. The same is true in sanctification. Although our works are rightly said to be our works, God is the one who grants both the will and the act. As Paul writes, "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for *it is God who works in you to will and to act* according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:12-13).

## 4. RECONCILIATION

### EPHESIANS 2:11-22

**Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men) – remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.**

**But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.**

**Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.**

With an emphatic "therefore," Paul connects what he has written to what he is about to say. In other words, his explanation on the doctrines of predestination and regeneration is the basis for what he will say about the Jewish and Gentile Christians being made one as God's people in Christ.

Before Jesus Christ arrived, the Jews called themselves "the circumcised" and called the Gentiles "the uncircumcised." Circumcision was the external sign of a covenant relationship with God, so that the rite made a distinction between the natural descendants of Abraham and those who were "foreigners to the covenants of promise."

This does not mean that all the Jews were saved or that all the Gentiles were unsaved. Paul is referring to the circumcision "done in the body by the hands of men." He does not suggest that there was an inward distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles, but only observes that the Jews had the external sign of the covenant. As for their inward condition, he said that both the Jews and the Gentiles were "by nature the objects of wrath" – there was no difference between them.

As early as Deuteronomy, the Bible mentions a circumcision of the heart as opposed to one that affects only the flesh (Deuteronomy 30:6). Then, against an external religion that is without sincere love and holiness, Jeremiah declares that the people of Israel were no better than the uncircumcised people of other nations, because the Jews were "uncircumcised in heart" (Jeremiah 9:26).

As Paul explains in his letter to the Romans, "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God" (2:28-29). The kind of circumcision that makes a spiritual difference is an inward circumcision, in which God himself operates in the heart of a man to remove his inward corruption and to mark him as a covenant friend.

This has always been the case. Whether we are speaking of the Old Covenant or the New Covenant, a person is regenerated and saved from sin only if he has been inwardly circumcised by a sovereign act of God. As Paul writes to the Gentile Christians in his letter to the Colossians, "In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ" (Colossians 2:11).

Under the Old Covenant, the Gentiles were left in spiritual darkness, although God regenerated and saved some of them through faith. On the other hand, the Jews were given the outward signs of the covenant and the means of grace, such as circumcision, the Scripture, and the temple. Still, they were saved only if they belonged to "a remnant chosen by grace" (Romans 11:5). Under the New Covenant, God releases the message of salvation through Jesus Christ to all people groups, without the cumbersome outward signs and rituals required by the previous administration of his grace.

Under the old administration, it was relatively difficult for the Gentiles to approach God and to learn about him. They did not have the Scripture and the temple. They were uncircumcised. Without observing the numerous rituals and dietary laws, they were considered ceremonially unclean. Thus there existed a "dividing wall of hostility" between the Jews and the Gentiles.

Then, Jesus Christ brought "peace"<sup>1</sup> and "destroyed the barrier." He fulfilled the rituals and sacrifices, and abolished their practice. They were symbols of the reality, and in him the reality has come. He did not destroy the moral laws, but only "the Law of commandments contained *in ordinances*" (Ephesians 2:15, NASB). So other than the commandments relating to ceremonies, dietary regulations, and the like, God's laws, such as the Ten Commandments, remain in effect and continue to govern the thought and conduct of his people, and to hold all of humanity accountable.<sup>2</sup> Thus Scripture destroys legalism but leaves no room for antinomianism.

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<sup>1</sup> This is an objective and relational peace.

<sup>2</sup> Vincent Cheung, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

As he does in 2:1-10, Paul first describes the former condition of the converts. His pattern of thinking is also the same, as he again shows that the unconverted were helpless, hopeless, and godless. And God did something to change the situation. The Gentiles did nothing, and could do nothing, to destroy "the barrier" that hindered them from approaching God and attaining salvation. They did not come near to God by their free will, as if they had free will, but they were "brought near through the blood of Christ." They did nothing, and they could do nothing – something was done to them by God and by Christ. They were brought to God by the blood of Christ, not by their free will or good sense.

The result is that Christ has created "one man out of the two, thus making peace."<sup>3</sup> Of course, when we say that Jews and Gentiles are united in peace, we do not mean that believers and unbelievers are united in peace. Rather, it means that Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians are united in peace because of their common faith in Jesus Christ. Any Gentile can become one of God's people by faith in Christ without submitting to the Law's rituals and ceremonies. And whether a person is Jew or Gentile, if he will not come to God by faith in Christ, he is not one of God's people, even if he observes all the Jewish rituals and ceremonies.

The peace is accomplished and maintained in Christ alone, so that it does not matter whether a person is a Jew or a non-Jew. All are alike and equal by faith in Christ, and there is no difference and no hostility between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. On the other hand, the spiritual hostility between Christians and non-Christians remain as great as before, and perhaps even greater, since Christ has come, and has been raised and exalted.

In fact, there is indeed reason to believe that the spiritual hostility between believers and unbelievers has become more severe. Although some Gentiles were saved under the Old Covenant by their faith in the coming Christ, now that Christ has arrived and destroyed "the barrier," the application of divine grace has become broad and global. Likewise, although God held the Gentiles accountable for their sins (Romans 1-2), and condemned all unbelievers to hell, he now sends his people to all areas of the world to explicitly demand faith in the gospel, thus increasing the condemnation of those who remain in unbelief. As Paul says, "now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). There will always be enmity between the children of God and the children of Satan (Genesis 3:15). The only way to attain peace is for the non-Christians to become Christians.

The unbelievers could not escape natural revelation in the past, and still cannot escape it, and now the church has the mandate to confront the people of all nations with the verbal revelation of Scripture. As Christ commands, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). So Peter writes, "For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, 'If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?'" (1 Peter 4:17-18).

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<sup>3</sup> Charles D. Provan, *The Church Is Israel Now*; Ross House Books, 2003.

Whether Jew or Gentile, there is no escape from natural revelation about God and his moral laws, and there is no excuse for rejecting Christ and his gospel. On the other hand, "through him *we both* have access to the Father by one Spirit." Non-Christians need to know that there is no other way to approach God except through Christ. They must abandon all non-Christian religions and philosophies. Likewise, Christians must condemn all doctrines (the occult, other religions, etc.) that compromise the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ.

Because we are Christians, we are "no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household." Many Christians refer to the Jews as "God's people," including those who call themselves "Jews" nowadays, just because they are Jews. Thus they ignore the very "mystery" that Paul so earnestly preached and pressed his readers to learn. Even when they acknowledge that we are indeed God's people in Christ, they think that the Jews are God's people in a special sense, whether or not they are Christians.

However, Paul says, "A man is *not a Jew* if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man *is a Jew* if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God" (Romans 2:28-29). As a non-Jewish Christian, I am more of a Jew than a Jewish non-Christian. Paul explicitly says that one who has not been changed by God's Spirit is "not a Jew." So non-Christian Jews are not Jews at all. They cannot be God's people in a special sense, because they are not even God's people in an ordinary sense. Whether Jew or Gentile, only Christians are God's people. Galatians 3:29 states, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Because I belong to Christ, I am a seed of Abraham, and I inherit all that God promised him. So those who keep calling the Jews "God's people" are either speaking heresy, or they must be talking about me.

This must be emphasized again and again. Although it was one of the main revelations that Paul wanted to get across, Christians still have not learned it. The problem is especially pronounced among dispensationalists. Their fanciful schemes and false divisions of the covenants subvert the truth and simplicity of the gospel.<sup>4</sup> They make believers regard "Jews" as Jews, when Paul says that they are not Jews at all, and as superior people, when Paul says that they are sinners "like the rest" (2:3). Some people consider any view that does not exalt the Jews as anti-Semitic, but Paul was its strongest proponent, although his love for the Jews was also the strongest (Romans 9:3-4). He demonstrated the doctrine from the Old Testament, because this has always been God's view of the Jews.

God's household is constructed upon "the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." It might be convenient to understand this as referring to the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. However, some contend that this is improbable because Paul would have used the reverse order, saying,

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<sup>4</sup> Keith A. Mathison, *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1995); Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1993); John H. Gerstner, *Wrong Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Soli Deo Gloria, 2000).

"the prophets and apostles" instead of "the apostles and prophets." This is unconvincing. A better indication that he probably does not have in mind the Old Testament prophets is that he later writes, "the mystery...was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets" (3:5). Although the Old Testament prophets had some knowledge of this "mystery," it was not fully revealed until the coming of Christ. Therefore, it seems Paul is indeed referring to New Testament apostles and prophets.

Then, because the words "apostles" and "prophets" share one definite article ("the"), the question becomes whether Paul is referring to only one group of people, so that the expression means something like, "the apostles who also function as prophets," or "the apostles who prophesy." Some commentators deny that this is the implication of the single article, and prefer to think that Paul is referring to apostles *and* prophets. Nevertheless, the use of only one article before the two nouns signify a strong unity between the apostles and prophets.

The most important issue is the theological significance. Paul intends to say that the "foundation" of God's household consists of the messengers of divine revelations, or more precisely, the divine revelations themselves. Whether the emphasis falls on both Old Testament and New Testament messengers, or only the New Testament messengers, the foundation is biblical revelation, or the doctrines that God has revealed through these messengers. Therefore, this foundation is "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). There is nothing about it that can be modified or removed, and nothing can be added to it. Our task is to defend and advance the doctrines that we have received.

All of this was initiated by Christ and is founded on Christ, who is the "cornerstone." He holds a more prominent place than the apostles. God's temple is being built outward and upward from this cornerstone, and each brick or stone finds its proper place in reference to him (Matthew 16:18). As Turner states, "The point would then seem to be that the temple is built out and up from the revelation given in Christ, through the revelatory elaboration and implementation of the mystery through the prophetic-apostolic figures."<sup>5</sup> Christ is the starting point of our thought and conduct, and Scripture is our spiritual and intellectual foundation.

Thus verses 21 and 22 say, "In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." Likewise, Peter writes:

As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." (1 Peter 2:4-6)

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<sup>5</sup> Turner, p. 1233.

Before the coming of Christ, the Jews were privileged "in every way" even though many of them were unsaved, because "they have been entrusted with the very words of God" (Romans 3:2), or the Scripture. They also had the temple of God. However, since the coming of Christ, the Jews have rejected God's fuller revelation, or the New Testament. Since the Old Testament anticipates and agrees with the New, to reject the New is also to reject the Old. This means that the Jews do not believe any part of the Bible, not even Moses (John 5:46). Moreover, God has destroyed their temple and raised up the church as his true temple. Therefore, Christians are the ones "entrusted with the very words of God," and Christians constitute the very temple of God. As God says in Hosea, "I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God'" (Hosea 2:23).

### **EPHESIANS 3:1-13**

**For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles –**

**Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.**

**I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. 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, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 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, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.**

In 3:6, Paul makes a clear statement about the "mystery" that he has been talking about. It also functions as a summary for 2:11-22. He writes, "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus." The mystery that has been revealed and explained is that Gentile Christians are "heirs together," "members together," and "sharers together" along with Jewish Christians.

Paul has become a prisoner of Rome for preaching this gospel. Consistent with his commitment to the sovereignty of God, he refuses to see himself as a victim of religious



and political power; rather, he calls himself "the prisoner of Christ Jesus," who controls every situation, directing history according to his foreordained plan.

Many people will not even lose sleep or miss lunch for the sake of the gospel, and still less will they suffer imprisonment or martyrdom for it. This is first because most of those who claim to be Christians are false converts. They have never been regenerated, and they do not truly believe. Then the rest are weak – feeble and pathetic! When Christ is not our sole obsession, we become worldly and ineffective.

As he identifies himself in verse 1, "I, Paul" is left without a verb until verse 14 ("I kneel"). This is because the mention of his imprisonment "for the sake of you Gentiles" leads him into another digression or parenthesis (v. 2-13). He explains, "this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles."

He was a persecutor of believers, but he says, "I was *made* a minister" (NASB, not "I became," NIV) by "the gift of God's grace." The Lord said to him, "I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:17-18). Just as it is God's sovereignty that brings men to salvation in Christ, it is his sovereignty that calls men to ministry for Christ. Man has no free will. Just as no one can become a believer by free will, no one can become a minister by free will.

It is God's sovereignty that places us in all our places and vocations. Nevertheless, the office of preaching is a special calling, and because Paul was faithful to this calling, he was persecuted, imprisoned, and eventually martyred. God did not save you so you may continue to pursue your personal ambitions and selfish desires, but he has foreordained a place for you in his plan, one that you will fulfill by his grace and power, and not by free will.

Preachers often tell people, "God has a wonderful plan for your life," or something to that effect. This is indeed true concerning the chosen ones. As Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." However, we must not apply this to all of humanity, since it is not true concerning all of humanity. It would be dishonest to tell the reprobate that God has a wonderful plan for his life, because God has a terrible plan for his life, one that will end in futility, destruction, and endless torment in hell.

Our message should be, "God now commands all men everywhere to repent. The only way to escape God's wrath is to flee to Jesus Christ. If God has chosen you for salvation, then he has a wonderful plan for your life; otherwise, he has a terrible plan for your life, and there is nothing ahead of you but death and destruction. Therefore, fear him and seek him, while there is still time."

The message that Paul was sent to preach is the one that he expounds in this letter. He writes that it was made known to him "by revelation," but by reading this letter, the people

would "be able to understand" the insight that he has received from God. He wants them to attain an intellectual grasp of the gospel, so as to "open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light." He seeks "to make plain to everyone the administration of his mystery." His ministry appeals to the mind. Its thrust is intellectual.

Some ministries appeal to the emotions, and some even to the senses like the smell and the touch. These are not biblical ministries, and their efforts will not produce the proper effect. The main thrust of a biblical ministry is always to convey biblical teachings to the mind by various forms of verbal communication, such as by speaking and writing, or sign language. A ministry that fails to communicate doctrine is useless. It has nothing to do with the Christian faith.

Many Christians claim that the Bible does not address the things that they would like to know, and that God hides from us his intentions and purposes. However, the problem is not that the Bible is insufficient, but that these people are stupid and lazy, and they will not pray for wisdom and take time to study.

Of course "the riches of Christ" are infinite and therefore "unsearchable," but this does not mean that we can know nothing about God's intentions and purposes, since the Bible reveals many things to us. As Paul writes, "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, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v. 10-11).

Commentators disagree on whether "the rulers and authorities" refer to good or evil entities, or both. But there is a similar thought in Peter's writings:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. *Even angels long to look into these things.* (1 Peter 1:10-12)

God's wisdom is "manifold." It is rich, colorful, and multifaceted, but this does not mean that it is pluralistic or inconsistent, that two contradictory religions can both be true, or that two contradictory doctrines can both be correct. In fact, it means that there are multiple angles from which to admire the superiority and exclusivity of the Christian faith. Since Christianity is true, then Islam, Mormonism, Catholicism, Judaism, and all non-Christian religions, must be false. God's "manifold wisdom" teaches us that truth is absolute – it is colorful, but rational and consistent.

God's intent is to make known his wisdom "through the church," and this is "according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus." The church's mandate is founded on God's foreordination, which is not wishful thinking, but something that God has established in history by Christ. Therefore, "In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence."

This means that Paul's imprisonment is not an accident, or an unexpected subversion of God's plan by men. Rather, it is part of the outworking of God's foreordained plan, which he has accomplished in Christ. God's plan has *already* become a reality through Jesus Christ, and he continues to fulfill all that he has predetermined, not only despite Paul's sufferings, but even through them. Paul wrote this "Queen of the Epistles" while he was in prison. As he says in another place, "This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. *But God's word is not chained*" (2 Timothy 2:8-9).

For God's chosen ones, predestination does not lead to despair, but to freedom, confidence, and encouragement! We know that God's plan is being fulfilled according to his foreordination, and that his "eternal purpose" has already become a reality, accomplished in Jesus Christ.

#### **EPHESIANS 3:14-21**

**For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**

**Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.**

In 3:14, Paul takes up the prayer that he was starting in 3:1. If 1:20-3:13 is indeed "a long doctrinal parenthesis,"<sup>6</sup> then 3:14-21 is the continuation of what Paul began in 1:17. There are similarities in content, but it is uncertain that this is a continuation. It might be a second prayer.

Paul prays to the Father "from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name." There is a play on words between "Father" (*patros*) and "family" (*patria*). Commentators disagree on whether the verse should say "every family" or "the whole family." If it is the former, then it means that human fatherhood, as imperfect and distorted as it is, has been patterned after God the Father. But if Paul intends to say "the whole

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<sup>6</sup> Patzia, p. 163.

family," then he is referring to "God's household" (2:19), the family of the redeemed in Christ.

Some consider "the whole family" an impossible translation because the definite article is missing. Others, such as Clark and Wilson, observe that 2 Timothy 3:16 also lacks the article, but there it must be translated, "the whole Scripture."<sup>7</sup> If the grammar is inconclusive, or if it favors "every family," the context decisively favors "the whole family." With all this talk about the Gentiles being "members of God's household" (2:19), and then how they have been called to "one hope" under "one God and Father" (4:4-5), it is more likely that Paul is speaking in line with the context, referring to the family of the redeemed, or the Christians.

Paul prays that God will strengthen his readers with power "in the inner man" (NASB). The "inner man" does not refer to a non-intellectual part of man, or to anything other than the mind. The most straightforward interpretation is that "Paul meant the minds of his converted Ephesians."<sup>8</sup> He prays that God's power would make their minds strong so that "Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." We have established that the "heart" is not non-intellectual, but it "chiefly means the understanding or intellect."<sup>9</sup> Clark adds, "Very infrequently does it mean emotion," although even the emotions are intellectual – they may not be rational or academic, but they are of the mind.

For Christ to "dwell" in a person is for him to "settle down." It emphasizes the pervasive and permanent influence of Christ, the person's conformity to the character of Christ, and his access to the power of Christ. As D. A. Carson explains:

Make no mistake: when Christ first moves into our lives, he finds us in very bad repair. It takes a great deal of power to change us; and that is why Paul prays for power. He asks that God may so strengthen us by his power in our inner being that Christ may genuinely take up residence within us, transforming us into a house that pervasively reflects his own character.<sup>10</sup>

Paul prays that "Christ may dwell in your hearts *through faith*." It seems most people think that this means Christ dwells in us *because of* our faith, or that Christ dwells in us *in response to* our faith. One commentator writes, "This indwelling is *through faith* – that is, as they trust him he makes their hearts his home."<sup>11</sup> The way that Christ dwells in us is often described as a "mystical union," which being so mystical, cannot be further explained.

However, the verse in fact speaks from an intellectual perspective. We have established that the "inner man" and the "heart" refer to the mind. So to say that Christ dwells in our hearts cannot mean that our hearts are containers for Christ as buckets are containers for

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<sup>7</sup> Clark, *Ephesians*; p. 117.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>10</sup> Carson, *Spiritual Reformation*; p. 187.

<sup>11</sup> O'Brien, p. 259.

water. Faith simply means "belief," and it is the mind that has this belief. To believe something is a mental state or activity. The verse, then, means that "the mode of Christ's dwelling in our minds is through faith," and "The power and strength we derive in answer to Paul's prayers come through and are proportionate to our grasp of Scripture."<sup>12</sup>

Christ dwells in our hearts through faith, and not through some mystical, non-intellectual, and indescribable "something." Charles Hodge writes that "the two essential conditions of this indwelling of Christ" are "a rational nature" and "faith." He notes that faith "includes spiritual apprehension – the perception of the truth and excellence of 'the things of the Spirit.'"<sup>13</sup> The Bible does not teach that our union with Christ is mystical.

In the second part of verse 17, whether Paul begins the next petition or extends the first, he continues on a similar theme. In almost every commentary I came across, the author's anti-intellectualism begins to step up starting from verse 18 and peaks when he reaches verse 19. This is ironic, because the language and the thought in these two verses are highly intellectualistic, perhaps the most intellectualistic in the whole Bible.

Paul prays that, "being rooted and established in love," the believers "may have power...to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." He mixes a botanical metaphor and an architectural metaphor to indicate that Christians are already rooted and established in love, and that from this firm foundation, he prays that they may have power to grasp all the dimensions of the love of Christ. The language indicates to Candlish "a comprehensive knowledge of the things of God."<sup>14</sup> Clark adds, "the impression is unmistakable that the understanding must be deep and wide, profound and extensive."<sup>15</sup>

The anti-intellectualism of many commentators reaches its zenith in verse 19, because the verse refers to a "love that surpasses knowledge."

For example, Patzia writes, "the emphasis is upon love rather than knowledge."<sup>16</sup> However, knowledge is in fact the emphasis. The prayer is for the people, not to love, but "to grasp...and to know." Love is merely the object of knowledge, the thing that we should know.

Then, he says something really absurd: "love, not knowledge, leads to a deeper understanding of God."<sup>17</sup> What is the difference between knowledge and understanding? Even if they are different, they are almost synonymous, and certainly belong to the same category of things. So it is as if he says, "love, not *knowledge*, leads to a deeper *knowledge* of God," or "love, not *understanding*, leads to a deeper *understanding* of God."

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<sup>12</sup> Clark, *Ephesians*; p. 121.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Hodge, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*; The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991; p. 129-130.

<sup>14</sup> Clark, *Ephesians*; p. 123.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Patzia, p. 223.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Perhaps he thinks that the "understanding" is something completely non-intellectual, but he does not assert this, nor does he explain its meaning. And if "knowledge" and "understanding" are not synonymous or almost synonymous, he does not explain the difference between them.

This is nonsense. By definition, knowledge leads to knowledge better than anything else, since the former is already the latter; and understanding leads to understanding better than anything else, since the former is already the latter. So how can love leads to X better than X leads to X?

The passage does not say what the anti-intellectual interpreters claim that it says. It does not say that love is superior to knowledge, and it does not say that love is a better way to know God. Rather, the prayer is for the believers "*to grasp...the love of Christ, and to know...this love that surpasses knowledge.*" Love is not *the means* to knowing God, but it is *the object* of knowledge – it is the thing that Paul wants us to know.

Nevertheless, this verse says that the love "surpasses knowledge." Does this not leave room for mysticism and anti-intellectualism? However, it is this very expression that makes this one of the most intellectualistic verses in the whole Bible.

The verse does not say that we cannot know "this love that surpasses knowledge." Rather, Paul prays for Christians "*to grasp...and to know this love that surpasses knowledge!*" Although there is always more to know about the infinite love of Christ, this does not mean that we can know nothing about it, or that we can know only a little about it. In fact, we are "*to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ*" – we can understand it in all its dimensions.

The emphasis is on the greatness of this love, but there is no indication that we are unable to understand it. In fact, it is to increase our ability to understand that Paul prays for us to "have power." If we keep in mind that Paul wants us to have power to know this love, then the more one emphasizes that this love "surpasses knowledge," the more intellectualistic these two verses appear. The more distance one puts between Christ's love and our intellect, the more intellectualistic Paul's words become, because no matter how far this love appears to surpass our knowledge, he thinks God can give us power to grasp even that.

Paul prays that God will give us power to grasp and to know the love of Christ, "that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." The knowledge adds to the fullness. Clark concludes, "God's fulness in us consists in knowledge, not merely the introduction of the Gentiles into the church, but an extensive theology. Ignorant Christians are empty, or nearly empty. It is surprising that so many commentators miss this point."<sup>18</sup> This fullness of knowledge, this "extensive theology," is not reserved for the theology professors or seminary students, but Paul prays for his readers to attain it "together with all the saints."

At this, Paul erupts into doxology again, praising him "who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." In other words, we can have confidence that God will grant this request to grasp and to know all the dimensions of his love; in fact, he will do more than what we can ask or imagine.

As with verse 19, this language about our limitations and God's greatness does not refute intellectualism, but proves and reinforces it, because he means that God will grant the

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<sup>18</sup> Clark, *Ephesians*; p. 123.

request for us "to grasp" and "to know," and he will do it by the divine power that is at work in us even now. If anything, God would have us be "immeasurably more" intellectualistic than we are now, beyond "all we ask or imagine." This is just another way to say that God wants us know him better, and by means of our prayer for knowledge, he will cause this to happen.

Although theological knowledge is inherently valuable, all this knowledge has a grand purpose. It is to glorify God, not only in the age to come ("for ever and ever"), but "throughout all generations" – even now. In the light of this, surely we are not living as redeemed people, but as stubborn beasts, if we still neglect or refuse to pray for an intellectual understanding of all the dimensions of divine love – that is, "the entire plan of redemption...everything in the divine revelation."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

## 5. SANCTIFICATION

### EPHESIANS 4:1-16

**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 heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)**

**It was he who gave 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 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.**

Scholars state that in Paul's letters, he often first emphasizes the doctrinal, and then proceeds to the practical and ethical. Although there is some truth to this, the observation can be misleading, and if abused, it becomes detrimental to a correct understanding of the faith.

What they consider the practical portions of these letters are not void of theological assertions and expositions, but as Wood writes, "Theology is not left behind but interwoven with the moral exhortations."<sup>1</sup> The problem stems from a sharp distinction between the doctrinal and the practical. Such a distinction obscures the fact that the practical portions of Paul's letters still consist of intellectual information about the Christian faith, and in this

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<sup>1</sup> Wood, p. 54.



sense they are doctrinal. They are not practical in the sense that they are non-doctrinal, but they simply consist of doctrinal information about different matters.

There are scholars who exaggerate the distinction in order to decry biblical intellectualism, and to advance an anti-intellectual pragmatism. Some of them even assert that the sole purpose of the doctrinal is to serve the practical, or that it is pointless to consider the doctrinal without drawing out the practical implications. However, we have already demonstrated that this philosophy is unbiblical and blasphemous. Scripture is intellectualistic, and even when it addresses the practical, it is speaking *doctrinally* about practical things.

With this in mind, we may cautiously agree with Patzia's explanation of the relationship between chapters 1-3 and chapters 4-6. He writes, "If chapters 1-3 provide the *theological basis* for Christian unity, then chapters 4-6 contain the *practical instruction* for its maintainence."<sup>2</sup>

Paul indeed turns to address how Christians should maintain the peace and unity that God has established in Christ, and that Christ has secured by his own blood. As one who has been faithful to his calling to the point of suffering imprisonment, Paul urges his readers to live in a way that is consistent with the calling that they have received.

Specifically, he admonishes the Christians to "make every effort" to maintain unity and peace among them. This requires them to exercise humility, gentleness, patience, and love toward one another. Although Christians exhibit many superficial differences – in their cultures, positions, and so on – spiritually speaking, there is only one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father for all of them.

The relationship among believers is founded on an actual spiritual unity, not a human treaty or social agreement, not mutual financial or political interest, or the general welfare of humanity. The unity of humanism is founded on compromise, but it is not the case with the unity of Christianity. As Paul explains, God has predetermined that his people would become one in Christ. As redeemed but imperfect people, there will still be friction between believers, but we have a true foundation for unity in Christ, and we also have the spiritual resources to maintain the unity and to resolve conflicts.

After Paul considers the church as a whole, he also considers the individual, and writes, "But to *each one of us* grace has been given as Christ apportioned it." He is not referring to the grace that saves, but to the grace that equips each believer for service and ministry. The context shows that this is what he has in mind (v. 9-16).

In connection with this grace that equips each believer, Paul alludes to Psalm 68:18: "This is why it says: 'When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.'" Applying the verse to Christ, he continues, "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 heavens, in order to fill the whole universe." By "the

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<sup>2</sup> Patzia, p. 228.

lower, earthly regions," he means "the earth below." The same Christ who "ascended on high" is also the one who first "descended" to the earth. Thus Paul is referring to Christ's incarnation and crucifixion, and his resurrection and exaltation.

This Savior, who came down from heaven and then went up again, has confronted and conquered all the powers in every sphere and on every level, and "led captives in his train." As Paul writes in Colossians, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (2:15). He did this "in order to fill the whole universe." The expression is an idiom for pervasive influence and control.<sup>3</sup> In his exalted position, Christ is "head over everything for the church" (Ephesians 1:22).

As the conqueror and the exalted one, he "gave gifts to men." Paul says that these gifts have been given to "each one of us," but he focuses on those in leadership positions. He specifically mentions "apostles," "prophets," "evangelists," and "pastors and teachers," so as to "highlight particularly those who reveal, declare and teach the gospel."<sup>4</sup> This is consistent with his emphasis on the intellectual and doctrinal throughout this letter.

"Apostles" and "prophets" are doctrinal ministers in the church. Since the doctrines of the Christian faith have been "once for all" (Jude 3) established, no one can remove, change, or add to them. For this reason, one perspective contends that there can be no apostles and prophets today.

However, this is a false inference. Although we make the usually harmless generalization that the apostles and prophets wrote the Bible, significant portions of the Bible were not written by them, or not known to be written by them. Moreover, most apostles and prophets did not write any Scripture. Thus these offices are not necessarily tied to the writing of Scripture, which was written by God, not by men. It seems an outright denial that apostles and prophets could exist today does not come from sound doctrine or orthodoxy. Rather, it comes from unbelief, especially in conjunction with the heresy of cessationism, and from the false assumption about the relationship between apostles, prophets, and the writing of Scripture.

Nevertheless, apostles and prophets in any age must possess the doctrinal knowledge and intellectual competence that this passage teaches us to expect from them. There are people who advertise themselves as apostles and prophets, when in some cases, it is difficult to believe that they are even Christians. Titles should correspond to functions and qualifications, and "apostles" and "prophets" must be tested. Jesus commends the church of Ephesus for this, saying, "I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false" (Revelation 2:2).

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<sup>3</sup> Turner, p. 1228 (on 1:23).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 1238.

"Evangelists," of course, preach the gospel to the unconverted (Acts 8 and 21:8),<sup>5</sup> and theirs is probably an itinerant ministry. However, it would be a mistake to think that they preach only to the unconverted, because our passage and probably also 2 Timothy 4:5 suggest that they play a significant role in promoting doctrinal progress and agreement within the church. O'Brien writes:

The admonition to Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist" is set within the context of a settled congregation, which presumably meant a ministry to believers and unbelievers alike, while the cognate verb, rendered "preach the gospel," covers a range of activities from primary evangelism and the planting of churches to the ongoing building of Christians and the establishment of settled congregations (cf. Rom. 1:11-15). Here in Ephesians 4 evangelists are given by the ascended Christ for the purpose of building his body, and this included both intensive and extensive growth.<sup>6</sup>

"Pastors and teachers" are linked by a single definite article. This suggests that either Paul has only one group of ministers in mind, or at least an overlapping of functions. Teachers, of course, teach. On the other hand, many pastors do not teach nearly often enough. Clark observes, "From my admittedly limited experience I would surmise that many of today's ministers spend a great deal of time pastoring and shepherding in the restricted form of pastoral counseling; and few spend much time teaching. The old Scottish ministers used to go from home to home catechizing. They then had an educated congregation."<sup>7</sup>

One way to appreciate this list of ministries is to divide them into the foundational (apostles and prophets), the trans-local (evangelists), and the local (pastors and teachers). The important point is that they are all doctrinal. Calvin notes, "the fact that the Church is ruled by the preaching of the Word, is not a human invention, but the appointment of Christ....doctrine is the present subject."<sup>8</sup>

Elsewhere, Paul writes, "Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work" (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13), and "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching" (1 Timothy 5:17). The doctrinal ministers hold the greatest place in directing the growth of the church; therefore, instead of neglecting or abusing them, believers must respect them "because of their work," and do everything they can to help these ministers properly fulfill their duties.

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<sup>5</sup> F. Scott Spencer, *The Portrait of Philip in Acts: A Study of Roles and Relations* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); Roger Carswell, *And Some Evangelists* (Christian Focus Publications, 2003); Peter T. O'Brien, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis* (Baker Academic, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> O'Brien, p. 299.

<sup>7</sup> Clark, *Ephesians*; p. 138.

<sup>8</sup> Calvin, *Ephesians*; p. 178-179.

The purpose of these doctrinal ministries is "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."

An older interpretation takes the three phrases in this verse as separated by the prepositions, thus the KJV translates, "*For* the perfecting of the saints, *for* the work of the ministry, *for* the edifying of the body of Christ." Thus the meaning seems to be that Christ has given these ministers to his people, so that *these ministers* would 1) perfect the saints, 2) perform the work of the ministry, and 3) edify the body of Christ.

On the other hand, the newer interpretation takes note of the different prepositions, taking the position that the second phrase depends on the first, and that the third depends on the first two. This has become the dominant view, and is reflected in some of the newer translations, including the NIV: "to [*pros*] prepare God's people for [*eis*] works of service, so that [*eis*] the body of Christ may be built up." Or, in the REB: "to [*pros*] equip God's people for [*eis*] work in his service, for [*eis*] the building up of the body of Christ."<sup>9</sup>

Besides the grammatical objection, the practical objection against the old view is that it assigns to the "special" ministers all the responsibility of service, and thus encourages other believers to be mere spectators in the church. This would undermine the biblical doctrine of "the priesthood of all believers." However, if one takes the whole passage into consideration, even the old view cannot encourage a spectator Christianity. Verse 7 says that "to *each one of us* grace has been given," and verse 16 concludes that the body of Christ maintains its integrity and progress "as *each part* does its work." Therefore, although the newer view is probably correct on grammatical grounds, even the old view cannot reach a different theological conclusion.

If we must avoid undermining "the priesthood of all believers," then we must also avoid undermining the role of the doctrinal ministers, since Paul indeed highlights their importance. Whether we affirm the old or new view on this verse, the doctrinal ministers are the ones who "equip the saints." If God's people are automatically and equally qualified at conversion, then there would be no need for Christ to send these ministers, and no need for Paul to distinguish them from the rest of the believers. All believers are encouraged and required to participate in the progress and growth of the church, but they must accept the training Christ provides through the doctrinal ministers.

As the mindsets of people have become more and more democratic and individualistic, to the point of showing blatant disdain and defiance against even proper authorities, "the priesthood of all believers" has become an increasingly abused concept. Just because we are all priests of God in Christ does not mean that we are all equally knowledgeable about the things of God. This same passage that affirms that each one of us has been given grace and that each part must do its work also affirms that each one must be trained and taught by the special ministers that Christ has given to his church.

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<sup>9</sup> But see Turner, p. 1238, and Mark E. Dever, "The Priesthood of All Believers: Reconsidering Every-Member Ministry," in *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis*, edited by John H. Armstrong; Crossway Books, 1998.

Some time ago, one woman discovered my ministry, and for a while was enamored with the biblical teaching that I offered. Then I found out that she had started going to some gatherings led by a certain heretic, and that she had become engrossed and supportive of his teachings. So I gently warned her about the man, and gave her several clear examples of how his teachings departed from central biblical doctrines.

She instantly turned from an enthusiastic supporter of my ministry into a raving lunatic. She was shocked and enraged that I would speak against this other man that she had grown to love so much. She did not even try to refute my objections against the man's teachings, but responded, "Each of us has our own gift from God. You are a teacher to the body of Christ, so that you excel at detailed and accurate biblical teaching. But he is an exhorter – he is like a cheerleader in the body of Christ." This is the kind of insanity that I have to deal with. She considered this a proper application of the biblical teaching that each believer has his own gift (Ephesians 4:7-16), that there is a diversity of gifts, and that each part is necessary (1 Corinthians 12).

If there is a ministry of the "exhorter" as one who speaks encouragement to the body of Christ, then instead of getting people excited and passionate about nothing, he must still exhort people *with* something, and *to* something. He must exhort people to affirm and follow sound doctrine, to shun heresies, to pursue holiness, and to overcome evil. Did the woman think that an exhorter performs a Christian ministry when he exhorts people with false doctrines and heresies? So a church janitor can be a Satanist and still be acceptable to God, because his gift is cleaning and not teaching? Then a pastor can commit murder and still be approved by God, if his gift is preaching and not healing. What if I say that I am called only to teach doctrine, so it does not matter if I kill, rape, and steal, because it is another man's duty to be the moral example? We have different gifts, you know. But insofar as we are Christians, we are all called to pursue holiness, and to affirm sound doctrine.

If she truly believed that I was a teacher to the body of Christ, then according to her own view, she should have paid attention when I addressed doctrinal matters, and she should have heeded my warning about the heretic. And if she truly believed that teaching was my gift, then in her view, that exhorter should have first learned biblical doctrines from someone like me, and then exhort the people to affirm and follow these doctrines, or exhort them on the basis of these doctrines. Instead, she thought that because he was an "exhorter," he did not need to be accurate when it comes to doctrine. She might have drawn the line if he had exhorted people to worship the devil, but that would be arbitrary, and inconsistent with her own position.

We must resist this perversion of the teaching about the diversity of gifts. The passage indeed says that because of our diversity in gifts, we can each make different contributions to the growth of the body of Christ; nevertheless, whatever our gifts may be, we are united by the work that Christ has done to redeem us, and we are united by common doctrines. It is to unite his people around these doctrines that Christ has sent the doctrinal ministers.

For this reason, although the passage begins by talking about the grace given to each of us, Paul highlights the doctrinal ministers, for they are the ones who nurture and direct the

grace given to each believer. Whatever your function in the body of Christ, you are unprepared to perform your duty unless you have been trained by the word of God and the Spirit of God, usually through the doctrinal ministers. As Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."

Church leaders must not forbid anyone who is teachable and obedient to participate in some form of ministry in the church. But one who refuses to learn from the proper authorities is not good enough to clean the church toilet. If you are eager to participate in ministry because Scripture teaches that you are a "priest" of God, then you better act like one all the time. This means that you must be diligent in prayer and study. Ministry is not an opportunity for you to gain attention, to satisfy your lust to perform, or to make people hear your irrelevant anecdotes and opinions. Christ has given the doctrinal ministers to prepare you for your ministry, but if you refuse to learn and to submit, then you have no right to participate, for the same Scripture that allows you to participate states that it is these doctrinal ministers who will equip you.

As the doctrinal ministers perform their duties, and as the other believers learn from them and participate in "works of service,"<sup>10</sup> they build up the body of Christ. The aim is to "reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God."

"Faith" is used in the objective sense. "The faith" refers to the biblical system of doctrine that Christians must affirm and follow. As 1 Timothy 3:9 says, "[Deacons] must keep hold of the *deep truths* of the faith with a clear conscience." 1 Timothy 4:6 talks about being "a good minister" who has been "brought up in *the truths* of the faith and of *the good teaching* that you have followed." And Jude 3 urges readers to "contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints."

Again, many commentators refuse to tolerate Paul's intellectual emphasis, and so they stir up problems with the word "knowledge." On the basis that the word used here is not *gnōsis* but *epignōsis*,<sup>11</sup> and sometimes without any basis at all,<sup>12</sup> some of them allege that Paul is referring to "heart knowledge," or something "deeper" than the intellect, such as personal "fellowship" with Christ.

For example, Foulkes writes, "faith is not just the acceptance of a collection of dogmas, in the embracing of which unity will be found."<sup>13</sup> He is totally wrong. Paul is indeed teaching that faith *is* a collection of dogmas, in the embracing of which unity will be found. The thrust of this passage is that Christ has given the church doctrinal ministers to teach them

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<sup>10</sup> Barclay thinks that this refers to "practical service" (p. 149). Christians who are relatively inept in intellectual matters, even if they have been trained for practical service, must not be allowed to usurp doctrinal authority in the church. Most people are not called to the office of teacher (James 3:1), but some are very gifted in handling the many practical matters in the church.

<sup>11</sup> See the example from Lenski below.

<sup>12</sup> See the example from Foulkes below.

<sup>13</sup> Foulkes, p. 129.

these dogmas, and true Christian unity is achieved when believers embrace these doctrines. Paul is teaching the very thing that Foulkes denies.

Foulkes continues, "[Faith] is something deeper and more personal. It is unity in *the knowledge of the Son of God*.... We can never know any person simply with our mind; and knowledge of such a person as is envisaged here must involve the deepest possible fellowship."<sup>14</sup>

He says that we can *never* know *any person* simply with our mind, but he does not specify with what other part of the human person we can know someone. Does he mean that we must know someone with our spleen as well as with our mind? Perhaps he means that we must know someone with our "heart" also. But we have shown the heart *is* the mind; they are the same part of the human person.

He says that this "knowledge" must involve "the deepest possible fellowship." Again, if this "fellowship" is not a mental relationship sustained by intellectual communication, then what part of the human person is he talking about? Is there a non-mental part of the human person with which we can have "the deepest possible fellowship" with another? Foulkes seems to think so, but he must show that there is such a non-mental part in the human person. We have established that the "heart," the "inward man," and all such terms refer to the mind.

Like others, Foulkes says what he says most likely because it sounds sweet and pious – he has no exegetical ground for it – but the problem is that it is meaningless nonsense. Of course we should have "the deepest possible fellowship" with Christ, but it is still a mental relationship, involving intellectual communication. We have a relationship with Christ and with other Christians based on the doctrines revealed in Scripture.

We must still talk about *gnōsis* and *epignōsis*. Lenski writes, "Not mere intellectual knowledge is referred to, such as *gnōsis* might express, but true heart knowledge."<sup>15</sup> But what is "heart" knowledge? And where is it? What is "heart" knowledge but intellectual knowledge? Is the "heart" non-mental, and processes no verbal information? If so – if the heart processes no verbal information – then how can we have "heart" *knowledge* about biblical doctrine? If not – if the heart *does* process verbal information – then how is the "heart" different from the mind? Again, we have already established that the heart *is* the mind.

Some people argue that we must distinguish the mind and the heart, because even an unbeliever can agree with biblical doctrines in his mind, but he is not truly saved until he agrees with them in his heart. This is wrong. First, we cannot make this distinction between the mind and the heart if the Bible never makes such a distinction, but in fact uses the two terms almost as synonyms, if not as exact synonyms. Second, the Bible never admits that an unbeliever can truly agree with biblical doctrines – it only teaches that he can claim to agree or pretend to agree. Third, even if the unbeliever can truly agree with some biblical

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Lenski, p. 534.

propositions, he can never truly agree with those biblical propositions that lead to salvation; otherwise – if he can truly agree with them – he would be a believer by definition, not an unbeliever.<sup>16</sup>

Lenski claims that *gnōsis* is "intellectual knowledge," but that *epignōsis* is "heart knowledge." This is one of the most popular exegetical myths. It is assumed by many preachers and scholars.

Clark replies, "Hellenistic Greek makes no distinction between *gnōsis* and *ginōskō*, and *epignōsis*."<sup>17</sup> Thayer's lexicon says that *epignōsis* means "correct and precise knowledge; used in the NT of the knowledge of things ethical and divine," and in connection with our verse in particular: "Of Christ, i.e. the true knowledge of Christ's nature, dignity, benefits."<sup>18</sup>

Lawrence Richards writes, "*Epiginōskō* is also translated 'know' in the NT. This is an intensive form of *ginōskō* and implies a fuller or more nearly complete knowledge."<sup>19</sup> And in connection with Ephesians 1:17, Ralph Earle writes:

The regular Greek word for "knowledge" is *gnōsis*...But the word here is *epignōsis*...Is there any difference?

Trench writes: "Of *epignōsis*, as compared with *gnōsis*, it will be sufficient to say that *epi* must be regarded as intensive, giving to the compound word a greater strength than the simple word possessed." Lightfoot says: "The compound *epignōsis* is an advance upon *gnōsis*, denoting a larger and more thorough knowledge." And Salmond agrees: "It means a knowledge that is true, accurate, thorough, and so might be rendered 'full knowledge.'"

Paul is fond of compound words. This fact seems to be a reflection of his powerful personality. He felt deeply and expressed himself strongly. His use of compounds with the intensive *epi* was but a projection of his very intense nature, which manifested itself also in a life of unsurpassed devotion to the Lord.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, the prefix *epi* at best intensifies the meaning of *gnōsis*, making it a greater and deeper knowledge of the same kind, but it does not change the meaning into another kind of knowledge. As Lenski himself admits, *gnōsis* denotes "intellectual knowledge," and since "Hellenistic Greek makes no distinction between *gnōsis*...and *epignōsis*," and

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<sup>16</sup> This also addresses anti-intellectual arguments based on James 2:19. Demons can affirm the oneness of God, but they can never sincerely affirm the proposition, "I will now joyfully worship Christ." To sincerely affirm this proposition would already be an act of worship.

<sup>17</sup> Clark, *Ephesians*; p. 140.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*; Hendrickson Publishers.

<sup>19</sup> Lawrence O. Richards, *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words*; Zondervan Publishing House, 1991; p. 383.

<sup>20</sup> Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament*; Hendrickson Publishers; p. 294.



the prefix *epi* most likely intensifies the meaning of *gnōsis*, this means that rather than denoting "heart knowledge" (as something different from intellectual knowledge), *epignōsis* refers to "super-intellectual knowledge."

Christ has sent us these doctrinal ministers so that they would prepare the believers for service. This results in the continual edification of the whole church, to the end that we all become agreed in doctrine and in the deeply, intensely, super-intellectual knowledge about the Son of God, that is, Jesus Christ. It is in this way and in this sense that we strive to attain "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Scripture teaches that Christian unity *is* doctrinal unity; that is, for Christians to be united is for them to agree in doctrine. Although this is the biblical position, many of those who claim to be Christians reject it. They insist that we can and must unite around "Christ," not in the form of doctrinal agreement, but *despite* great doctrinal differences and disagreements.

However, it is impossible to unite around "Christ" while affirming incompatible doctrines about him, since "Christ" would then become an undefined and meaningless sound with no definite content. If Tom thinks that Christ is an elephant, Mary thinks that Christ is a polar bear, Jane thinks that Christ is a merely human prophet, and Vincent thinks that Christ is God incarnate, then to say that we can unite around "Christ" while retaining these different conceptions about "Christ" would make both "Christ" and the "unity" meaningless. For just as Jane refuses to obey an elephant, Vincent refuses to worship a polar bear.

If your response is that the beliefs of professing Christians are not really *that* different, so that the illustration is merely hypothetical, then by implication you have admitted that Christian unity indeed depends on doctrinal unity, only that you think this doctrinal unity is already present and sufficient. If you insist that there must be only minimal doctrinal agreement among believers, then we already disagree on a doctrinal issue that I consider central. It is one that I refuse to compromise; therefore, our doctrinal disagreement has resulted in disunity.

For Christians to unite around Christ means to affirm the same things about Christ, such as who he is, what he has done, his incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation, his relationship to the Father, his relationship to the believers, and the relationship between believers in him. In other words, unity in Christ must be unity in what Scripture teaches about Christ. Otherwise, there is no unity, even if there is compromise.

Therefore, the doctrinal ministers teach the truth about Christ and refute false ideas about him: "Preaching the gospel aims at theological agreement."<sup>21</sup> As the various members of the body of Christ learn and reinforce these doctrines, they grow in knowledge and agreement with one another. This is the essence of Christian unity. Christian unity *is* doctrinal unity, and this doctrinal unity is what Paul teaches and illustrates.

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<sup>21</sup> Clark, *Ephesians*; p. 139.

If you are a church leader, then this is your mandate. You must promote doctrinal agreement by faithfully and forcefully teaching biblical doctrines, and by refuting unbiblical ideas. You must not attempt to achieve agreement by compromise, or by reducing the biblical system of truth to a common denominator with which everyone can immediately agree. Rather, you must promote the truth and destroy falsehood.

The Bible never encourages us to "put aside our doctrinal differences," but it teaches us to confront and resolve them. Rather than to satisfy both sides of a doctrinal disagreement, if one side holds the biblical position, then he should win the argument, and the other side should discard his false position. If both sides are wrong, then they should both discard their positions to embrace the biblical one.

This demands unusual commitment and courage, "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Timothy 4:3). Yet, this is the very purpose for which Christ has called you.

You might complain that substantial doctrinal agreement between Christians appear too remote, but this is partly because you have not been doing your job! It is your fault, so do not complain. If you have been thinking that Christian unity is not based on doctrine, but on some non-doctrinal "love" or "Christ," then no wonder there has been no progress in doctrinal agreement. And instead of praying for agreement only in attitudes and actions, you should also be praying for agreement in our beliefs.

Paul is not finished with his emphasis on doctrine. He states that as the doctrinal ministers perform their duty, as they prepare the believers for works of service, as the church moves toward doctrinal agreement, so that it attains the whole measure of the fullness of Christ, "Then 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." Therefore, besides telling us that Christian unity is doctrinal unity, he also teaches that Christian maturity is doctrinal maturity.

False doctrines sway immature Christians. Most churches have very little immunity, because their leaders fail to give doctrine the highest priority; instead, they promote drama programs, youth retreats, singles nights, and bake sales. It would be better if they cancel the drama programs, scrub the youth retreats, call off singles nights, turn over the bake sale tables, and devote all the time and money to theology classes. That would be a good start.

Church leaders must diligently "encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9). When they fail to do this, the believers under them will remain spiritual infants, susceptible to "the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming." Some of them will take responsibility for their own faith, and study and pray for themselves. They will mature and stand firm despite the ministers' negligence. But others will drift away to false doctrines and religions.

A heresy is a heresy, and we must refute and destroy it. Nevertheless, we should invest most of our resources on building up Christians on sound doctrine, so that they will no longer be infants. Spiritual "infants" are those who have no resistance to false doctrines, and spiritual adults are those who have been established by sound doctrines, so that they are not easily swayed.

One measurement of spiritual maturity is doctrinal maturity. Is the person's doctrinal knowledge broad, deep, accurate, and established? Then, he is spiritually mature. One might object that a person can memorize a systematic theology and still remain a licentious person or an unbeliever. This is true, and that is why he must be "established" in sound doctrine. A person who sincerely and steadily believes and follows sound doctrine is by definition a true Christian, and spiritually mature.

Paul writes, "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me" (1 Corinthians 13:11). Spiritual maturity has to do with growing up in talking, in thinking, and in reasoning about spiritual things. A mature person possesses deep doctrinal discernment, and he is not easily deceived. As a believer, this is what you must strive to become; as a church leader, this is what you must help believers become. We must read about doctrine, think about doctrine, and talk about doctrine – all the time. As Herman Hoeksema said, "If you ask me what, in our time, our people need above all, in the first place, my answer is: Doctrine! If you ask me what they need in the second place, I say: Doctrine! If you ask me what they need in the third place, I say: Doctrine!"<sup>22</sup>

By doctrine or theology, we refer to a systematic understanding of the word of God. Thus when I say, "Study doctrine! Study theology!" it is just a formal way of saying, "Listen to God! Believe God! Obey God!" If you think that we stress doctrine too much, it is because you think too little of the Bible. If you think too little of the Bible, it is because you think too little of God, because the Bible is the word of God.

Rather than tossed here and there by every heretical trend, we promote the growth of the body of Christ by "speaking the truth in love." What does this mean? Many people assume that it means, "Assert the truth, but do it *nicely*." They define "love" according to secular social etiquette, a non-Christian standard of polite speech and conduct. However, if this is the right definition, and if this is the correct understanding of "speaking the truth in love," then Paul would be telling Titus to "speak the truth *in hate*" when he writes, "Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth" (Titus 1:13-14). His concern there is similar to the one here, that is, doctrinal accuracy and maturity. But he says, "*Rebuke them sharply*, so that they will be sound in the faith." Is this love or not? Why do you think he says to rebuke them in the first place? It is because he loves them (Proverbs 27:5; 1 Timothy 5:20).

Harsh rebuke is often not the first step against false doctrine or spiritual immaturity, but it is usually reserved for the unrepentant, and those in close danger of spiritual shipwreck.

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<sup>22</sup> Herman Hoeksema, *Believers and Their Seed*; Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1997; p. vii.

The point is that "speaking the truth in love" does not mean that we always speak softly and nicely, but love sometimes requires us to let out a thunderous rebuke against the person in error. Paul writes, "These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority" – sometimes I encourage and sometimes I rebuke, but I always teach. Some people think that I should always encourage, sometimes teach, and never rebuke, but Paul assures me: "Do not let anyone despise you" (Titus 2:15). So I will keep on encouraging and rebuking people. Why? Because I love them.<sup>23</sup>

Then, "as each part does its work," the body of Christ is "joined and held together," and it "grows and builds itself up in love."

#### **EPHESIANS 4:17-24**

**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.**

God has chosen them for salvation, regenerated them, and made them into "Israel" in Christ. And now, because they belong to one body with all the heirs of God, and must contribute to its growth, Paul commands these believers to stop living like the Gentiles; instead, they must "live a life worthy of the calling" (4:1). In other words, they must stop living like non-Christians, and live like Christians.

What are the "Gentiles" or non-Christians like? What is wrong with them that Christians must not be like them? Read verses 17-19. Paul mentions "the futility of their thinking," and that they are "darkened in their understanding." He is still not done with the intellect; he is still not done with doctrine. He finally arrives at a more practical and ethical emphasis, and he immediately addresses the mind again. He says that the unbelievers are separated from God, that they are ignorant, and hardened. Then, he continues to say, they are callous, indulgent, and continually driven by lust. As the Bible consistently and repeatedly teaches, non-Christians are stupid and evil.

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<sup>23</sup> To love does not mean "be nice." Biblical love is much greater than this. It refers to an obedience to the laws of God in our relationship with God and with people (John 14:21; Romans 13:10). It is volitional and sacrificial, often resulting in some practical action that benefits others at our own expense. Here we emphasize "speaking the truth in love" among believers. For a discussion on what love and hate mean in our relationship with unbelievers, see my *Systematic Theology*.

When Scripture declares that non-Christians are morons, people often distort it and claim that it refers to "moral" intelligence. This is a blatant rejection of the word of God. Of course unbelievers are stupid concerning moral things, but this is because they are stupid concerning all things. Christians often say that many non-Christians are very smart and very moral, but that they are not good enough, or that they do not have the right kind of wisdom and morality. Scripture denies this, but it outright condemns non-Christians as stupid and evil.

Paul says that their mindset ends in futility, and that their understanding is darkened. Hendriksen writes, "The 'understanding' or *power of discursive reasoning* has been affected by sin."<sup>24</sup> Romans 1:22 says, "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools." In the same sense that non-Christians claim to be wise, they are fools. However, they do not claim to be only morally wise, but also intellectually wise; therefore, when Paul says that they are "fools" in the same sense that they claim to be wise, he means that they are intellectual fools, and not just moral fools.

Therefore, he is referring to their ability to think and reason, not only about morality, but about anything and everything. You must either confess with Scripture that all non-Christians are morons, or you must reject this assessment and abandon the inerrancy of Scripture, and thus renounce the Christian faith.

Even the people who usually support my teachings sometimes disagree that I should call non-Christians morons. However, I have repeatedly given biblical support for it, so that unless they can offer a biblical refutation, they are in defiance of Scripture when they complain that I call the non-Christians what the Scripture itself calls them. It is a sin to disagree with me on this, because I merely declare and apply God's own judgment on the matter.

They admit that Scripture calls the non-Christians "fools," and they do not object when I point out that the Greek is *moros*, from which we derived the English word that means the same thing, "moron." But they still insist that I should not call them this. They have an unbiblical and irrational aversion to it, probably because they have been influenced by a non-Christian standard.

One person responds, in effect, "You are right, but just do not say it, at least not in front of them." Are we allowed to preach on Psalm 14:1 and Romans 1:22, and other verses that say non-Christians are stupid? If so, is this person saying that we must preach on these verses behind their backs, only when they are not present? Or should we not even preach on these verses, and just read them silently at home? This person is ashamed of the word of God.

The Bible says that non-Christians are "sinners" and that they are "wicked." Are we also forbidden to tell them this? Or is it acceptable to call them "sinners" and not "morons," and say that they are "wicked," and not "stupid"? Should we even say that they "sin"? Yes, right

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<sup>24</sup> Hendriksen, p. 210.

in front of them? If so, how is "moron" and "stupid" any worse? If not – if we must not mention sin – then how can we preach the gospel at all?

Another person writes, "I wholeheartedly agree that I was stupid, foolish, and moronic in my beliefs before I became a Christian...but I do not see justification for engaging in the manner of name-calling which I have read from Mr. Cheung's writings."

So I have no justification in telling the truth and repeating the Bible? In any case, this is an incomplete account of my position. This person admits only to being "moronic in my beliefs," but Scripture does not say that non-Christians are moronic only in what they believe – it says that *they*, the people, are morons. As for justification, I have repeatedly justified the practice, but it seems he refuses to admit it.

Moreover, this is not a matter of name-calling,<sup>25</sup> but a matter of doctrine. The only justification for not calling non-Christians "morons" is if they are not morons. He disagrees with my approach because he uses a non-biblical standard of judgment or etiquette. For so long people have been trained by unbelievers on how to talk that they are shocked when someone comes along and repeats the Bible! Anyone who objects to calling non-Christians "morons" must first refute Scripture, because this is not a tactic of debate, but the theology of Scripture.

In one place, a person proposes the syllogism: "Scripture says that non-Christian are fools; X is a non-Christian; therefore, X is a fool." He questions how Vincent Cheung could be in error if Scripture is inerrant and if this syllogism is valid. One person answers that he does not dare disagree with what God says, and so he has to agree with the first premise and the necessary conclusion of the syllogism – but somehow Vincent Cheung is still wrong!

He claims that he does not want to "judge" people. But consider this syllogism: "Scripture says that non-Christians are sinners; X is a non-Christian; therefore, X is a sinner." By this person's reasoning, it would also be wrong to call the non-Christian a sinner. If this is the case, how can I preach the gospel? Am I even allowed to tell Christians that the non-Christians are sinners? If not, how can I teach the Bible? And if we are not supposed to "judge," then who are we to assume that someone might even need the gospel? Can we preach to anyone about anything? This person's reasoning amounts to saying that although we must agree with the Bible, we are not allowed to draw necessary implications from it, and we are not allowed to apply its negative teachings to anyone – that would be to "judge" people.

There are some who think that we may call people sinners, but not morons. But why is "sinner" less offensive than "moron"? Or why is "wicked" more pleasant than "stupid"? The non-Christian denies both, but Scripture calls them both.

Then, some people applaud me for agreeing with Scripture and calling the non-Christian a fool, but they want me to be so poetic and polite – so unclear – about it that they are shocked

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<sup>25</sup> If you are calling them what they really are, why is "name-calling" wrong?

and embarrassed when I repeat what Scripture says in plain speech, in a way that both Christians and non-Christians can understand. These people pretend to believe the Scripture, but they are also ashamed of it. They call themselves Christians, but they wish that God would shut up and behave.

My critics assume a secular morality that has been designed to silence Christians, so that they are bound by unbiblical concepts of etiquette and tolerance. As for me, I will "no longer live as the Gentiles do." This includes believing what Scripture says about them, and calling them whatever Scripture calls them, and do it right in front of them. If Scripture is our spiritual and intellectual foundation, then we must believe and declare its assessment of the non-Christians.

Then, some Christians find it acceptable when I say that non-Christians are "irrational" or "unwise," but they are horrified when I use the word "stupid." Some of them even call the non-Christians "fools" in agreement with Psalm 14 and Romans 1. But when I use the words "idiots" and "morons," I am guilty of some horrible crime.

It is Scripture's own doctrine that non-Christians are stupid, that they are morons. I am willing to affirm this doctrine in clear and unmistakable terms before both Christians and non-Christians – whether in a soft or harsh tone, with restrained or flamboyant gestures, or with subdued or forceful mannerisms, as the situation demands. I merely apply and repeat the words of the prophets and the apostles. If you disagree with this, is it really because I am wrong, or is it because you are a loser, a wimp, and a slave of non-Christian indoctrination?

Paul writes that they are "darkened in their understanding." If we agree with Scripture that the non-Christians are "darkened in their understanding," then we cannot at the same time think that they are pretty smart. In Romans 1:21, he writes that "their thinking became futile and their *foolish* hearts were darkened," very much like what he says here in this letter. Thayer's lexicon says that the word (*asunetos*) means "unintelligent, without understanding," and that in Romans 1:21, it means "stupid."<sup>26</sup>

Then, Paul adds that the non-Christians "indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more." Do my critics agree with Scripture that the non-Christians are "callous" (NASB), and that they continually "lust for more" vile and impure things, but that at the same time they are pretty good people? Are they insane? Or are they stupid like the unbelievers?

Paul says that non-Christians are vain, stupid, hardened, callous, and full of lust. My critics must either accept biblical inerrancy or reject it. If they accept it, then they must agree with Paul and me that non-Christians are stupid and evil. If they reject it, then they must tell us on what basis they can call themselves Christians at all. If they are not Christians, then they must refute the Christian faith before they can criticize me for repeating what my worldview says about the non-Christians.

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<sup>26</sup> Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*.

Some believers know that I am right, that Scripture indeed calls non-Christians stupid and evil, but they resent me for being biblical and unambiguous about this. Nevertheless, I would follow Scripture all the way – I do not stop at calling non-Christians stupid and evil, but I proceed to proclaim the gospel, pressing the point that only Christ can save them from being morons and monsters.<sup>27</sup>

As mentioned, Paul is still not done with the intellect, and he is still not done with doctrine. After reminding his readers that non-Christians are stupid and evil, he also reminds them that they are not like the non-Christians, because they have been changed by Christian teaching. Notice the intellectual references:

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.

The non-Christian's problem consists of his futile thinking, darkened mind, callous heart, and continual lust. Christians are different because they have been taught the truth of the Christian faith. God's power rescues us from futile thinking and continual lust, not by a mystical encounter or experience, but by the teaching of Christ, or Christian doctrine, applied to the mind by divine power.

The act of putting off the old self and putting on the new self is also an intellectual exercise. As the parallel verses in Colossians 3:9-10 say, "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being *renewed in knowledge* in the image of its Creator."

Thus Paul is saying to his readers, "You do not have to be like the non-Christians, because you have been taught something else. You have been taught the doctrines of Jesus Christ. You can live consistently with this Christian worldview because God has regenerated you and his power is at work in you. By renewing your mind with biblical teaching, you can put on the new self, form new thinking patterns and moral habits, and conform to true righteousness and holiness."

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<sup>27</sup> There are several biblical verses that people use against my approach, which is based on what the Bible says about the non-Christians, but they have distorted these verses. For example, see *The Sermon on the Mount* for my response to a misapplication of Matthew 5:22. They pervert the Bible to justify their adoption of non-Christian standards. Why do you think the unbelievers teach "tolerance"? It is because their thinking and conduct cannot withstand scrutiny. However, we must not tolerate false beliefs, but we must expose and destroy them. See also Douglas Wilson, *The Serrated Edge: A Brief Defense of Biblical Satire and Trinitarian Skylarking* (Canon Press, 2003), and Robert A. Morey, "And God Mocked Them" (audio).



## EPHESIANS 4:25-5:2

**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. 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.**

In sanctification, the Christian renews his mind with the teaching of Scripture, and then following its instructions, he puts off the old self and puts on the new self. Having established this in the previous passage, Paul now lists several areas in which Christians must practice this principle, and explains what it means to put off the old self and put on the new self in the context of these examples.

Because we must no longer live like the Gentiles, and because we have received the teaching of Christ, "therefore" we must now "put off falsehood." The old self tends to lie whenever it seems advantageous to do so, but we must put on the new self and thus "speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body." Although we must follow biblical principles of ethics at all times and toward everyone, Paul focuses on our behavior within God's household, since the context has to do with maintaining the peace and unity that God has produced among his people through Christ.

"In your anger do not sin" comes from Psalm 4:4. There is continuity between Old Testament ethics and New Testament ethics.<sup>28</sup> Christ did not redeem us so that we may disobey Old Testament moral principles, but rather to grant us a new spirit to obey them (Ezekiel 11:19-20). There is such a thing as righteous indignation. Anger is not always sinful, but it is righteous when it arises because we are jealous for God's honor, and zealous for the truth (Mark 3:5). Nevertheless, we must not justify selfish anger, or lack of patience and compassion, by calling it righteous indignation. Righteous anger is different from holding a grudge. If we can tell the difference, and control our emotions, then we will "not give the devil a foothold."

Some of the readers were thieves before they were converted. Now that they are Christians, stealing is unacceptable, because this is not what they learned from Christ (4:20); rather, they have been taught to put off the old self and to put on the new self. They must not only

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<sup>28</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

put off the old, but they must also put on the new; they must not only put away wickedness, but they must also pursue holiness. Therefore, it is not enough to stop stealing, but they must find some useful work to do, so that they may "have something to share with those in need."

The same principle applies to our speech. Now that we are Christians, we must put away any "unwholesome talk"; instead, we must speak "only what is helpful for building others up."

Some Christians misuse the statement, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." They apply this to the "moves" of the Spirit, and to warn those who oppose the unusual things that they claim the Spirit does in church services. However, whether or not this principle is correct, it is not what the passage intends to say.

They infer that the Holy Spirit is easily offended, that he is like a frightened little girl, or that he could be easily chased away like a pigeon. But if the Spirit is as "sensitive" as they say, we would never have the Spirit's presence and power. They overestimate their own holiness, and underestimate the Spirit's robust personality.

The "anointing" does not depart from you because you oversleep or overeat, because you have to clean the toilet, do your laundry, or feed your baby before you preach, or because the music leader plays the wrong song during the service. The power rests in the Spirit! It does not depend on you, or on your serene state of mind. The Spirit is with us because of the work of Christ, not because of our holiness, and not because we manage to tip-toe around him all the time.

Moreover, since God is impassible, the reference to "grieve" is an anthropopathism in the first place. God is without emotions.<sup>29</sup>

Paul's point is for us to "Get rid of...every form of malice." Again, sanctification involves more than putting off the old self, along with its sinful desires and habits. We must also put on or take up the corresponding virtues. So he urges us to "Be imitators of God...and live a life of love." Following God's example, we must "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

He is introducing a new pattern of thinking and living to his readers. We may no longer live like the non-Christians, because we have been chosen, changed, and converted in Christ. Non-Christians lie and steal. They are bitter and malicious. At one time, we were like them, but instead of acting like the children of Satan, now we must be "imitators of God, as dearly beloved children."

#### **EPHESIANS 5:3-20**

**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**

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<sup>29</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology*.

**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, 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. 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. 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. 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.**

Paul is aware of the rampant sexual perversions that surround Christians, and so after giving them some examples on putting off the old self and putting on the new self, he provides an extended warning against "sexual immorality" and "what the disobedient do in secret" – things that are "shameful even to mention."

Among Christians, there must not be "even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity." How far we are from this standard! Yet Christians are still playing nice with sins and sinners, and attacking those who speak up. But Paul does not stop here. He adds that "coarse joking" should be replaced with "thanksgiving." Some Christians are eager to show the non-Christians that we are not prudes, but if we ever succeed in doing this to their satisfaction, then it would also mean that we have embraced a non-Christian moral standard. Rather than proving that we are not prudes, we should show that they are filthy beasts.

Paul then makes an important point. He says, "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." Many Christians accommodate their theology to the non-Christians' sinful lifestyle. They seem to think that if we would affirm that all these things lead to hell, then it would mean that many people are heading there. They refuse such a harsh theology. But take it or leave it, this is Christianity.

In another place, he writes, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor

effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, NASB). Some of those who claim to be Christians even say that it is fine to commit adultery, that it is fine to have an abortion, that it is fine if you are a homosexual, that it is fine if you leave your husband or wife. After all, you must follow your heart, right? God understands.

But it is not fine. Paul explicitly states that adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, and drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God. They are not Christians, and they will go to hell – all of them. He knows that people do not like to think this way, and that many people will assert a different view, and so in one passage he warns, "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient," and in the other he also writes, "Do not be deceived."

It is precisely because of these things – sexual immorality, coarse joking, adultery, theft, homosexuality, drunkenness, and all the other things that Scripture calls sin – that God's wrath is coming upon "the disobedient." It is because of these things that non-Christians will burn in hell. The sooner Christians wake up to this reality, the sooner they can take the proper approach toward these people. They must not tell homosexuals that they can remain homosexuals and still go to heaven as long as they believe in Christ. No, if they believe in Christ, then they must stop being homosexuals. Likewise, one cannot be a Christian and have an abortion, or leave the husband or wife for another person. All these are abominations. It is not loving or compassionate to deceive a sinner by letting him think that he is not a sinner.

"Therefore, do not be partners with them." Instead of joining them in their sins, or their approval of these sins, we must "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them." Paul sets up a sharp contrast between Christians and non-Christians. Whereas we were "once darkness...now you are light in the Lord." The Christians are as light, and the non-Christians are as darkness. We must "live as children of the light." Throughout this letter, Paul labors to communicate the tremendous intellectual and moral differences between the Christians and the non-Christians, and here the imagery cannot be more clear – Christians and non-Christians are intellectual and moral opposites.

He is not finished with the contrast. He writes, "Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise." In other words, do not be stupid like the non-Christians, but be smart, and that means "making the most of every opportunity" to live as children of light and to expose the deeds of darkness. "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." Here is the contrast again. Non-Christians are stupid – they indulge in their lusts and immorality and think that they are fine. We must not be like them, but we must be wise, and understand the Lord's will.

Paul continues, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Some Christians distort this verse. They take a mystical and experiential interpretation, rather than, as consistent with the context, an intellectual and moral interpretation. Some of them assume that this means the Spirit is a substitute for wine, and he will produce similar mental and physical effects in a person.

The contrast is still between folly and wisdom.<sup>30</sup> In fact, O'Brien argues that the Holy Spirit is not the content of the filling, but the instrument of the filling. So the verse does not say, "Be filled *with* the Spirit," but "Be filled *by* the Spirit." As for the content of fullness, recall the relevant expressions in this letter. O'Brien concludes:

The *content* with which believers have been (or are being) filled is the fulness of (the triune) God or of Christ. No other text in Ephesians (or elsewhere in Paul) *focuses* specifically on the Holy Spirit as the *content* of this fulness. It is better, then, to understand 5:18 in terms of the Spirit's mediating the fulness of God and Christ to believers. In other words, Paul's readers are to be transformed by the Spirit into the likeness of God and Christ, ideas which are entirely consistent with the earlier exhortations of 4:32-5:2...To be admonished, "Be filled by the Spirit," then, means that Paul's readers are urged to let the Spirit change them more and more into the image of God and Christ, a notion which is consistent with Pauline theology elsewhere.<sup>31</sup>

This filling by the Holy Spirit produces in the believers "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs," which are associated with "giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." This seems to describe the very doxologies and thanksgivings that we have read in this letter, and like Paul's doxologies, they should contain deep theology and exhibit coherent thought.

This interpretation is credible because the parallel verse in Colossians says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (3:16). Here it is "the word of Christ" that fills the believers, and the effect is that they would "*teach and admonish* one another with *all wisdom*, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

Some people are more prone to write songs and doxologies, even if they are not as good as Paul's, but all who have been filled *by* the Spirit *with* the word of Christ must "teach and admonish...with all wisdom." This is another way of saying that the Holy Spirit fills us with biblical knowledge, and as he does so, we become capable of teaching and admonishing others with theological insight, perhaps even in the form of songs and doxologies, and always with gratitude in our hearts to God.

#### **EPHESIANS 5:21-6:9**

**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.**

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<sup>30</sup> Turner, p. 1242.

<sup>31</sup> O'Brien, p. 392.

**Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.**

**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, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.**

**After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.**

**Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" – which is the first commandment with a promise – "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."**

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

**Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.**

**And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.**

There is difficulty in determining the relationship of verse 21 with its surrounding verses. Grammatically, it seems to belong to the previous passage, and refers to one of the results of being filled by the Spirit. In terms of content, however, the verse appears to introduce the next section on domestic relationships. In fact, it is verse 21 that supplies the verb for verse 22. Thus we must recognize the relationship of verse 21 with both the verses that precede and follow it.

Corresponding to Paul's earlier admonition, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (4:3), people who are filled by the Spirit do not always insist on having things their own way, but they willingly yield to one another as long as

this does not compromise doctrine. After instructing the believers on how to behave in the household of God in general, he proceeds to discuss the relationships in the individual households of Christians.

The verse says, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Some have derived from this the teaching of "mutual submission," that every believer must submit to every other believer, and they apply this to the domestic relationships that Paul is about to discuss. However, this is not what the verse teaches, and when one tries to impose "mutual submission" on the subsequent verses, it just does not fit. We will consider several arguments showing that the verse contradicts "mutual submission."

To begin, the word translated "submit" (*hypotassō*) regularly functions to describe a one-directional subordination to another's authority, rather than a symmetrical relationship. O'Brien writes that "it always has to do with an ordered relationship in which one person is 'over' and another 'under.'"<sup>32</sup> Therefore, to say that the word can refer to a relationship of mutual and reciprocal submission would be "to misunderstand the semantic range of the term."<sup>33</sup> The word disallows the "mutual submission" interpretation of the verse; rather, it denotes a one-directional submission to the proper authority in any given situation.<sup>34</sup> Mary Kassian concludes:

*Hypotasso* always requires *one* party in a relationship to submit to the other, and *not* vice versa. The context of Ephesians 5:21 supports this position. In this verse, Paul makes a *general* call to all Christians to submit to one another in whatever hierarchical relationships *they are involved in*. He then gives three *specific* examples of relationships in which submission of one party is required. Verse 21 is thus properly understood as an introductory verse to those which follow.<sup>35</sup>

Then, "one another" does not necessarily imply an equal and reciprocal relationship. For example, Paul writes in Galatians 6:2, "Bear *one another's* burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ" (NASB), but then he writes in verse 5, "For each one shall bear his own load." His point is that whereas each person should "bear his own load," the stronger should help the weaker, or those who are capable should help those who are in need. He certainly does not mean that we should each *exchange* our "burdens," and to never bear our own load but to always bear the burdens of other people.<sup>36</sup>

Another example is Revelation 6:4. The verse says, "And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men should slay *one another*" (NASB). This means that men would fight among themselves, and that

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<sup>32</sup> O'Brien, p. 402.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> To paraphrase, the verse is saying, "Submit to one another – that is, wives to husbands, children to parents, and slaves to masters." See also Dan Doriani, *Women and Ministry: What the Bible Teaches*; Crossway Books, 2003; p. 66.

<sup>35</sup> Mary A. Kassian, *Women, Creation, and the Fall*; Crossway Books, 1990; p. 36.

<sup>36</sup> See also 1 Corinthians 11:33; Luke 2:15, 24:32.

many of them would be killed. It is certainly not asserting that there would be mutual destruction in every confrontation, that people would be killed in pairs, or that both parties in every confrontation would always kill each other, so that each would have to fatally wound the other person at almost the same time, since one cannot inflict harm to his opponent after he himself has been killed.

Therefore, "one another" in 5:21 does not necessarily imply "mutual submission" in the sense of a reciprocal submission; instead, we must determine the meaning by observing the context.

What interpretation does the context demand?

A completely reciprocal submission would mean that whereas wives must submit to husbands, husbands must also submit to wives (in exactly the same sense and to exactly the same extent), that whereas children must submit to parents, parents must also submit to children (in exactly the same sense and to exactly the same extent), and that whereas slaves must submit to masters, masters must also submit to slaves (in exactly the same sense and to exactly the same extent).

The passage does not teach this – Paul indeed says that wives must submit to husbands, that children must submit to parents, and that slaves must submit to masters, but he never says that husbands must submit to wives, that parents must submit to children, or that masters must submit to slaves. He teaches that husbands must treat their wives well, that parents must treat their children well, and that masters must treat their slaves well, but this is very different from teaching submission. Paul never says, "Wives, submit to you husbands, and husbands, submit to your wives," or "Slaves, obey your masters, and masters, obey your slaves"!

In fact, one reason Paul commands those in authority to treat their subordinates well is precisely because the latter must submit and obey. It is as if he says to them, "Since they must obey you, they are in a vulnerable position to be abused by you. Therefore, just as I command them to submit to you, I command you not to mistreat them, but to be tender toward them. Just as you have authority over those who are under you, we are all under the authority of Christ, and are accountable to him."

Paul uses the marriage relationship as a figure for the relationship between Christ and the church. If verse 21 requires that we understand 5:22-6:9 as teaching "mutual submission," then this necessarily implies that Christ himself must obey the church in the same sense and to the same extent that the church obeys Christ. Thus the mutual submission doctrine results in blasphemy.

On the other hand, he writes, "For *the husband* is the head of the wife *as Christ* is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now *as the church* submits to Christ, *so also wives* should submit to their husbands in everything."<sup>37</sup> "The husband is...as Christ

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<sup>37</sup> Calvin writes, "Not that the authority is equal, but wives cannot obey Christ unless they yield obedience to their husbands" (*Ephesians*, p. 205).



is," and "as the church...so also wives." Does this not give the husbands tremendous authority over the wives? Indeed it does, and that is one reason Paul writes, "Husbands, love your wives."

Therefore, we conclude with Lenski, "...in what follows (v. 22-6:9) we, indeed, have subjection but no reciprocal, no mutual subjection. Wives are to be subject to husbands, children to parents, slaves to masters, but not the reverse, and husbands and masters are not to be subject to other persons in the family."<sup>38</sup>

Now we come to verses 22-24. They are self-explanatory, especially in the light of our discussion on verse 21. However, there have been many attempts at distorting and subverting the obvious meaning of the passage. For example, the *NIV Study Bible* rejects Paul's teaching, and offers the following excuse:

To submit meant to yield one's own rights. If the relationship called for it, as in the military, the term could connote obedience, but that meaning is not called for here. In fact, the word "obey" does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives, though it does with respect to children (6:1) and slaves (6:5).<sup>39</sup>

Submission is defined as "to yield one's own rights." Another popular understanding of "submission" contrasts it with "obedience," and takes submission in this context to mean humility and respect in the wife's attitude, instead of conformity to the husband's will in behavior. Thus it is conceivable that a wife could exhibit total *disobedience*, and at the same time satisfies the command to exhibit total "submission," just because she has a respectful attitude. Both of these definitions are false given the context of the passage and how the word is used in other biblical verses.

As for the claim that "the word 'obey' does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives, though it does with respect to children (6:1) and slaves (6:5)," it is an outright lie.

First, although the word translated "submit" (*hypotassō*) in verse 22 is different from the one translated "obey" (*hypakouō*) in 6:1 and 6:5, it is unnecessary to use *hypakouō* ("obey") in verse 22, since *hypotassō* ("submit") can also denote obedience. For example, the same word *hypotassō* ("submit") is used in Luke 2:51, but this time the NIV reflects the meaning of obedience: "Then [Jesus] went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient [*hypotassō*] to them." But *hypakouō* ("obey") is used in Ephesians 6:1 where it says, "Children, obey [*hypakouō*] your parents in the Lord, for this is right."

Does the commentator<sup>40</sup> dare to insinuate that Jesus was merely "submissive" to his parents in his attitude, but that he was not "obedient" to them? So he nodded and smiled, but did not do what they said? If so, did Jesus obey the commandment, "Honor your father and

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<sup>38</sup> Lenski, p. 623.

<sup>39</sup> *The NIV Study Bible, 10th Anniversary Edition*; The Zondervan Corporation, 1995; see notes on Ephesians 5:22.

<sup>40</sup> Walter L. Liefeld appears to be the one responsible for this portion of the *NIV Study Bible*.

mother"? Paul cites this commandment in Ephesians 6:2 as the basis for children to *obey* their parents, but the Bible uses *hypotassō* ("submit") in reference to Christ in Luke 2:51.

The commentator continues, "In fact, the word 'obey' does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives."<sup>41</sup> He must mean that Scripture never uses *hypakouō* ("obey") when it refers to wives, but that it uses only *hypotassō* ("submit"). However, it indeed uses *hypakouō* ("obey") when it speaks about Sarah in 1 Peter 3:5-6: "For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive [*hypotassō*] to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed [*hypakouō*] Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear."

Again, the claim is that "the word 'obey' does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives." But who was Sarah? She was the *wife* of Abraham, and Peter writes that she obeyed (*hypakouō*) her husband. Then, he says that women are to follow her example. This necessarily implies that we must equally apply *hypakouō* ("obey") to all wives. In addition, the verse itself either equates *hypotassō* ("submit") with *hypakouō* ("obey"), or assumes that *hypotassō* ("submit") implies *hypakouō* ("obey"), since it says, "They were submissive [*hypotassō*] to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed [*hypakouō*] Abraham and called him her master." These women were *submissive*, like Sarah, who *obeyed*.

Therefore, whether Scripture uses *hypakouō* or *hypotassō* (and we see that it uses both words), it commands the wives to *obey* their husbands – nothing less will do. A wife must obey her husband, Paul says, "so that no one will malign the word of God" (Titus 2:5). A disobedient wife brings shame to the kingdom of God.

Husbands are commanded to love their wives: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." The command is not for the husbands to show mere affection, but to love the wives to the death, and cherish them more than their own welfare. If the wives complain that it is too difficult to obey their husbands, it is even more difficult for the husbands to love these disobedient wives to this extent.

Just as many men are difficult to obey, many women are difficult to love. If God has not filled us with divine love, it would be impossible to love anyone as Christ loves, especially to love the rebellious women that refuse to obey their husbands. At any rate, it is best for both the husbands and the wives to follow God's precepts, since it is indeed easier to obey a loving husband, and to love an obedient wife.

Nevertheless, as Peter suggests (1 Peter 3:1-7), each of us is accountable to God regardless of what the other person does. It is not up to the husband to withhold his love from a disobedient wife, and it is not up to the wife to withhold her obedience from an unloving

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<sup>41</sup> This statement is no longer in the most recent revised edition of the *NIV Study Bible*; however, it retains the position that the term does not refer to obedience in this passage. In other words, the assertion remains, but the reason has disappeared. Is this a case of intellectual dishonesty, or does this reflect only an "innocent" editorial decision? I cannot tell.

husband. The preacher can help both the husband and the wife by reminding them of their respective duties.

On marriage, Paul writes, "This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church" (v. 32). The "mystery" refers to how marriage serves as a figure for the relationship between Christ and the church. Although he considers marriage a reflection of the relationship between Christ and the church, he also applies his knowledge about the relationship between Christ and the church when he theologizes about marriage. What Scripture teaches about either union enhances our understanding of the other.<sup>42</sup>

Then, Paul proceeds to discuss the relationship between parents and children. Again, there is no mutual submission. As Dan Doriani writes, "Parents can still tell children when to go to bed, and children may *not* reply, 'Fine, but *you* should go to bed, too.'"<sup>43</sup> Of course, children must obey both their fathers and mothers, but when Paul turns to address the ones in authority, he speaks only to the fathers, and says, "Do not exasperate your children, instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

Just as the man is the head of the woman, he is also the head of his family; therefore, the responsibility finally rests upon him to bring up his children. Moreover, he is not to be concerned only with the children's vocations and prospects, but he must bring them up in "the training and instruction of the Lord." He must make sure that they learn and follow biblical doctrines. This has been the duty of parents, and especially the fathers, throughout the history of humanity (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). It follows that if you have not been teaching your children theology, then you are a bad parent. This is the measurement of parenthood, and until it is first satisfied, all other considerations are trivial.<sup>44</sup>

As for masters and slaves, Paul tells the slaves to obey their masters. Contrary to a misinterpretation of Galatians 3:28,<sup>45</sup> which concerns justification by faith, conversion does not dissolve human relationships, obligations, and authorities. If you are a wife, you must still obey your husband; if you are a child, you must still obey your parents; and if you are a slave, you must still obey your master. However, there is one great difference: Christians have one common Master. "There is no favoritism with him," and "the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free."

The passage forms the foundation for the matchless work ethic that Christians were famous for in the past. This work ethic calls for a sincere respect and fear toward superiors, but it also looks beyond them to the Lord: "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men." Today, those who claim to be Christians are often as slothful and

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<sup>42</sup> See David J. Engelsma, *Marriage: The Mystery of Christ and the Church: The Covenant-Bond in Scripture and History* (revised edition); Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1998.

<sup>43</sup> Doriani, p. 66.

<sup>44</sup> See Lou Priolo, *Teach Them Diligently: How to Use the Scriptures in Child Training* (Timeless Texts, 2000), and Bruce A. Ray, *Withhold Not Correction* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1978).

<sup>45</sup> "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

unproductive as the non-Christians. But Paul writes, "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (4:1).<sup>46</sup>

#### **EPHESIANS 6:10-20**

**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. 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. 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.**

**Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**

**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.**

Martyn Lloyd-Jones observes that there are three dangers when it comes to spiritual warfare: 1) Thinking that there is no warfare, 2) Avoiding the warfare, and 3) Fighting with the wrong weapons.<sup>47</sup> This passage in Ephesians 6 is only one of the many in Scripture reminding us that there is spiritual warfare, exhorting us to actively engage in it, and explaining to us the weapons that God has given us.

Paul concludes his letter with a call to arms, because there are evil forces in this world that threaten the peace and unity that Christ has established for the church. His emphasis is on the defensive.<sup>48</sup> This probably follows from what he has said about the foreordination of God and the work of Christ. Now he speaks of our spiritual war not so much as an undecided conflict between two kingdoms, but as our struggle to "stand firm" against the hostile powers that would disrupt what God has established in Christ.

He tells his readers to put on "the full armor of God." The *full* armor of God is complete, and includes all that the Christian needs to "stand against the devil's schemes." Contrary to what some people think, the weapons that God gives us are not mystical in their nature and

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<sup>46</sup> For a biblical perspective on slavery, see John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957.

<sup>47</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Knowing the Times*; The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989; p. 200-207.

<sup>48</sup> When the context calls for it, Paul turns the warfare metaphor into an active and aggressive one (see 2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

power. Rather, each piece of armor refers to the doctrinal content of an aspect of the Christian faith and its outworking in our lives.

Paul first exhorts his readers to "be strong," or literally, "be strengthened." The passive verb suggests that we are not the ones who strengthen ourselves, but that we continually depend on God to strengthen us. Christians derive their strength from God – we are strong only by his "mighty power."

He indicated earlier that the same power God wielded in the resurrection of Christ is being exercised for the benefit of those who are in Christ (Ephesians 1:18-20). God is already applying this power to us, so we do not need to beg him to make it available; rather, his power will manifest in our lives when our minds are "enlightened," so that we may know "his incomparably great power for us who believe...which he exerted in Christ" in his resurrection and exaltation. We ought to study and pray for this theological understanding.

The power that God has made available to us is more than sufficient. It is through "his power that is at work within us" that he will "do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20). We can have confidence to face pressure, adverse circumstances, hostile powers, and demonic forces, knowing that God has put into our lives a power so strong that it raised Jesus from the dead. This power is available to every person who is in Christ.

This information surprises some Christians, especially those whose lives are characterized by defeat and barrenness. Although God's power is available to all believers, it remains dormant in some of them because of a lack of knowledge and understanding. The apostle seeks to remedy this by praying that God would enlighten the minds of his readers, so that they may realize what has been made available to them in Christ.

So when Paul says to "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power," he is not suggesting that we do this only by praying for God to strengthen us, but also by understanding what God has given to us in Christ. When a Christian realizes that God's power has been applied to him through Christ, he ceases to be afraid of other people, of adverse situations, and hostile powers. He remembers that the Scripture says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Paul says that God has chosen to "make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). John explains, "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God" (1 John 4:15). The Bible tells us that we are "God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in [us]" (1 Corinthians 3:16). John says in 1 John 4:4, "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them." By "them," he refers to the spirits that inspire "false prophets," even the "spirit of the antichrist" (v. 3). We have overcome them because "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (v. 4).

We can overcome the world when we believe and depend on God's power. God's chosen ones are destined for victory (Romans 8:37). After all, "Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John 5:5).

Then, verse 11 reads, "Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." The word translated "schemes" (*methodeia*) refers to trickery or deceit – deception is the "method" by which Satan tries to defeat the Christian. It is by putting on "the full armor of God" that we will be able to "stand against" the devil.

Peter also warns that the devil wants to attack us: "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings" (1 Peter 5:8-9). He is telling us to stay awake – "be self-controlled and alert." Although the devil "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour," we can "resist him" and remain immovable in our stance of faith. As John assures us, "We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him" (1 John 5:18).

Deception is Satan's weapon. He will lie to us, and he will attempt to bombard us with unbiblical thoughts and arguments, and those who fail to "escape from the trap of the devil" are "taken...captive to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:26). On the other hand, Jesus says, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

Only Christians are truly free. The rest of the world "is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). This is because only Christians possess and affirm the truth, and through the lens of Scripture, they are able to perceive reality. As for non-Christians, Paul says, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). All non-Christians are blind in their minds, and so they deny reality. Spiritual battle is fought in the mind. Even after you have become a Christian, the devil will continue to attack your mind with lies to undermine your faith.

Jesus offers valuable insight into the devil's nature when he says to the Pharisees, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). When the devil tells a lie, he is doing so out of his own nature. Lying is natural to the devil. He attacks God's people by spreading lies that lead them away from God.

This means that the nature of our spiritual conflict is intellectual. As Paul says, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). The weapons that God has given to us have "divine power to demolish strongholds," which are in fact "arguments" that are "against

the knowledge of God." We fight to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." This is how spiritual warfare is done, and it is for this purpose that God has given to us the "full armor of God."

Continuing to verse 12, Paul writes, "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." Our fight is not natural, but spiritual, and that we are involved in spiritual warfare means that our conflict has to do with the intellect, with ideas, and with arguments.

The fact that it is a *spiritual* fight does not make it a *mystical* fight; therefore, we must avoid the error that by "spiritual" we refer to the mystical rather than to the intellectual, for it is the mind or intellect that deals with spiritual things. By saying that we have weapons with "divine power," Paul refers to the God-given ability to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

By tapping into God's power through an intellectual understanding of theological truth, we can be confident of the outcome. We have noted that God is applying to us the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. It is this power that energizes our Christian work: "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me" (Colossians 1:28-29). Satan cannot withstand this power. This is why when we "put on the full armor of God," we can "stand against the devil's schemes." And James assures his readers, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

Of course, because God is sovereign over all things, even the devil is under God's control, and he cannot do anything that has not been ordained by God's decree. Thus even the devil is one of the means by which God accomplishes his purposes. God can annihilate him at any moment; however, he has ordained that we should resist the devil by the knowledge of Scripture and the energy of the Spirit – for God's glory and for our sanctification.

Since verse 11 instructs us to "put on the *full* armor of God," we must take up every piece of weapon that God has given us, and not neglect any one, so that we will be prepared to "stand against the devil's schemes." Then, verse 12 says, "our struggle is not against flesh and blood," but "against the spiritual forces of evil." We must recognize the reality of demonic powers, that evil spirits are real. These entities wield their deceptive powers to blind people from the truth of God's word. God has sovereignly enlightened us concerning the truth and enabled us to affirm it. Paul explains, "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). God removes our spiritual blindness and transmits his truths to our minds through the Scripture.

Jesus prays, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). Our initial enlightenment concerning the things of God comes from Scripture, and our subsequent spiritual growth also comes from Scripture. It is the basis of our progressive sanctification.

As Paul writes, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). We are "renewed in knowledge" (Colossians 3:10) – not by mystical experiences, and not even mainly through prayer. It is when we understand and retain biblical truths in our minds that we will live our lives in obedience to God and successfully resist the devil.

Paul continues in 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." The full armor of God protects us from the "devil's schemes," and it also enables us to stand firm "when the day of evil comes." When every piece of armor is intact, we can face the enemy in hand-to-hand combat with confidence.

Paul likens this armor from God to the armor of the Romans soldiers. Of course, our weapons are not physical, but spiritual. However, this does not mean that they are mystical, but each piece of weapon represents a set of biblical truths that protects an aspect of our Christian walk.

For example, it is possible that when Paul writes that salvation is as a helmet, he means that the biblical truths about salvation is meant to protect the mind. Or, when righteousness is likened to a breastplate, perhaps it means that our understanding of the righteousness of Christ and our justification by Christ serves to guard our conscience against accusations.

In any case, because Paul in fact names the doctrines, we can be confident that each piece of weapon corresponds to a biblical doctrine that we must learn in order to successfully wage war against the enemy. Since we comprehend doctrinal truth with the mind as it is illuminated by the Holy Spirit, it is undeniable that all these spiritual weapons are intellectual in nature.<sup>49</sup>

We do not "put on" the full armor of God by imagining ourselves dressed in a mystical armor, and we do not exercise the power in these weapons through physical motion. Rather, our weapons have "divine power" to "demolish *arguments*...and...take captive every *thought* to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). In spiritual warfare, we deal with arguments and thoughts, with the mind or the intellect. This is the nature of the battle and the weapons.

Paul identifies each spiritual weapon with a piece of armor on the Roman soldier. This is meaningful in the sense that, for example, he identifies salvation with the helmet for a reason – namely, the doctrine protects the mind as a helmet protects the head.

He says that truth is as a belt. In the soldier's armor, it is the belt that holds the rest of the items in place; likewise, truth holds everything together in our Christian walk. Without the truth that God has revealed in Scripture, there would be no righteousness, peace, faith, and

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<sup>49</sup> Some people want to give these weapons a moral emphasis. For example, "righteousness" should denote our personal integrity and holiness rather than Scripture's teaching on righteousness. However, even the moral is based on the intellectual. Morality does not occur in a vacuum or in our bodies – it has to do with our thoughts, dispositions, and decisions. In this sense, morality is mental and intellectual. Moreover, a moral interpretation is unable to make sense of every piece of weapon listed in the passage.



salvation for us to "put on." Without the truth that God has revealed in Scripture, we would not have the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

What do we mean by truth? Jesus says, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). You will know the truth only if you "hold to" the *teaching* (*logos* = word, reasoning, doctrine) of Jesus. Contrary to many people's opinion, a Christian's strength does not rest on experience, prayer, or fellowship, but on truth – that is, the theological principles and biblical doctrines in Scripture. Without truth, we cannot even define – and so cannot "put on" – the other pieces of our armor, such as righteousness, faith, and salvation. Your priority must be to gain knowledge of the truth. Since God reveals truth to us through the words of Scripture, you must pursue theological and biblical studies to construct the foundation of your spiritual life.

Knowledge of the truth will set you free. As we increase in our knowledge of and commitment to truth, we become increasingly protected from deception. As Paul explains, "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us" (1 Corinthians 2:12). While the devil lies to us and tries to deceive us, God has sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts so that "we may understand what God has freely given us."

As Peter writes, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3). In Christ, God has given us "everything we need for life," but it is "through our knowledge of him" that his provisions are applied to us. The knowledge is found in Scripture, and it is the Holy Spirit who grants us understanding and agreement to this knowledge.

Many Christians believe the lie that the spiritual is irrational and that the intellectual is unspiritual – that spirituality and rationality are mutually exclusive. However, since the divine weapons were given to you to "demolish *arguments*" and to "take captive every *thought*," you will not become more spiritual by ignoring the intellectual nature of biblical faith and life. Rather, to ignore the intellect is to stop resisting the devil and his deception, and by thus discarding all your divine weapons, you will become thoroughly unspiritual by biblical standards.

Paul then mentions the breastplate of righteousness: "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place" (6:14). We were all sinners before conversion, and although God has changed our basic dispositions in regeneration, we have not attained perfection and we continue to commit sins. These transgressions threaten our confidence when we approach God.

John writes, "Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him" (1 John 3:21-22). It is essential to have a way to truly deal with sin, a way that leads to freedom from condemnation and to confidence in God's presence. This comes from an understanding of the righteousness that God has provided for us through Jesus

Christ. This righteousness then functions as a "breastplate" in our spiritual battle, guarding our heart and conscience.

We can never attain true righteousness by our own works, but it must be imputed to us by God. Righteousness is a gift (Romans 5:17) that God gives his chosen ones through faith: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Bible teaches that "a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (Romans 3:28). Jesus did not commit any sin, but "the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6), so that "whoever believes on him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). However, if God has not given you faith in Christ, then you are not righteous: "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18).

Scripture urges us to "draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience" (Hebrews 10:22). The Christian is a righteous person, not because of his good works, but because he has been justified by God through faith in the work of Jesus Christ. This knowledge gives us the basis on which we can resist anything that tries to undermine our confidence in approaching God.

Christians sometimes sin, but God has provided a solution for sins committed after conversion, so that our fellowship with him would remain intact. Although sin is inexcusable, God who "knows how we are formed" and who "remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14), has mercy on us and has given us an Advocate, so that "if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1). Thus "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Nevertheless, a true Christian will not abuse God's grace by sinning constantly, thinking that he only needs to confess his sins. A person who does this is not a Christian, because a Christian is one who has been truly changed by God: "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9). As Paul writes, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (Romans 6:1-2). Those who love God will also obey his word: "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

After the breastplate of righteousness, Paul says that we must have our "feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace" (6:15). The Bible sometimes uses the imagery of walking to represent our daily conduct, as when Paul says, "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7, KJV). Therefore, when he says that the "gospel of peace" (or "the readiness that comes from" it) is as foot gear for our Christian walk, he means that the intellectual content of the gospel must not only be a topic of discussion during certain times and activities, but that it must be an integral and pervasive part of our daily conduct.

In spiritual warfare, the gospel is the means by which we will stand our ground and advance the kingdom of God. Church programs, charity, music, and such things are not the means by which we will invade the enemy's territory. Rather, it is by publishing the intellectual content of the gospel that we will destroy the strongholds that has been built into the minds of non-Christians.

Our gospel is a gospel of peace, but this peace is not one that we have with the enemies of God, such as demons and unbelievers. After the fall of man, God established hostility between the children of God and the children of Satan. (Genesis 3:15). It is impossible to have true peace with anyone belonging to the kingdom of darkness. Rather, this is a peace that we have with God and with Christians. As John says, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). When we stand our ground and conquer enemy territory with this gospel, then others are able to join us in this fellowship. Paul says in Romans 16:20, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."

Paul says that we are to have the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace, so that we are not just to know the content of the gospel for ourselves, but we must be prepared to articulate and defend it to others. Peter also instructs us to do this, and writes, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15).

Always be ready to use the gospel to destroy the non-Christian intellectual strongholds that have been installed in the minds of others. Never be caught without an argument for the Christian worldview, or without a refutation against non-Christian thought. You must be prepared to answer anyone who asks you questions about the Christian faith. You must have an accurate and comprehensive knowledge of biblical doctrines, and be able to defend them against objections. This is every Christian's responsibility; therefore, every Christian must immerse themselves in the study of theology and apologetics.

The Christian's mandate is to "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). This is not optional. Jesus commands his disciples to preach the gospel to "all the world." This is how we will destroy the works of Satan.

Paul is "not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). The gospel is the "power of God," and by the gospel God will accomplish his purposes on earth. God has made us his representatives, so that we may publish his commands to the nations: "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

Once we have it settled in our minds that the gospel is "the power of God," we will not be "ashamed of the gospel," or be embarrassed by its claims and demands. When we realize and affirm that Christianity is superior to all other belief systems, that it is the only one that truly represents and reveals God, and that it is the only source of truth and knowledge, we will stop being timid about presenting it to the world. Once we are convinced of this and

have learned how to articulate and defend it to others, we will have attained "the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace."

The gospel is indeed good news to God's chosen ones, and it brings the believer to a state of peace with God and his people. It is the "fragrance of life" to those who accept it, but as it is also a weapon against the enemy, it carries the "smell of death" to those who reject its claims and demands (2 Corinthians 2:16). The one who preaches the gospel brings the power of God to summon and to save those whom God has chosen to believe, and at the same time brings destruction and condemnation to those whom God has designated as reprobates. The one who preaches the gospel is God's messenger, releasing his power to save and to destroy, to justify and to condemn.

Nevertheless, contrary to popular opinion, what is commonly called "evangelism" is not the highest priority. Rather, the Bible indicates that the teaching ministry – the theological training of believers – takes precedence over evangelism. Evangelism is not an end in itself, but it is the means by which the chosen ones are brought into the church so that they may be taught.

This sounds strange to those who are accustomed to hearing that evangelism is the top priority. This unbiblical view has caused many people to neglect investing in the theological training of believers. As a result, most of those who claim to be Christians are feeble in intellect, ignorant of biblical doctrines, and incompetent in defending the faith. After all, without extensive training by the church and other institutions (such as the family), how many will attain the "readiness" described above? And how can a person properly preach the gospel without at least an elementary understanding of biblical doctrines? Since God has commanded us to proclaim and defend the faith, this means that without this training, it is impossible for a Christian to obey God.

No Christian will doubt Paul's evangelistic zeal, but he describes his own ministry as follows:

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. (Colossians 1:27-29)

He is "*admonishing and teaching* everyone with all wisdom, so that we may *present everyone perfect* in Christ" (Colossians 1:28). He is doing the work of the ministry with God's energy, which powerfully works in him (v. 29), so that he may, not just to bring people to conversion, but beyond that to "present everyone perfect" in Christ. It is "to this end" (v. 29) that he labors.

Maturity, not conversion, is the aim of Christian ministry. Conversion is one of the first steps that the chosen ones take toward maturity and perfection in Christ. Both evangelism

and teaching serve the ultimate end of producing mature Christians for Christ. This is our priority. Evangelism concludes once God grants a person repentance and faith, but a believer will continue to pursue biblical and theological teaching throughout his life. Evangelism is a short-term means to a long-term process (teaching) that in turn leads to an ultimate end (maturity and perfection). To regard evangelism as the greatest task of the church is to distort the nature of biblical ministry, and it often turns out that spiritual maturity, the real goal, is never reached or even considered.

Since the main task of the church is to teach believers, most of the church's time and money should be devoted to the education of Christians, whether in the form of sermons, lectures, books, recordings, broadcasts, or other means. Putting evangelism first results in the accumulation of feeble believers and false converts, and makes the church a poor witness to the world. This in turn undermines evangelism itself. Thus putting evangelism first is unbiblical as well as self-defeating.

In what is called the "Great Commission," a passage often used to encourage evangelism, Jesus says:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20)

If Jesus intends to command only evangelism, why does this mandate include "teaching" the people? And if he intends to command what people call "evangelism," then why does he tell us to teach the non-Christians to "obey everything" that he has commanded? When people perform what they consider "evangelism," do they recite all the commands in the Bible to the unbelievers? But the passage makes perfect sense when we realize that Jesus has in mind the ministry of teaching. Our mandate is to "make disciples...teaching them to obey *everything*" in the word of God.

Even if we think that the words, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," refer only to "evangelism," we must admit that the latter part, "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you," refers to the teaching ministry, and that the former (evangelism) leads to the latter (teaching). Evangelism is the means to produce converts, *so that* we may teach them to obey all the commands of Christ. Therefore, those who exalt evangelism at the expense of the teaching ministry defies the very command of Christ that they claim to obey.

"The readiness that comes from the gospel of peace" must mean more than having just enough comprehension of the gospel to tell people how to become Christians, but it implies a comprehensive knowledge of biblical doctrines. Otherwise, all Christians would already be prepared, since all of them have learned enough to become Christians, and so no one would need to obtain this "readiness." However, the fact that Paul tells us to put on the "readiness" of the gospel suggests that it is not automatic, and this means that some

Christians may not be ready with the gospel. Only the teaching ministry can remedy this, and a ministry of "evangelism" that does not offer teaching in Christian theology is incomplete and unbiblical.

Coming to verse 16, Paul introduces the shield of faith: "In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." The word translated "shield" is *thyreon*, and Wood writes as follows:

*Thyreon* is derived from *thyra* (a door) and refers to the large oblong or oval *scutum* the Roman soldier held in front of him for protection. It consisted of two layers of wood glued together, covered with linen and hide, and bound with iron. Soldiers often fought side by side with a solid wall (*testudo*) of shields. But even a single-handed combatant found himself sufficiently protected. After the siege of Dyrachium, Sceva counted no less than 220 darts sticking into his shield. For the Christian this protective shield is faith (*pistis*).<sup>50</sup>

The question is whether this "faith" refers to the subjective belief of the Christian or the objective content of Christianity. Wood answers, "Believing cannot be divorced from what is believed, and no rigid line should be drawn between these two aspects."<sup>51</sup> This does not squarely address the issue. Even if believing cannot be divorced from what is believed, what is believed can be distinguished from what *ought to* be believed. The subjective belief of one who claims to be a Christian does not always correspond to the objective content of Christianity. Of course, in such a case, what is "taken up" by the person is not "the shield of faith," and he is left without full protection.

Each piece of armor represents the biblical doctrine that corresponds to it, and this means that each piece of armor refers to an objective aspect of the Christian faith, and not the subjective belief of the individual about the subject. The belt of truth refers to truth itself, and not just our commitment to it. Likewise, the breastplate of righteousness represents the biblical doctrine on the subject, and not just the individual's subjective realization of it.

Paul is not telling his readers to "put on your subjective beliefs," since one's subjective beliefs are never "off" in the first place. Rather, the Christian must deliberately "put on" something that can be either "put on" or "put off" – something that has objective existence and validity independent of the subjective beliefs of the individual. For example, the sword of the Spirit is the word of God, not our beliefs about the word of God. By telling us to take up the sword, Paul is telling us to believe and apply it.

He is calling his readers to take possession of the biblical doctrines and identify with them. Truth is truth by itself, whether or not one commits to it; however, it will not benefit the one who has not put it on to structure his thoughts and actions. The content of the gospel remains the same even if a person has only a partial understanding of it, but when he puts it on through study and training, and allows the gospel to govern his daily conduct, he

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<sup>50</sup> Wood, p. 88.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

becomes a person who is prepared to advance the kingdom of God. Likewise, the shield of faith may very well represent the objective content of the Christian faith, but it will protect the one who picks it up and puts it before him.

On demonic attacks against the church, Wood writes, "But in the context of Ephesians they are more likely to have been deliberate attempts to destroy the unity of Christ's body (3:14-22; 4:1-16, 27) through the invasion of false doctrine and the fomenting of dissension (4:2, 21, 31, 32; 5:6)."<sup>52</sup> Paul instructs the Philippians to be "of the same mind" (Philippians 2:2, NASB), and says that they should "with one mind" be "striving together for the faith of the gospel" (1:27, NASB). A church cannot be "of the same mind" when its members disagree on the content of the gospel, and when false doctrines have taken over their minds. Heresies and divisions pervade the church because it has neglected the study of theology and apologetics.

False doctrines are as "flaming arrows," rapidly spreading destruction, but the shield of faith can "extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." If the shield of faith refers to the content of the Christian faith, then picking it up would mean to learn and affirm the content of Scripture. Those who thoroughly understand and strongly affirm biblical doctrines are able to resist and overcome the false ideas that are sent their way.

Although it requires strength and discipline to take up this shield and to hold it before us, its use is sometimes remarkably simple, especially when it comes to private attacks against our minds:

Although Paul does not give individual examples of these flaming arrows, Hodge mentions horrible, blasphemous, skeptical thoughts and more subtle suggestions of cupidity, discontent, and vanity. These, or whatever else the figure of speech may represent, are to be extinguished by faith. Evil thoughts must be dislodged and expelled by good thoughts. If in trouble we doubt either the power or the wisdom of God, we should say to ourselves, "I believe in God the Father Almighty," or repeat some verse that speaks of his loving kindness. Thus the doctrines of faith will expel our false ideas.<sup>53</sup>

The fact that the shield of faith and the flaming arrows are intellectual and doctrinal in nature carries certain implications, namely, "We must have already studied and memorized some Scripture in order to have something to remember. This study is like picking up the shield in the first place."<sup>54</sup> One who is weak in understanding has not picked up the shield of faith, and cannot do so until he has learned the basics. Before that, he has little protection against the false ideas that come against him. Once a member of the church has been injured or infected by false doctrine, the damage could quickly spread if left unchecked, because "a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough" (Galatians 5:9). Church leaders

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>53</sup> Clark, *Ephesians*; p. 208.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

must teach their people, so that they would become skilled in using the shield of faith (Hebrews 5:13-14; Ephesians 4:11-16).

Picking up the shield of faith is not only a matter of will, but also one of understanding. It is not only a matter of volition, but also of comprehension. In fact, intellectual understanding of biblical doctrines precedes volitional assent to them, since the will cannot commit to something that is not even there. If the shield of faith represents the objective content of Scripture, then the intellectual comprehension of and volitional commitment to Scripture represent the act of picking it up. The large size of the shield is significant. Knowledge of the truth in one area may not offer sufficient protection from falsehood and confusion in another area. Picking up the shield of faith implies obtaining a comprehensive knowledge of Scripture.

The helmet was "the most ornamental part of ancient armor,"<sup>55</sup> and Paul uses this attractive piece to represent salvation: "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). Hodge writes:

That which adorns and protects the Christian, which enables him to hold up his head with confidence and joy, is the fact that he is saved. He is one of the redeemed, translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. If still under condemnation, if still estranged from God, a foreigner, and alien, without God and without Christ, he could have no courage to enter into this conflict. It is because he is a fellow citizen of the saints, a child of God, a partaker of the salvation of the gospel, that he can face even the most potent enemies with confidence, knowing that he shall be brought off more than a conqueror through him that loved him.<sup>56</sup>

God shows a natural benevolence to everyone: "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). Even those who are hostile to God must depend on his sustenance for their very existence, "For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Everyone should be moved by this, so as to repent to God and believe in Christ. However, without God's sovereign decision, they cannot repent and believe; therefore, God's natural benevolence results in the condemnation of the reprobates.

God's saving grace is revealed only to his chosen ones, and those created for damnation have no part in it. Thus salvation distinguishes Christians from the rest of humanity. Christians are God's chosen people: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). All other human beings are unsaved because God has not chosen them.

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<sup>55</sup> Hodge, p. 286.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.



In addition to its attractiveness, the helmet probably represents Christian salvation in another significant way: "*Take* is really receive or accept (*dexasthe*). The previous items were laid out for the soldier to pick up. The helmet and sword would be handed him by an attendant or by his armorbearer. The verb is appropriate to the 'givenness' of salvation."<sup>57</sup>

The helmet appropriately represents Christian salvation not only because of its attractiveness, but also because of the manner in which the Christian puts it on. Although the believer adorns the other pieces of armor by taking them up or putting them on, salvation is received from God.<sup>58</sup> The Christian must not flatter himself that he has "accepted Christ" because he was better and wiser than the unbelievers in himself, when in reality it was God who has chosen and accepted him. The only reason we are able to love him is "because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Thus in place of self-congratulation and boasting, we should offer thanksgiving to God, who has chosen us and shown us mercy, not because of any prior condition in us, but because of his sovereign grace.

As to whether there is any meaning in salvation being represented by a headgear, some suggest that the metaphor refers to clarity in thinking,<sup>59</sup> but others consider this "too imaginative."<sup>60</sup> We should not apply a metaphor in a way that exceeds the intention of the writer; however, even if Paul does not explicitly emphasize the intellect with the helmet as a metaphor, many elements in the passage imply such an emphasis.

For example, truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith (in both its subjective and objective aspects), salvation, and the word of God all represent intellectual content to be understood by the mind. Therefore, even if making salvation a helmet is not in itself an attempt to emphasize the intellectual comprehension of soteriology, the inclusion of this emphasis is inescapable. As Paul writes in another place, "[The Scriptures] are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). The wisdom for salvation comes from an intellectual grasp of the Bible, applied to our minds by the Holy Spirit to produce conversion and sanctification.

Thus we have derived several points from the metaphor that salvation is like a helmet for the Christian. First, salvation is "the most ornamental part" of Christianity, so much so that "even angels long to look into" it (1 Peter 1:12). Also, the faith with which we affirm the gospel is "not from ourselves, it is the gift of God," so that "no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). In addition, it is of utmost importance that we obtain an in-depth theological understanding of salvation, since only then will we be properly wearing the helmet of salvation, which is able to protect us from the numerous false doctrines that surround the subject.

The final piece of armor is the sword, which represents the word of God: "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). There

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<sup>57</sup> Wood, p. 88.

<sup>58</sup> This is a matter of emphasis, since even the volition to put on the other pieces of armor still comes from God (Philippians 2:12-13).

<sup>59</sup> Clark, *Ephesians*; p. 209.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

were several types of swords, varying in length and weight, but since Paul is drawing his metaphors from the weapons of the Roman soldiers, he is referring to their short straight sword.<sup>61</sup> This is also indicated by his use of the word, *machaira*, as opposed to the word for a long sword, *rhomphaia*, used in Luke 2:35.

The sword is both a defensive and offensive weapon. It can slay the enemy, and block some of his attacks.<sup>62</sup> The fact that it is a *short* sword implies that the fight involves close encounters with the enemy, and thus the need for a light and flexible weapon.

The sword is "of the Spirit" (*tou pneumatos*). This does not only mean that it is of a spiritual nature (as in "spiritual sword"), but also that the sword, as with the helmet, would be handed to the soldier by an attendant,<sup>63</sup> and so Barth thinks that it means "the sword provided by the Spirit."<sup>64</sup> The sword is "of the Spirit" in the sense that it is produced by and given to us by the Holy Spirit.

This sword is said to be "the word of God." Here we encounter some difficulties. There are several interpretations, and since one of them is more obviously false, we will dispense with it first.

This first view teaches that the words of Scripture, particularly those "given" to the person by the Spirit at the moment, when uttered through the lips of a Christian, form either a figurative or an actual sword in the spirit realm to inflict injury upon demonic forces.

This mystical interpretation suggests that the power of the sword does not rest in the intellectual content of the word of God – in what the word of God says – but in the brute force that it contains to overcome the enemy. However, this view is inconsistent with the context, and it fails to consider "the way [Paul] ordinarily uses this kind of language."<sup>65</sup>

The second view claims that since the Greek word *rhema* is used in "the *word* of God" as opposed to *logos*, the sword of the Spirit must then refer to a "word" given at the moment by the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, we may depend on the Holy Spirit to bring to our consciousness verses of Scripture that we need to confront a thought, temptation, or argument. However, it would be totally absurd to claim that even obviously relevant verses are ineffective against a thought or argument unless they are first "quickened" by the Spirit. But this mystical foolishness seems to be what this second view states or implies.

The Christian obtains his "sword" and becomes skilled with it through his usual study and training. If he has prepared himself, he should not require a special word for the moment when he comes under attack, since he will already have in mind a number of biblical verses

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<sup>61</sup> Barth, p. 776.

<sup>62</sup> Marvin Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament, Vol. 3*; Hendrickson Publishers, p. 410.

<sup>63</sup> Wood, p. 88.

<sup>64</sup> Barth, p. 776.

<sup>65</sup> Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*; Hendrickson Publishers, 1994; p. 728-729.

and thoughts to counter it. The Christian should not need a special unction from the Spirit before he can apply an obviously relevant biblical teaching.

This second view exaggerates a distinction between *rhema* and *logos*, since the two words are often interchangeable in the New Testament.<sup>66</sup> A number of false doctrines can be traced to those who have mistaken their ignorance as revelation. They give the impression that although *logos* is God's word, it is rather useless and ineffective until the Spirit "quickens" it and turns it into *rhema*. This teaching is heretical. Paul writes, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Every verse of Scripture is "God-breathed" – "alive" and effective at all times, even without a special unction to speak it.

Nevertheless, Paul's use of the word *rhema* might have some significance. As Gordon Fee writes:

While these words are near synonyms and therefore can often be used interchangeably, *rhema* tends to put the emphasis on that which is spoken at a given point, whereas *logos* frequently emphasizes the content of the "message."

But this does not lead to the second view, the one that exaggerates the distinction. Fee continues:

If that distinction holds here, then Paul is almost certainly referring still to the gospel, just as he does in Romans 10:17, but the emphasis is now on the actual "speaking forth" of the message, inspired by the Spirit. To put that in more contemporary terms, in urging them to take the sword of the Spirit and then identifying that sword with the "word of God," Paul is not identifying the "sword" with the book, but with the proclamation of Christ, which in our case is indeed to be found in the book.<sup>67</sup>

This leads to the third view, which says that the sword of the Spirit is the publication and application of the words of Scripture. It refers to the intellectual and not the mystical. This is the only view that reflects the meaning and intention of Paul's metaphor when he says that the sword of the Spirit is the word of God.

The content of *rhema* is not different from *logos*, although in some instances *rhema* may denote actual communication of the content. Whenever Christian and non-Christian ideas clash, the believer should stand his ground, but he should also invade and capture the enemy's territories. Each time a believer verbally defends Christian ideas and attacks non-Christian ideas on the basis of the words of the Bible, he is wielding the sword of the Spirit.

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<sup>66</sup> Foulkes, p. 184.

<sup>67</sup> Fee, p. 728-729.

The verbal expression and intellectual expression of the word of God is the *rhema* of God. It is a sword that comes from the Spirit.

It is ridiculous and unspiritual to think that we must wait until the Holy Spirit "quickens" a verse of Scripture before we can effectively answer a thought or argument, even when we already know how to answer it. Instead, Scripture itself maintains that every biblical verse is true, effective, and "alive" at all times (2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:12). Use what you know about Scripture to engage the enemy. Do not think that what you know is useless until it is "quickened" for your situation. This also means that if you know too little, you will be ineffective in battle. The solution is not found in a mystical "quickening," but in a program of theological education (2 Timothy 2:15).

Jesus offers us a perfect example on how to wield the sword of the Spirit against the devil:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.  
(Matthew 4:1-11)

He uses the sword of the Spirit to overcome temptations. In all three cases, he applies the words of Scripture to counteract the words of Satan.

In the first instance, he cites Deuteronomy 8:3 to resist the devil. Seeing how Jesus uses Scripture to defend himself, the devil makes a second attempt and cites from Psalm 91:11-12, hoping to deceive and persuade him. But Jesus cites from Deuteronomy 6:16, and answers, "It is *also* written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Spiritual battles involve the authority and application of Scripture, and theological arguments. In this second temptation, Satan cites a biblical passage that, when falsely understood and applied, seems to permit Jesus to jump from the temple. But Jesus notices that Satan has distorted the passage, so he says, "It is *also* written" in Scripture that one should not put God to the test, and thus exposes the misuse of Psalm 91:11-12.

This exchange carries several implications. For example, Jesus' answer assumes the unity of Scripture, that one part of the Bible agrees with all the other parts, and that one part of the Bible never contradicts any other part. This is consistent with a principle of interpretation that Christians have always affirmed. The way he handles this temptation is a strong endorsement for systematic theology.

To wield the sword of the Spirit is to present and defend biblical truths and to attack unbiblical beliefs through rigorous biblical and rational arguments. Therefore, this weapon can apply to preaching, writing, debates, and ordinary conversations in which the Christian presents and defends the biblical worldview, and attacks and refutes unbiblical beliefs.

Contrary to the mystical approach, the sword of the Spirit refers to intellectual presentations and arguments whose form and content are derived from Scripture. As Matthew Henry writes, "The word of God is very necessary, and of great use to the Christian, in order to his maintaining the spiritual warfare and succeeding in it...with this we assault the assailants. Scripture-arguments are the most powerful arguments."<sup>68</sup>

Jesus' response to the second temptation shows that the sword of the Spirit advances the kingdom of God by biblical argumentation. Then, in the third temptation, he seals Satan's defeat with another application of Scripture, and emerges victorious. By persistently wielding the sword of the Spirit in this manner, we will plunder the territories occupied by the devil. We will rescue the minds of the chosen ones and confound the minds of the reprobates (2 Corinthians 4:4-6, 10:3-5).

Examples of wielding the sword of the Spirit by biblical argumentation abound in Paul's ministry (Acts 17:2-4, 16-17; 18:4-5, 19). He is emphatic about the intellectual nature of our conflict with Satan (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). The devil "has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel" (2 Corinthians 4:4), and it is our purpose to "demolish arguments" that have been set up against the biblical faith, and to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

One who possesses considerable theological knowledge and superb reasoning powers is also one who can powerfully wield the sword of the Spirit. But a person who lacks these spiritual assets may never inflict much damage to the kingdom of darkness. Therefore, let us heed the words of Paul, who says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15, NASB).

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<sup>68</sup> *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*; Hendrickson Publishers, 1991; p. 2319.

Since Paul mentions prayer in verse 18, some people wonder if it represents another piece of armor. But since he does not say that it corresponds to any piece of armor, we should not assume that he still has the armor metaphor in mind, although the military imagery indeed continues. He urges his readers to "be alert," and rather than relaxing their spiritual vigilance, they must persist in prayer, that is, "on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests," and to "keep on praying for all the saints."

He then makes a personal request for prayer. This is important, because it tells us what he is most concerned about. He asks them to pray that he will "fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel." This is the proper concern of every minister – to preach the gospel, and to do it fearlessly.

## 6. CONCLUSION

### EPHESIANS 6:21-24

**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.**

Every part of Paul's letter is objectionable and repulsive to unbelievers and heretics. Thus they will also find every part of this commentary objectionable and repulsive. We have studied the doctrines of the sovereignty of God, the total depravity of man, the particular atonement of Christ, the irresistible calling of the Spirit, and the preservation of the saints. All unbelievers and heretics, including many of those who claim to be Christians, detest these biblical doctrines.

Following Paul's letter, we have proceeded from predestination to regeneration, from regeneration to reconciliation, and from reconciliation to sanctification. Among other things, we have discussed the foolishness and wickedness of non-Christians, the intellectual emphasis of the Christian faith, and the authority structure in the home. We have shown that Christianity is thoroughly deterministic and intellectualistic. In contrast, the essence of popular "Christianity" consists of anti-determinism and anti-intellectualism. The fact is that popular "Christianity" is anti-Christianity.

What does this mean? If unbelievers and heretics find Christianity objectionable and repulsive, and if popular Christianity is really anti-Christianity, it means that the world hates Christianity, and therefore they hate Christians. They hate Christianity and Christians because they have first hated Jesus Christ (John 15:18). Every non-Christian is an enemy of Christ (Matthew 12:30). For this reason – because the world hates Christ, Christianity, and Christians – we must take up the spiritual weapons that God has given us, so that we may stand our ground and maintain what he has accomplished for us in Christ, and to advance his kingdom by demolishing every thought that rises up against him.