

Studies in Ephesians by Ian Barker

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The Study

This study came from my blog where I daily wrote on a few verses from Ephesians. My intention is not to provide a full commentary (as though I could even write one!) but only to follow Paul's thought and make a few notes on something that stuck out in the section. My hope is that this humble offering will inspire you to study the Bible and dig into the text to discover truths for yourself.

Father's Role in Salvation (Eph. 1:1-6)

There is some dispute about whether or not this letter was actually written to the Ephesians. The letter is not personal in any way, meaning that Paul does not mention anyone's names like he does in his other letters. The earliest manuscripts do not have Ephesus in them. This has led some to believe that it was a general letter that he intended for certain churches.

Paul picks up the theme of saints from verse 2 and expounds on the role of the Father in our salvation. In these 4 verses, Paul references Jesus Christ 4 times even though He is talking about the Father. This does not mean that the Son is greater than the Father, but that we now have access to the Father through Christ. We wouldn't be able to have access to the Father if it were not for the Son. The theme of blessing and grace is prominent when Paul talks about the Father. He "has blessed us", He "chose us", He "predestined us", by "the kind intention of His will", and by the "glory of His grace." Our salvation is a gift from the Father to us through the sacrifice of the Son.

The Father's role in our salvation is to initiate and choose. This choosing is a corporate choosing. He is speaking to the church or saints in Ephesus and possibly other churches. As a family, He has chosen and predestined them but they have the right to choose Him. He had the idea to save a remnant on the earth and so in that sense we are predestined. The glory of this passage is His kind and caring desire to save us when we were away from Him. We were not holy and not blameless before Him but He has saved and cleansed us.

Jesus' Role in Salvation (Eph. 1:7-12)

The Father's role is to call us to Himself. But redemption is necessary for us to be able to come to Him. Redemption has been provided for us in Christ, His Son, through His blood. I love that He has lavished His grace upon us. Do we truly understand what kind of grace has been given to us?

This redemption through His Son was part of the great plan that He had to bring together everything in His Son. The gap between heaven and earth was spanned by His Son. The Father intended in His heart to give all of the glory to His Son. Heaven and earth are meant to come together and not to be separated. It is the only way that we will experience justice. When earth comes into harmony with the Godhead. They will come together and it is in the environment of heaven that we will dwell on earth.

As sons of God, redeemed through His blood, we have received an inheritance. This gift has been carefully thought out by the Father and perfectly coexists with His will. The chief goal, or the end, of our inheritance is to "be to the praise of His glory". This includes an awakening of praise within us that reveals His glory, but also a partaking of His glory that reveals His glory. Fallen humans will be completely redeemed from sin and evil so that we choose goodness, and are good.

Holy Spirit's Role in Salvation (Eph. 1:13-14)

The Father initiates relationship with us. Jesus came to ensure the plan could happen. Now we see that the Holy Spirit carries out the plan by sanctifying us that we might become true sons of God. Paul says that after we had believed in Him, we became sealed with the Holy Spirit. This sealing is a protection and a sign of

ownership. A king would place his seal on an important document to authorize that the decree came from him. God the Father has put His sign of ownership upon us by giving us the Holy Spirit. We are His possession.

But this ownership is a pledge of our inheritance. In other words, the sealing is only the beginning and it His statement that He is committed to us receiving our full inheritance. There is a process that is taking place, commonly called sanctification. This is the glorious work of the Holy Spirit. To help set us apart and prepare us for the receiving of our full inheritance. Our inheritance is a resurrected body but it is also the bestowing of authority to rule with Him. He wants it to be a process because He wants us to make choices of love to agree with Him. He doesn't want us to be robotic in our obedience, but wants us to freely choose. Isn't that what love is?

Allen Hood said that the Holy Spirit told him that He loves His job. Isn't that encouraging? My problems and attitudes are not too big for the Holy Spirit to take care of. Nor do they scare Him off. He is preparing a bride to be presented to Jesus. That is glorious work.

Spirit of Wisdom & Revelation (Eph. 1:15-17)

After giving us an outline of our salvation, Paul is impressed to thank the Lord for their faith and love and to pray for them. Faith in Christ and love for people are two marks of a true believer that Paul mentions in Colossians 1:4. He starts his prayer for them by addressing God as the "Father of glory", which means that He is able to impart glory to His sons. A large essence of His glory is His emotions. When Moses asked Him to show His glory, the Lord responds by saying, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion" (Ex. 33:18-19). He longs to impart His emotions to us.

The first thing that Paul asks for is "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." Who is Him? It is the Father, but it also the Son. It is God! We desperately need this Spirit. 1 Corinthians 1-2 outlines how contrary our natural, fleshly minds are to a true revelation and understanding of God and His wisdom. Paul makes it clear that it is only by the Spirit that we can understand the wisdom and the beauty of the cross, the centerpiece of all His activity. Our minds are so dead to His beauty that we are unaware of how dead we really are! I get satisfied so easily on a little bit of bread, when there is a banquet that is awaiting me. One of the hardest things for me to understand is that He wants to reveal Himself. Another thing that is hard for me to understand is that there is always more of Himself that He wants to reveal. I have such a low view of God and that affects the way that I live.

In Romans 12:2, Paul says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." There is a direct correlation between the effectiveness of our walk, and the purity of our knowledge of God. We need to have "a spirit of wisdom and revelation" to purify our minds and ignite our emotions in holy love.

The Hope of His Calling (Eph. 1:18)

After praying for a spirit of wisdom and revelation, Paul prays for the eyes of their hearts to be opened. He is asking for reality to be imparted to our hearts so that we feel, think and see differently. In real life, what you see is reality. You may not see clearly to have details of what is going on around you, or you may not recognize what you are seeing making you confused, but you are seeing something of reality. Seeing gives us an understanding of what is around us and allows us to appreciate beauty. In other words, it changes our perspective on our lives. This is what Paul is asking for. But rather, he is asking that we would see spiritual

reality, and more specifically, our spiritual reality in Christ. He is not asking that we would be able to see angels and demons, but he is asking that we would see who we are in Christ.

The first of these three realities that Paul wants us to see is “the hope of His calling.” Mike Bickle has an excellent teaching on this reality (available from my website) and he writes, “God created each of us with a longing to participate in that which has deep and lasting significance and relevance. We are restless and agitated in our spirit until we answer this longing. However, only that which is significant to God is truly significant. Thus, we must agree with God. This requires resisting the secular values that are so natural to us.” It is the classic question: What are we here for? It is a valid question. In all of our searching, we usually think of our calling in an external or vocational way, or we think of it in an internal way (How am I to grow?). Both of these are dynamic because Jesus called us to preach and heal, and He also called us to be disciples. I believe that our primary calling on this side of eternity is our internal calling of growing to be more like Jesus and having relationship with Him. But there is another aspect of our calling that we often miss. It is our eternal calling.

Jesus said, “Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities” (Lk. 19:17). The principle that Jesus is giving here is that our external calling is almost always going to be small in this life. But, if we are faithful with the smallness that He gives, then we will be granted much more in eternity. Peter asked Jesus, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?” Jesus replied by saying, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:27-28). Our primary calling is our eternal one when we will be given responsibility (Matt. 25:21; Rev. 3:21) and greatness (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:16-17).

I believe that it is imperative to understand all three of these callings because if we do not, we will lose our way. I also believe that if we grasp our eternal calling of responsibility and greatness, then we will be able to pursue our present two callings (internal and external) with much more clarity and success. We need to have our eyes opened to see the reality of His calling so that we do not lose hope.

Riches of His Inheritance (Eph. 1:18)

This is an odd request. Mostly because this says that God has an inheritance. An inheritance is property, right, or money that an heir receives when another person dies. Someone has to die for Him to receive His inheritance, and that someone was Christ who died and has bought us by His blood. We are the Father’s gift because the Son has paid the price of our death. The idea of God having an inheritance in His people goes back to the Exodus when God delivered His people (Deut. 32:8-9).

It is a staggering idea to consider that we are God’s inheritance. It is mind-blowing enough to think of the fact that our inheritance is God. Even that is hard to believe. But we are actually a gift to the Father and the Son. Me? A gift? Who am I? But that is the beauty of the gospel. We who are poor and naked, have been clothed in righteousness. There is also the reality that we have to put on clothes of righteousness (Rev. 3:18), but that is not the focus here. We are instructed to pray for that our eyes would be opened to perceive the riches of the glory of His inheritance in us. This perception will give us the strength to put on those clothes of righteousness. A child or an adult acts differently when they know that they are loved. A person performs better when they are confident that they have ability. Paul will write in 4:1, “Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.”

I am challenged to really believe that I am special to God. There is nothing mysterious about getting this revelation. It is a revelation that a child can understand. I am because God is love. I am because Christ died, and my life is “hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). That motivates me.

Greatness of His Power (Eph. 1:19)

The third part of Paul’s 3-fold request for an opening of the eyes of their hearts, is that they would know what is the surpassing greatness of His power. The first request was that they would know what their calling or assignment is. The second request was that they would know how much God likes them. Now Paul requests that they know how much God is for them. Just think of God and His power. Consider Genesis 1, the Flood, the Exodus, and the Resurrection. Those are just examples of His obvious outworkings of power. It is hard to understand power that can create the heavens and the earth. But that same power is available towards us as saints in Him. We have a power source inside of us that is greater than we can understand. We have it so good! We don’t understand at all what we have in Christ Jesus and the new birth.

“If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness” (Rom. 8:10). The Holy Spirit within us empowers us to make right and godly choices so that we become more like Him. On our own, we are unable to act, feel, or think like Christ. But through His Spirit, His strength is imparted to us that we might be like Him. Do you ever feel helpless, like you cannot do the Christian thing? I do. And it’s in those times that I have to remember that His strength and grace is for me. His grace is His desire and power to help me to walk in godliness (Titus 2:11-12). To cooperate with His grace is to thank Him for His grace and righteousness by saying “yes” to His ways, and then to walk it out. By thanking and agreeing with Him, it softens our hearts to be able to make the choices that we need to make with the Holy Spirit. I find that I usually make godly choices when I spend time agreeing with Him about His ways.

I love the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God’s answer to our question, Where are You God? He is right inside of you. Art Katz once asked a little girl how she knew God was real. He was an intellectual atheist who had embarrassed any Christians would had dared speak about Jesus to him. But her answer cut him to the heart and he was converted. Her answer to his question: “Well, He’s inside of me.”

According to His Power (Eph. 1:19-23)

This power that is toward us is the same power that was working in Christ when He was raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father. These verses are pretty intense because they reveal His power in four ways:

1. He raised Christ from the dead.
2. He seated Him at His right hand.
3. He put all things in subjection to Him.
4. He gave Him to the church as the head of all things.

We will look in chapter 2 at how this has affected us, but I want to look at how the church is His body, “the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” The church is known as the community of saints on earth and in heaven. We are His people whom He has died for and that we might reign with Him. We are His bride, His household, His building, and His body. We are also many other things but all of these metaphors indicate that we are in a partnership with Him to establish His purposes on the earth. Not only this, but we are His representation on the earth. We are the fullness of Him.

This is both glorious and terrifying. Glorious because we represent Christ on the earth and He has chosen to fill us with Himself. But terrifying because we have a responsibility to represent Him on the earth. Though this is terrifying because we fail so often, we are safe. He is the head of all things so He is our leader and is actively involved with us. He understands our immaturity and His reputation is safe with Himself. The maturing of the church into fullness will be glorious as both heaven and earth witness the full cooperation and harmony between God and man.

Dead in Our Sins (Eph. 2:1-3)

The reality of sin is offensive to our minds and hearts, especially in our American culture. The Western world is devoid of any real fear of God or conviction of the wickedness of man. Terrorist, murderers, rapists, corrupt politicians, wealthy businessmen, these are all evil in the eyes of the American public. But what about the average person who lives a quiet life? Are they good? The Biblical truth is, no, they are not good. They are sinners, even as the murderer is a sinner.

Paul says that we once were “dead in our trespasses and sins.” We were “by nature children of wrath.” Since Adam and Eve sinned against God in the garden, all of humanity has been born into sin (Rom. 5:12). Being born into sin does not mean that we merely commit sins, but we are sinners. This is important to understand because many many people, including myself, think of sin as something that can be controlled. (In Christ, we can control it, but I still struggle to give God control of my life so He can work righteousness in me.) We sub-consciously believe that there is a scale of sins that we are judged by so that the person who boasts in his heart is better than the murderer. But James writes, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all” (Jas. 2:10). The smallest sin is counted before God and the penalty is the same: eternal death. We cannot work to repay our sins because we are sinners by nature.

This is all very heavy but it’s really important to understand what we were saved from in order to truly be thankful for what He has given us. As we will see, He has given us a lot, but it is hard to be fully thankful when we don’t see the darkness of our sin. All have fallen short of the glory of God. It’s a good thing to remember our salvation. Martin Luther was asked why he was preaching the gospel every Sunday to his congregation. He said something to the effect of, “Until they begin to believe the gospel, I will continue to preach it to them.” The gospel is not a once for all time event, it is something that we need to be continually reminded of.

Alive Together with Christ (Eph. 2:4-7)

Though we were dead in our sin, we have been made alive together with Christ. This is because of the Father’s great mercy towards us and His unfailing love for us. The Father, out of His great compassion and love, gave us new life through His Son. He didn’t love us because we were appealing to Him; He loved us even when we were filthy in our sin. Our salvation is purely a gift of His grace. Mercy and grace is never deserved because they act regardless of works (Rom. 11:6). Mercy acts for those who cannot as opposed to those who can.

Obviously, this is amazing for us because we are born as those who cannot. We try to convince ourselves that we can have relationship with God out of our own strength, or we can become godly out of our own strength, but sooner or later, we realize that we are weak and powerless outside of Him. But God has made us alive through and with His Son. Instead of being dead, having no effect, we are now alive which means, we are pleasing and available to God. Pleasing because we have relationship with Him; available because we now have His Spirit in us.

My position of being ‘alive together with Christ’ is one of the most powerful realities I like to meditate upon. Often, I find myself trying to find a way to please God and make myself pleasing and available to Him. But truth tells me that I am already there. Thinking about my position of being alive in Christ helps me to connect with the reality so that I truly believe it.

Verse 6 is a very startling statement. In the pattern of Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension, we also, being dead, have been made alive and raised up with Him where we are seated with Him in the heavenly places. We have been given a tremendous amount of authority to govern with Him. The interesting thing about this is that the reason for us being seated there, is “so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (v. 7). I do not pretend to understand this, but He delights in showing His lovingkindness to us. His lovingkindness is so unending, that He will forever reveal it to us. And our position now is directly linked with the revealing of His lovingkindness forever. I need to go meditate on this.

The Ages to Come (Eph. 2:7)

Our present condition of being regenerated is described in verses 1-6 but our future inheritance is revealed to us in verse 7. We are being saved so that the glory of His kindness and grace will be shown to us and to all of heaven. This tells me three things:

1. Our lives are much more about our life after we die, then it is about our lives now. We need to enter into a comprehension of God as the eternal God who aligns things in this age to effect eternity. Our callings have much more to do with eternity than we think.
2. His greatness, our greatness, and our ability to experience Him is greatly veiled in this age. Colossians 3:3-4 seem to confirm this. Why is our greatness and experience of Him veiled? Pride is a violent beast that will rob us of our inheritance if God showed us who we truly are. God desires people who will love Him through good and bad times. He “withdraws” His presence to build our faith that He is and He is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6).
3. Our salvation is a process called “sanctification.” This is a simple truth, but it sets my heart free every time I screw up. I am on a path to maturity and my Father knows that. Consequently, my weak desires for righteousness are precious to Him.

Saved by Grace (Eph. 2:8-10)

Paul tells us that our salvation is completely by grace, and not because of good works. It is the gift of God to us so that we would not be able to boast before God. That we are protected from boasting is His kindness to us. We are saved by faith, which is our side of our salvation. But I thought Paul just said we are not saved by works? Is faith a “work”? Works are rooted in our strength and are done because we think that we can do something. Faith is rooted in humility and brokenness so our response is to believe in Him to do what we cannot do. Our salvation is by grace, but God gives us the dignity of choosing Him even though He really chose us!

Though we are not saved by works, we are saved to do good works. Paul says that we are God’s “workmanship” and that we are created in order to do good works. But the good works that we are to walk in are not arbitrary or random. They have been “prepared beforehand” for us. Every person has a different calling and role in the Kingdom. He wants to reveal to each one of us what this calling is and what the good works are that He would have us to do. Not envying another’s calling is very hard to do in our performance society. Some people will be more visible or honored, while others will be hidden (1 Cor. 12:22-25), but we all serve a purpose. He has thought out our calling and it is good.

One New Man (Eph. 2:11-22)

In verse 11, Paul's direction begins to change and he wants to encourage unity within the church and to show that as individuals, we are saved into a family. The Christian faith is meant to be lived out with other believers. Not only are we a family, but we are a Jewish family. Speaking to the Gentiles, he tells them that at one time, they were "without". What were they "without"?

They were separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants, without hope, and without God. But because of the cross, they have been included in all these of things. The blood of Christ has brought peace between all racial and religious barriers. Gentiles were unable to know God because He gave the Law to the Jews. But Christ fulfilled the Law allowing Gentiles to come into the Jewish family. Paul calls this inclusion of Gentiles with the Jews, "one new man". The Gentiles did not start the Church; the Jews did. The Church is Jewish and Christianity is a Jewish faith. Yet, Jews are not of the Church unless they come in through Jesus.

This passage needs to speak to us in a couple of ways, and hopefully more. First, Israel is not a separate entity from the Church. The promises of the covenants will be fulfilled in Israel through Christ. As Gentile believers, we have been given the privilege of participating in these promises, but they are not ours. Second, the problem of racism is the fruit of sin, and it is only solved through the Gospel. Racism cannot exist if two people are living in the cross. There is the issue of cultural differences that still exists, which are dealt with through the cross as well (Gal. 2:20).

Mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:1-7)

Paul begins to pray in verse 1, but then gets sidetracked and won't get back to his prayer until verse 14. Paul has a habit of doing this (Romans 1:8 - "First,..." Where's the "second"?). He is a prisoner for the sake of the Gentiles, and he has received a revelation from God. This revelation has not been revealed to anyone else except for Paul in all of history. It is the mystery of Christ, which is the fact that Gentiles are now "fellow heirs and fellow members of the body."

The promises were given to the Jews to carry from Abraham on, but now those Gentiles have been allowed to partake of them. How? Through the cross of Christ. That it is a mystery does not mean that we can't understand it or it is something that is really hard to figure out. It simply means that it was previously undisclosed, but now is disclosed to us.

The power of this mystery is veiled to us because as Gentile Christians, we view our faith as mostly spiritual, rather than physical and eternal. A land, a kingdom, a king, and lots of descendent's were all promised to Israel. These promises were to be fulfilled on earth, and on some far away place in heaven.

It is not comprehended by us because we lack an appreciation of the calling and choosing of God. God chose a people from the earth to invest Himself in. Do we understand how amazing that is? When we read Exodus 19, we get a little bit of an understanding of how difficult it is for God to relate with man. That He chose one nation is amazing enough. But now that He has included all peoples and nations in that choosing, this is extraordinary.

Manifold Wisdom of God (Eph. 3:8-13)

Paul was given a special grace, or an assignment, to preach to the Gentiles and to offer to them the way of salvation. He was a Pharisee of Pharisees, which meant that he saw Gentiles as the enemies of God. But now,

he has been called to preach to the Gentiles. He is preaching a mystery that was in God's heart from eternity past, but is now being disclosed in the preaching of Christ. The essence of this mystery is that God is moving towards reconciling all things in His Son.

Verse 10 is one that you could make your life verse. What does this mean? I have some thoughts. I believe that the root issue behind the fall of Satan was that he thought that he could sway the hearts of humans to worship him. He took advantage of the freewill of man and has been in a competition with God for the worship of man. He believes that man will always choose themselves and always choose temporal things. God is looking for love that gives of itself and chooses those who will wait for rewards.

The genius of God's plan is that He will cause men to voluntarily worship a God whom they cannot see or touch, and who asks that they forsake their ways for His. He asks that we forsake our desires for the desires of our brother. He asks that we choose meekness now, so we will be blessed in eternity. God will have a company of people for eternity who have willingly said 'no' to their own desires and have blessed others and loved a God who they cannot see. Those who worship Him will do it out of love, and not because they have been forced to. The defeat and humiliation of Satan will be extraordinary and our weak faith will bring down an entire kingdom of darkness. This is why Paul's tribulation (v. 13) is light.

The Wisdom of God - Part 2

I've been thinking about the wisdom of God because it comes up so prominently in Ephesians 3 and I have been reading 1 Corinthians as well and it's a big topic in that letter as well. It brings me to question what exactly is the wisdom of God.

The wisdom of God always has to do with solving the problem of the alienation between God and man. In the discovery of the wisdom of God, one must always start with the premise that there exists a radical rending of relationship between God and man. The damage is not in part, but total. Intrinsic in understanding this damage is the fact that God is faultless. The fault lies solely with man and to say otherwise only proves the point.

The problem is created by humanity, so the solution must come from God. Man is fractured and unable to heal ourselves. His wisdom is spent on repairing the damage that exists. In His wisdom, the solution must exalt God, while humbling man. The result of this is that the wise man is made foolish, while the simple man is saved by faith. This is our glory.

But in Ephesians 3, Paul looks at the wisdom of God as it relates to Jew and Gentile. How does it relate? Because the fruit of alienation from God is alienation from each other. The fall of man has severed the relationship between man and man, as well as between God and man. The beauty of the cross is that He humbles all men and it proves that we have fallen short and we are all equal before God in acquiring salvation. So the wisdom of God is displayed to the heavenly principalities when Jew and Gentile, black and white, man and woman, all dwell with each other in Godly love and peace.

To Be Strengthened (Eph. 3:14-17)

Paul has been imprisoned for the mystery of Christ, which is the breaking down of the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile. Now he begins to pray, "For this reason..." For what reason? You have to go back to 2:19-22. He is kneeling before the Father because Gentiles have now been grafted into the heritage of the Jews, and together they are growing into being "a dwelling of God in the Spirit."

He identifies the Father as One “from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name”, to show that the blessing that he will ask from God is able to be received by everyone. What is the blessing? He is asking that the Father would strengthen the believers with power or might in the inner man. This power flows from the “riches of His glory”, which is the beauty and power of the God who has lived forever.

The Father wants to strengthen our “inner man”, which is our soul or spirit, through the power of the Spirit. Paul does not pray for external realities, but is concerned about the inward state of the church’s life in God. He wants them to experience God in their emotions and thoughts. I believe the power that he is talking about here is faith. I say that because in verse 17, Christ dwells in our heart through “faith”. The reason that the Father wants to strengthen us is in order for Christ to dwell in our hearts. The Father is looking for “many sons of glory” and so He strengthens us to be transformed into His image (Rom. 8:29). This manifold wisdom of God will be made known through us to the powers and principalities. We will be like Him!

Rooted and Grounded in Love (Eph. 3:18)

Paul has been asking that the Father would strengthen the hearts of His people with faith, so that Christ would dwell in their hearts. He wants the saints in Ephesus and elsewhere to be conformed to the image of the Son. Now he will ask that they would be able to comprehend the greatness and infiniteness of the love of Christ.

The importance of knowing the love of Christ is not lost on Paul, for he wants them to be “rooted and grounded in love”. This phrase describes a tree that is strong and healthy, which is the tree of Psalm 1 that produces fruit in its season and prospers. Paul wants our growth and our stability to come from having confidence in the love of God. Our hearts are to be nourished by the rich soil that is the love of Christ.

Throughout life, we are tempted to fill our hearts and minds with many things and loves. We are easily comforted by this life. While some of these are good, Paul wants to lift our vision higher and to turn our expectation and longing towards Him. In the Song of Solomon, the immature church is pictured as tell Jesus, “your love is better than wine” (1:2). The wine speaks of the pleasures of the world, which are not always bad (though they often are), but they are just not the best.

We are to be comforted by His love because it “surpasses knowledge”. His love goes beyond what we have known before and what can be described. In an experiential manner, His love is unlike anything we have ever felt before. It is safe to “just love Jesus” because the nourishment and pleasure we experience from Him is endless and bountiful.

To Be Strengthened (Eph. 3:14-17)

Paul has been imprisoned for the mystery of Christ, which is the breaking down of the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile. Now he begins to pray, “For this reason...” For what reason? You have to go back to 2:19-22. He is kneeling before the Father because Gentiles have now been grafted into the heritage of the Jews, and together they are growing into being “a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”

He identifies the Father as One “from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name”, to show that the blessing that he will ask from God is able to be received by everyone. What is the blessing? He is asking that the Father would strengthen the believers with power or might in the inner man. This power flows from the “riches of His glory”, which is the beauty and power of the God who has lived forever.

The Father wants to strengthen our “inner man”, which is our soul or spirit, through the power of the Spirit. Paul does not pray for external realities, but is concerned about the inward state of the church’s life in God. He wants them to experience God in their emotions and thoughts. I believe the power that he is talking about here is faith. I say that because in verse 17, Christ dwells in our heart through “faith”. The reason that the Father wants to strengthen us is in order for Christ to dwell in our hearts. The Father is looking for “many sons of glory” and so He strengthens us to be transformed into His image (Rom. 8:29). This manifold wisdom of God will be made known through us to the powers and principalities. We will be like Him!

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With All the Saints (Eph. 3:18-19)

As I’ve been going through Ephesians, and also studying 1 Corinthians, I’ve been struck by how much Paul’s theology revolves around community. Ben Witherington writes, “One of the great challenges to understanding Paul’s thought is the relationship between the one and the many: Paul affirms both, holding them in tension. To be a Christian is to be a member of the body of Christ, not an isolated saved individual.”

In experiencing the love of Christ, Paul prays that we would experience with “all the saints”. God has a family and as that family, we grow faster and experience more in community. As a newly married man, I am learning firsthand how dwelling with someone can be both wonderful and frustrating. It is frustrating because all of my insecurities are being poked and my pride is prodded. It is wonderful because I get to be loved by someone who is loving me with the love of Christ. Conversely, I get to love her as Christ loves her, which brings healing. Marriage is the most intense form of community that I have ever experienced.

We are to be rooted in the love of Christ, that we might “be filled up to all the fullness of God” (v. 19). The fullness of God is an intense reality because God is eternal and infinite in who He is. So how can we be filled with something that is infinite? First, fullness probably refers to the Father’s apportioning of a certain measure of power and love that is given to each one of His children. Second, coming into this fullness is an

eternal process that requires a resurrected body (cf. 3:21). Third, it is together with the saints that we come into this as we grow as the body of Christ.

Now To Him Who Is Able (Eph. 3:20)

Paul often give a doxology, which is a short hymn of praise to God. He does it here in verses 20-21 to express the greatness of God's power to work that which Paul has just prayed. If you found yourself in disbelief when reading or praying this, do not worry, you have God on your side.

Paul has just prayed that we would be strengthened with the riches of His glory; that Christ would dwell in our hearts; that we would be able to comprehend the love of Christ; and we would be filled up to all the fulness of God. Those are pretty lofty prayers and realities. My faith buckles when I actually consider living in this place. It is almost like Paul understands this thought process and so he goes, "Now to Him who is able..."

God is able to perform what we can barely believe for. He is able to dream dreams for us that we do not dare to dream. I remember reading this a couple of years in the NAS version, which reads, "...able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think..." I counted five adjectives that describe distance and quality of something. Isn't this amazing?

Our little faith and our little minds have no idea what to ask God for. But what do we expect from Him? He is the God who is powerful and loving. He became a baby! Not only that, He died like a criminal. Philippians 2 details the extent of His humility, which is amazing. The astounding thing is, if He were to come to earth and become the most glorious and powerful king who ever ruled on earth, He would still be humbling Himself. But He went lower than that. What makes us think that He won't perform all that He has promised us, and maybe even more?

To Him Be the Glory (Eph. 3:21)

Paul ends his doxology and prayer by saying, "to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." The Father has chosen to show forth His glory through His church, which is both Jew and Gentile in Christ, and through His Son Christ Jesus. Before He went to the cross, Jesus prayed, "Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (Jn. 17:5). Jesus was glorified because He was obedient unto death, and so He has been given the name that is above every other name (Phil. 2:5-11).

The remarkable thing about this passage is that God will show forth His glory through His church, forever. In Isaiah, God reveals that it is through Israel that He would show forth His glory to the nations (Is. 44:23; 49:3). The nations will know that He is God when Israel receives Jesus as their Messiah, and God restores them as a land and a people (Is. 62:1-2; Ezek. 36:23, 36). Jesus prayed again in the garden, "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one" (17:22). Though Israel has the leading role in discipling the earth, His glory will be released into His church, as Jew and Gentile, when Israel and the nations are drawn together in unity. God will known as the Great King because He will unite all of humanity together as one. All of heaven and earth will marvel at His "manifold wisdom" (3:10).

Another amazing aspect of His glory being in His church, is that as believers, we have received a hidden glory through Christ that will be revealed to us when His glory is revealed at His coming (Col. 3:3-4).

Preserving Unity (Eph. 4:1-3)

It has often been observed that chapters 1-3 are identifying who we are. Not only individually in Christ, but also as the body of Christ as Jew and Gentile. In chapters 4-6, Paul takes this understanding and shows how we are to live with each other because of who we are. That certainly makes sense since Paul starts chapter 4 by saying, “Therefore.” The classic question is, What is the “therefore” there for?

Paul is imploring us to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.” Since Christ has died for our sins and we have received the Holy Spirit, the very power of God, we have been given the resources that we need in order to walk in godliness and righteousness. God has called, but we must answer that call by using the power that is in us. In verses 2-3, Paul reveals that the way we are to do this is by acting in humility, patience, and love toward one another. The revelation that we receive from chapter 1 is to encourage us to love one another. The love of Christ that we experience in chapter 3 is to help us to love another.

Paul sees the love of our neighbors as the ultimate fruit of a dynamic relationship with God. The reason for this goes back to the fall when Adam and Eve were ashamed of their nakedness before God and themselves. It goes back to the tower of Babel when man was uniting for the cause of evil, so God confused their language and created disunity. The ultimate sign of the restoration and redemption of mankind is when His people act in godliness towards one another. Our calling is to be sons of God as part of a large family.

One (Eph. 4:4-6)

As Paul continues to provoke the church in Ephesus to unity, he sets forth a clear statement that is both offensive and beautiful. It is offensive because he uses the word “one”, pointing to exclusivity, seven times in these three verses. But it is beautiful because it demonstrates that God is the only God and He rules over all.

We are all a part of one body that is not divided by race, economics, or nobility. We are all equal before God, yet we all have a distinctive to offer God and each other. There is one Spirit who joins us and who works in us to will and work His good pleasure. One spiritual gift is not better than any of the others, eliminating any excuse to be jealous or envious. All of us have equal opportunity to cooperate with the Spirit in the process of sanctification. This doesn’t mean that we will all grow to the same degree, but the Spirit is the same in each of us. These are things that we may not think about every day, but I think that these kind of thoughts exist, tucked away in the back of our minds.

When I read “one faith, one baptism”, I think of a couple of things. First, Christianity is the only faith that is real and eternal. It is the only way that leads to the Father. This is a hard message to preach and hold to in this day and age, but it is the truth and we must hold onto it fast. Second, when I think of “one baptism”, I think of how many denominational splits have occurred because of differing opinions concerning baptism. While I don’t profess to know what the “one baptism” is, this arguing must grieve the Holy Spirit.

Gifts Given To Men (Eph. 4:7-13)

Ephesians 4:1-6 essentially describes the foundation of Christian unity; what we can be united about. In verse 7, Paul begins to describe how we can reach unity and community so that we that we are becoming one body. Jesus has given gifts to His church, but these gifts are men and not abilities or blessings (cf. Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12).

Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 and changes it a little bit to show that when He ascended to heaven as a victorious king, He gave gifts to men. This is different than the usual custom of receiving gifts, but Paul apparently uses a different Jewish translation that replaces “received” with “gave”. Verses 9-10 is inserted as a parenthesis to comment on what it meant for Christ to “ascend”. The phrase “the lower parts of the earth” has been used to establish the idea that Christ went to hell while He was in the grave. I don’t think that is what is meant here, rather, Paul is describing how Jesus descended from heaven to live on earth, even dying on the cross. This descending was the basis or qualification for His ascending to the place of honour to “fill all things”.

Verse 11 describes what Jesus “gave”. He gave us men who would help us walk in unity and fullness. These men are gifted, but they are anointed. I find it interesting that we speak of the 5-fold ministry here, but it is really 4-fold. Paul differentiates the offices with the words “some as”, but includes pastors and teachers as one. The purpose of the giving of these “offices” is to equip every saint to do the work of Christ, so that the body is built up and edified. These men and giftings will exist in the church until the church becomes mature in unity and power.

Winds of Doctrine (Eph. 4:14-17)

He has given us the gift of gifted and anointed men who are able to help equip us, so that the church is built up until we come into the fullness of Christ. Because of the leadership in the body, we are able to be strong and mature in our walks. We are not children tossed around by the waves of delusion and lies that come against us every day.

How often do we stop and realize the fact that we are bombarded by the trickery of men? I know that I grow weary of “being on my guard” and will easily give in to untruth. It is not the obvious lies that trip me up, but the deceptive lies that lie underneath the surface of a book I read, a news article, a movie, or in a conversation that I have. There are winds of doctrine that are blowing that seek to circumvent the truth of the gospel. We are constantly under attack from the father of lies.

Paul’s answer to our battle over truth is to speak the truth to each other, which is why we need teachers, apostles, and prophets to train us. It is no surprise that he tells us to speak it in truth because of our propensity to become dogmatic and unyielding when we begin to “preach” to one another. Whether you are right or not, Paul tells us to speak in love. Understand that we are all in a war that is violent and unrelenting. If someone you know is believing a lie, then have a little mercy and understand that you are just as able to believe a lie as they are. This is why we need each other and this is the ministry of the body.

Put On the New Self (Eph. 4:17-24)

Paul encourages the saints to no longer walk according to the way of the unsaved Gentiles who have a darkened understanding. Paul sees that the mind is the catalyst for both righteous and unrighteous behavior. He uses 7 different words to describe how we are guided by what we think (mind, understanding, ignorance, learn, taught, truth, spirit or your mind).

The Ephesians were living in a culture where evil was pervasive so that the Gentiles had given themselves over to evil and had become calloused in their hearts. They were unable to respond to God because they had practiced greed over and over again. My friend Brandon went to Ephesus a couple of months ago, and he said that it was a common practice to throw newborn babies outside of the city gate. This was common not only in Ephesus but also in other cities in Asia at that time. The sin that the Gentiles were involved in was rooted in greed. They were ignorant of God, but they also had hardened hearts. Paul instructs the church in Ephesus to not walk like them.

How are they to walk in the way of Christ? First, they are to set aside the old self, and put on the new self. This new self is made in the likeness of God, “created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” Second, the way to put on the new self is to be “renewed in the spirit of your mind.” In Romans 12:2, Paul tells us to renew our minds so we can “prove what the will of God is.” This is why reading, meditation, praying, and study of the word of God is so important. We need to wash ourselves with truth so that we can have a walk that is worthy of our calling.

Actions of the New Self (Eph. 4:25-32)

In 4:24, Paul commands us to put on the new self, created in the image of God. Now, in 8 verses he describes how a person acts when they have put on the new self. He carries on the same theme of family and unity by giving us boundary markers as to how we are to treat one another.

He begins by reiterating that we are to speak truth to one another. Rather than speaking truth to free someone from delusion, we are to be honest with one another. A lack of honesty leads us to be angry because lies and distrust build which opens the door for accusation and anger. Paul offers an interesting commentary on how those who are poor are to treat their neighbor. Rather than stealing or relying on other’s for money, they are to get a job and make their own money. Then, they can give to others. He doesn’t say anything about how we are to treat the poor, or how long we are to extend mercy before we can hold them accountable for providing for themselves.

How hard verse 29 is to walk out! We are to let no “unwholesome word” come out of our mouths, but only speak that which is good for edification and what is needed in the moment. A failure to do so actually grieves the Holy Spirit. When was the last time that I actually stopped and thought about if the words I was about to say were needed? Sometimes I will stop myself, only to be convinced to say them anyway in the name of “honesty” or “openness”. The underlying rule of all our behavior is that we are to act towards one another as Christ has acted towards us.

Imitators of God (Eph. 5:1-5)

Paul tells us in 4:32 to forgive each other “just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” He carries this same theme on into chapter 5 where he exhorts us to be “imitators of God, as beloved children.” We are to walk in love as Christ walked in love and who was a pleasing and fragrant aroma to God.

After the flood, Noah and his family came off the ark onto dry land. Noah took one of every clean animal and bird and offered a sacrifice to the Lord on an altar. Genesis 8:21 reads, “The LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, ‘I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.’” Noah’s small offering had touched something in the heart of God and was a proper sacrifice for sin. Since man is evil from “his youth”, he has no choice but to sin because it is his nature. For this reason, He had mercy on him and promised to never again “destroy every living thing.” This was a type or a foreshadow of Christ’s pleasing sacrifice. The Old Testament sacrifices and lives of faith were only pleasing to the Father because He was looking forward to the sacrifice and faith of Christ the Son (Gal. 3:8).

As a contrast of the sons of God, Paul describes the sons of darkness and their behavior. The saints and children of God are to not act in immorality or greed, but are to give thanks. We are to give thanks because we are not prone to immorality or impurity, but those who are will not enter the kingdom of God. Yet we are to fear and be wise lest we do act fall short.

Children of Light (Eph. 5:6-14)

Paul continues to call the saints to a higher calling. They are not to partake of the spirit of the world, which scoffs at the idea that wickedness will exclude a person from the kingdom of God. They are better than that because they are children of light and not of the darkness. They are to expose the works of darkness, rather than participating in them.

It is interesting to consider what Paul means by exposing the deeds of darkness. He tells us to expose them in verse 11, but then in verse 12 he says that it is “disgraceful even to speak” of them. Does this mean that we bring disgrace upon ourselves by paying attention to their deeds, or does he mean it in the sense of it bringing disgrace on the one in darkness? I wonder if he is trying to uproot an inclination to stare at the deeds of darkness. In other words, were believers paying too much attention to the disgraceful acts? Had it become the center of attention? This seems to be possible, because in verse 13 he tells them that “all things become visible when they are exposed by the light.” Paul seems to be advocating a lifestyle that brings conviction upon those who are walking in darkness. If they see the good deeds and the love of Christ that is in us, then they will turn. But if they do not know anything other than darkness, what are they going to turn to?

This reminds me of that famous quote: “At all times preach the gospel; use words when necessary.” Paul is encouraging the church in Ephesus to not be overwhelmed by darkness, but to live a life that shines bright in the darkness.

The Days Are Evil (Eph. 5:15-21)

Paul concludes the last section (5:6-14) by exhorting us to wake up and Christ will shine on us. He continues his exhortation by instructing us to be wise in our walks, because the “days are evil.” We are to be filled with the Spirit, not with wine, so that we can exhort each other and the Lord through song and melody. We are to be thankful to the Lord and be subject to one another.

It is interesting that he encourages us to make the “most of your time” because the days are evil. Being wise in our walk is linked with making the most of the time that we have. It could be that Paul was counter-acting a slothful and entertainment spirit that was indulging in wine. Instead of indulging in entertainment and fun, he tells them to be wise about what they are doing with their time because the days are evil. We can always spend more time in prayer and Bible study. But we also can spend more time in relationships or in serving others. We can make use of our time by using it to combat the worldly spirit that is around us.

It is interesting that he encourages the Ephesians to be filled with the Spirit by speaking to one another and singing to the Lord. We really value the singing to the Lord part at IHOP, but it is awkward for me to speak to someone else a psalm or hymn. But this is what being filled with the Spirit is! Two more ways that we can live in these evil days, is to give thanks to the Lord, and “be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” Being subject to each other is a very Kingdom of God practice and not a kingdom of darkness practice. But humility is a wise course of action.

This Mystery Is Great (Eph. 5:22-33)

One of the characteristics of the person who walks in the will of the Lord is that they are “subject to one another.” In 5:22-6:9, Paul will address wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves, and masters, and give instruction as to how they are to be subject to one another. In this section, he addresses wives and husbands and reveals that the marriage relationship is a shadow of the Christ’s relationship to His church.

Wives are to be subject to their husbands because it is a picture of the church being subject to Christ. This may be offensive to some, but in verse 25, Paul tells husbands to love their wives. Husbands are not to be subject to their wives, but are to love them. What kind of love? “To love their own wives as their own bodies” (v. 28). Like Christ, husbands are to use their authority over their wives to love and serve them. Christ lowered Himself and used His authority to serve humanity, His church. Husbands are to use their position as head’s of their wives to serve and protect them.

I love how Paul is trying to talk about earthly marriage but keeps going back to speaking about the marriage between Christ and His church. This is because, 1) it is an incredible mystery, and 2) human marriage shadows the Divine-human marriage. Paul instructs husbands how to love by showing how Christ has loved His bride. He washes her with “the water of the word” so that His church will be holy and blameless before Him. Similarly, husbands are to cherish and nourish their wives. Paul redefines the idea of marriage here by introducing the idea of mutual submission.

Community Relationships (Eph. 6:1-9)

Paul has been talking about how we are to be subject to one another. This means that we are to be under the authority of one another. This redefines marriage as a relationship of mutual submission, but it also affects the child/parent relationship and the master/slave or employer/employee relationship. The Gospel does not just effect us at an individual level but truly penetrates and cuts to redefine our communities.

Children are called to obey their parents. Our relationship with our earthly father should reflect our relationship with our heavenly Father: obedience. This commandment that God gave Moses is the only one that comes with a promise. If you honor your father and mother, you will live a long life on earth. I think what God had in mind when he gave this commandment with a promise, was that man would continue to honor his or her parents throughout their lives. Obviously, honoring your parents looks different at 9 years of age than it does when you are in your adult years.

It’s interesting how any questions of what it looks like to honor parents is answered by Paul’s instructions to fathers. He commands them to not provoke their children to anger. Father’s are to be respectful of their children and not exasperate them (Col. 3:21). I will not pretend to know what this means (having never been a father), but what I see is that many fathers are so heavy-handed with their children, that the child does not feel like they have room to grow and express themselves. This leads to rebellion. Father’s are to apply the discipline and instruction of the Lord, which of course is kind and gives dignity to the freewill of man.

Paul ends his instructions regarding subjection by addressing slaves and masters. Interestingly, Paul points towards eternity and the coming judgment as incentive for slaves to be free of bitterness and anger towards their masters, and for masters to be free of cruelty. Both slave and master are in subjection to God who does not see any rank, for good or bad.

A Spiritual Battle (Eph. 6:10-17)

Paul shifts gears a little in 6:10 and gives some instructions for godly living. This passage always is a good reminder of how my perspective on victories and defeats needs to be altered. “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (6:12). It’s sad to think of how often I truly take this verse to heart and really consider the fact that I am in a spiritual battle.

It's interesting that he reminds the Ephesians of their spiritual battle right after he gives them instructions concerning community relationships. It is like he knows that community leads to all sorts of grievances and disagreements, and we are to know that the enemy has his hand in these battles more than we would imagine. The enemy's strategy is to divide the body of Christ and we are to be on guard against these attacks. That is one application of this passage, but I'm sure that Paul is looking at the sinful culture of Ephesus and exhorting the Christians there to fight a spiritual battle.

These verses are often used as a sort of war cry for freedom from demons. But the our only offensive play in this battle is to take up the sword of the Spirit. The word for "sword" is machaira, which means, "a short sword or a dagger." Our entire strategy is to be built around a good defense. We are to "put on the full armor of God", "stand firm", and "resist". I know there is a place for the binding and rebuking of demons (I should be doing more of that!), but Paul is pointing towards a solid interior rather than a forceful exterior in our spiritual battle.

Pray At All Times (Eph. 6:18-24)

I will finish my study of Ephesians today so I can start my study of Philippians tomorrow. We have seen in the book of Ephesians how we have been given a new identity through the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We are no longer bound by sin, but we have been given salvation and the power of righteousness. This new identity has given us entrance into a new family, a new race, where there is no racial status, but all races are allowed to live in unity with each other to express the full beauty of God and His creation. Paul has been showing us how we are to walk in our new identity, specifically with each other in community.

From verse 10 to verse 24, he is closing up his correspondence with the church in Ephesus and is forceful to note that the battle that we find ourselves in is a spiritual battle, rather than a physical battle. The key to our victory is a good defense rather than a good offense. Now he introduces us to our final weapon: prayer. But it is more than intercession, we are to "pray at all times in the Spirit". By praying in the Spirit, it seems that we are able to better sustain our responsibility of being "on the alert" in prayer for each other. After all, we are dependent upon God for protection, refreshment, and empowerment. Paul specially requests prayer for his ministry of preaching the mystery of the gospel. Paul is aware that he has been entrusted with the gospel and is in need to help to speak it with care and precision.

Paul ends with a few "items of business" before closing with a blessing. One thing I have learned from this study of Ephesians: God loves community.