

Ephesians

Chapter 1

1 - Our Spiritual Blessings in Christ

In these thirteen studies we are going to go through Paul's letter to the Ephesians. It is a remarkable letter and was not intended for the believers in Ephesus only, but others in the same area. It is also a letter most certainly meant for us to-day. Paul was so thrilled with Christ and what it meant to be his, so thrilled with the abundant spiritual riches to be found in Him, that he wanted as many as possible to know about it. Some of the spiritual riches that he says God promises to us are so staggering in their possibilities, the thought almost takes our breath away. Paul seems to find difficulty in choosing the right words to express what he wants to say. Think, for instance, of the thanks he gives to God at the end of chapter three: "Now unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think according to the power that works in us.

The thought came to me one Easter that this letter is really a description and an explanation of the Easter experience in Christian living. It speaks a great deal about the power of the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus. It relates these to Christian living and shows how we can enjoy their Power in our own lives. So as we go through this letter together, let us keep this in mind. Let us also enter into the excitement and thrill that Paul finds in all that our Lord has done for us and is able and willing to do for us and in us now.

Paul starts off with his usual greeting. These greetings are very much like the normal greeting of that day when writing letters. There is, though, one great difference. Paul makes the greeting thoroughly Christian; he includes that which has real Christian meaning, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Grace is a word which occurs again and again throughout the letter Peace does too, that is reconciliation with God and wholeness from God. All of it, too, is through our Lord Jesus Christ. He was writing to people who knew exactly what it means to have peace with God through His grace and mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ. He does not want to leave it there, though. He wants them to realise all that being reconciled to God means. So in the first part of this first chapter he speaks of all the spiritual blessings that are ours if we are in the heavenly places.

This phrase "heavenly places" comes more than once in this latter. It could be rendered "heavenlies" or "heavenly realms." It is the place of true fellowship with God where Christ dwells in us and we in Him. It is that condition of heart where our relationship with God is the most important thing to us and where we live in His presence.

Now let us think of these blessings which Paul is so excited about. First he says that we have been chosen in Christ to be holy and blameless. What a very wonderful calling. There are some vocations in life that stand out as being exceptionally worthwhile and honourable such as that of a doctor or nurse and, amongst Christians, that of evangelist or pastor. God, though, has called us to something far higher - to be like Himself: "Be holy for I am holy" God said to the Israelites in the Old Testament, and He repeats it to his church in the New Testament.

You will find the words in the first letter of Peter, chapter one and verses 14 - 16. God hates sin and does not want it in his children and so his one aim is to save us from it. That is why Jesus came and it is to this we are being called. "Walk worthy of it", says Paul later in this letter.

Going very closely with this purpose of God is the fact that it says in verse five, that we are chosen to be sons of God through Jesus Christ. Children are like their parents in looks and very often in ways too. They share something of their parental nature. So the calling we have just been thinking of is not just trying to be like God by our own human effort and by obeying certain rules and regulations. It is much more than this. A Christian is someone who has received God's life and nature through Jesus Christ. Read John chapter three and you will find more about this in the words of Jesus. So you see when we are true Christians, we share His nature and that begins to work out in our lives to make us like Him. Just as fruit grows on a tree according to the kind of tree it is, so the fruit of the Spirit grows in the life of the believer.

Notice something else too. All that God does is to the praise of his glorious grace and according to the purpose of his will. When God does something, He does not do it in any old way, any more than we do. When a carpenter makes something, he does it according to a plan. When a new ship is built or a new house, they are built according to a plan. The builders know what they want and what they are building. God is the same; He too has a plan. He knows what He wants man to be like. Man sinned and failed miserably, but God had his plan all ready. Jesus, God in human flesh, came to this earth and died to bear away our sin and to bring us back into fellowship with God again.

It is all according to His plan that we should be children of God and grow to be like Him, holy and unblamable in his sight. So when we come to Jesus and trust Him as our Saviour, we are just fitting into God's plan. That is why life takes on purpose when we are his. We are fitting into his plan. This thought comes more than once in this letter, and the wonder of it is increased by the fact that it is all to the praise of his glorious grace. This plan shows the reality and wonder of his grace and love towards lost and sinful men and women. He longs for them to come to Him.

This is only the beginning of all Paul has to say. No wonder he is excited.

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2 - Redeemed, Sealed and Forgiven

You may remember that we started last time to discover some of the thrill and excitement Paul had when he thought of all that God had done for him and for all believers through Jesus Christ. He tells us about it in the letter we are discovering together. He says, you remember, that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. We began to speak about some of them last time. We thought how he says that God has chosen us in Christ to be holy and blameless before Him and for this purpose. He has chosen us to be His children. All this shows He has a plan for us.

Now he goes on to tell of some more blessings. I hope you have your Bible or New Testament ready so you can follow along as we discover this Letter to the Ephesians together. We are still in chapter one, and so now find verse seven. It reads like this, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of his grace which He lavished upon us." Three things stand out in these words: first, redemption, then forgiveness and lastly the measure of these blessings - they are according to the riches of his grace which He lavished upon us.

First then, we have redemption. The word means being bought back, usually from slavery. You see we are by nature slaves of sin and Satan. If you read in Romans chapter 6, you will see that Paul says the same thing there. Jesus said it too. In John chapter 8 and verse 34 we read, "everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin." Evil habits and thoughts hold us in their grip and enslave us. Our own selfish desires and lusts rule our lives. We are servants to Satan rather than to the Lord Jesus. While we are in this state we cannot be friends of God or serve Him. We cannot either be fit to go into His presence when we die. This is just why Jesus died for us. It was to buy us back from the power of Satan and sin and to set us free from them. He does this first of all by forgiving our sins.

Another word is sometimes used for forgiveness. Sometimes we speak of remission of our sins and this is just what the word really means. Remission means the putting away of our sins, with their guilt and their power. Do you see all that that means? First the barrier between us and God is removed and we can have fellowship with Him and be part of his family. Then also our lives begin to be changed; the power of sin is broken; we are no longer its slaves.

Then look at the measure of this blessing - it is according to the riches of his grace - grace that has been lavished upon us, given in full measure, plenty of it. Quite a lot is said in this letter about God's riches of grace and glory. We shall come across it again. God does not give in a half-hearted, mean, miserly way. He gives generously and with a large heart. His forgiveness, the putting away of sin, is like this.

The next point Paul mentions has something to do with God's plan again. You remember we had something to say about this last time. In verses 9 - 12 he gives a brief picture of all that God is going to do with this lost world through Jesus Christ. In the fullness of times, that is at the end of the age, at the final putting right of all things, He is going to gather together in one all things in Christ, What does this mean? It is saying very much the same thing as John is saying at the end of the Book of Revelation. It refers to the new heaven and the new earth which we read of there. All things are to be new in Christ. We who have put our trust in Him and become one of his family are going to share in the wonderful glory of the new creation.

In verse 13 Paul turns to those to whom he is writing (add so to us as well) and who have trusted in Christ and speaks of one great further blessing. Listen to what he says - you who have believed in Christ "were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the Guarantee, of our inheritance until we acquire the possession of it". Notice what he says. First that we are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. What, does this sealing mean? The seal was the sign of ownership and also of the fact that the object sealed was genuine. It is the same today. The seal on any object shows to whom it belongs and shows that it is genuine.

This is just what the seal of the Holy Spirit is. The ordinary type of seal is external and on the surface. The seal of the Holy Spirit, though, is inward, in the heart, in the spiritual part of us. Paul says in the letter to the Romans, that the Holy Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God. You will find this in Romans chapter eight and verses 15 and 16. This is an inward consciousness and assurance that, we are God's children. We all have a right to this seal and Paul reminds the Ephesians that they were sealed in this way.

Paul goes on to say something, more about the meaning of this seal. He says it is the guarantee of our inheritance, until we acquire possession of it. Another version translates rather freely and puts in like this: "The Spirit is the guarantee that we shall receive what God has promised his people and assures us that God will give complete freedom to those who are His." Do you understand what Paul is saying? He is saying that if we have this seal, this witness and assurance of the Holy Spirit whispering in our hearts, if, by this same Spirit we can say, "Abba Father", then this is the guarantee that all that God has promised us of his cleansing, presence and keeping power, and all that He has promised in his word for the future, will surely be made real. Paul, in other words, is giving the same assurance as he is giving in Romans chapter 8 and verse 28, that "in all things God works for the good of those that love Him and are called according to his purpose."

What a blessed and wonderful thing it is to know God and experience his grace in Jesus Christ. Paul has a great deal more to tell us about this. Next time we shall be thinking of the first of the two prayers that are in this letter to the Ephesians.

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Chapter 1

3 – Paul Prays for the Believers

We are still in the first chapter of this letter to the Ephesians and we are going to think today of the first of two prayers which there are in the letter. In the earlier part of this chapter you will remember that Paul has been speaking of all the blessings God has for us in Christ Jesus. Now, in verse fifteen, he starts to pray for them. Because of the promised blessings and because he has heard of their faith, he says, "I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers." He is continually praying for them. I wonder whether we pray for each other in the same way? But what does he pray? What does he want God to do for them? If you read the prayer carefully you will see that Paul is praying that they will have a real experimental knowledge of the Lord. He wants all the blessings he has been speaking of to be made thoroughly real in them.

Paul is speaking of knowing. There are several kinds of knowledge. There is knowing with our minds, understanding things. We call this intellectual knowledge. There is practical knowledge, knowing how to do things. There is also experimental knowledge. This refers to things we know by experience; we live in them; they become part of us. This is the way we know a person. It is by living with them, seeing and experiencing how they act and how they react in different circumstances. Paul says clearly that we are to know Christ in this way. In John's Gospel chapter seventeen, at the beginning of his prayer in the upper room, Jesus says that eternal life is knowing God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. That is what it means to be a Christian. It means to know him with our minds, with our hearts and in our real experience of his presence with us.

Paul says also that this knowledge comes to us by revelation. It is not just learning truth with our minds, nor is it just believing a creed, it is having Christ revealed in our hearts. It is that deep inner part of being enlightened, lit up by God. You see, we do not really know each other except by revelation, do we? None of us really knows what the other is like unless we reveal ourselves. Sometimes we do it by what we say, sometimes by the attitudes we show, and sometimes by just sharing with each other what we are like and how we feel.

God has revealed himself to us so that we may know Him. In the Bible, His word, He speaks to us and has revealed Himself to us in the Lord Jesus. He also speaks by His Spirit within our hearts. He reveals the awfulness of sin and the awfulness of our own sin. He reveals His great love in giving His only begotten Son to die for us and bear away our sin. When we put our faith in Him as our Saviour, His holy spirit speaks to us within and gives us the assurance that our sins are forgiven and we are His children. It is a delightful thing that we can know the Lord Jesus in this way.

Paul goes on to tell us three things we can know concerning God. They are the hope of His calling, the riches of His inheritance and the greatness of His power. The first thing we are to know then is, "The hope of His calling", or we could say "the hope to which He has called us." This is God's calling, not just something we have planned for ourselves. So much more is included in it than being called to forgiveness or called to be His children. God calls us and beckons us on to holiness, to be like Him, to be pure in heart, to be filled with His fullness. He has also called us to serve Him, to be witnesses to what He has done for us, wherever we may be. Finally He has called us to be with Him one day in all His glory. Read what John says in his first letter chapter three verse two: "Beloved we are God's children now. It does not yet appear

what we shall be, but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him for we shall see him as He is", and John adds, "everyone that has this hope in him, purifies himself as He is pure".

The second thing they are to know is "the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints". Notice that it is His inheritance in the saints. God has something that He wants from us. He gave his only son for us; we are his joy. He therefore expects something in return from us. He wants our love. He wants us to love him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. He wants us to praise him. He wants us to lift our hearts in worship to him whatever the circumstances. In Hebrews chapter thirteen and verse fifteen we are exhorted to continually offer up our sacrifice of praise to God. Then He wants all there is of us and all we possess to serve Him, so that by all we say and do, we make take the good news of God's saving grace to others.

The third thing Paul wants the Ephesians believers and us to know is the exceeding or immeasurable greatness of God's power in or towards those who believe. Notice that his power is in our direction; it is toward or for us. We who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are the ones who can share it. Then he tells us what the dimension or measure of this power is. The measure that he gives us is that of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The power, Paul says, is that which God used to raise Jesus from the dead and make Him sit at his right hand far above all rule and authority, power and dominion. This is the power He wants us to know.

What does Paul means by all this? Does he mean we are to be lifted out of this world, above it all? Does he mean that we will continually be able to perform miracles? No, I do not think so. He is saying rather that this power is to enable us to live in fellowship with our Lord so that we may be able to face life and cope with it. We may live in victory in all temptation, trial and stress, and may know fellowship with the Lord through them all. Notice again that this power is for those who believe. It is not just one act of faith, but the power flows as we constantly believe and open ourselves to the Lord.

So this is what Paul prays for the Ephesian believers and what a prayer it is! If he were here today, he would pray just the same for us. May the Lord help us to know in our hearts and lives all that Paul prayed for the Ephesians.

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Chapter 2

4 – Made Alive in Christ

Last time we were thinking of Paul's prayer at the end of chapter one of this letter to the Ephesians. You remember that he was praying that they might have true knowledge of the lord Jesus Christ and might be enjoying to the full all the blessings God has for them in Christ.

Now he goes back over the same idea again. He traces the grace of God working in their lives from what they were before they became Christians to what God wants them to become through his grace. This is all in the first part of chapter two; so let's go through the first ten verses and see what Paul has to say.

In the first three verses he speaks about what they used to be. Note that he says very little about outrageous sins. They were not necessarily the kind of people whom others would look upon and say, "What a desperately wicked lot they are!" What does he say, though? They were spiritually dead, cut off from the life of God and in no way sharing it. This does not mean that they could not hear God when He tried to reach them. By God's grace they could and were able to turn to Him so that He could give them eternal life. Then he says they were living according to the ways and attitudes of the world. They lived to satisfy themselves and to please men and left Jesus Christ out of their lives. He also called them "sons of disobedience". This means that they had within them the spirit that did not want God to rule in their lives, but they wanted to please themselves. Finally, they are called "children of wrath." In other words they were under God's condemnation. They were guilty before God and condemned to everlasting death.

This is the kind of people they used to be, but then come these wonderful words at the beginning of verse four, "But God." What a glorious "but" this is! In spite of all their sin, godlessness and rebellion God still loved them and wanted them for Himself. Right from the start, God in his love and mercy made his wonderful plan of redemption for them to forgive them, bring them back to Himself and make them like Himself. The same plan is still at work for us today; God's love and mercy go on and on.

Verse five tells us just what God's love and mercy had done for them. He had quickened them and made them alive together with Christ. Through Christ He had imparted his life to them and made them one with Himself. This is exactly what He does for us when we put our faith in Him. But what does it mean for us to have the life of God? It means at least four things. It is very much like physical life. First, we begin to breathe. Prayer is just like breathing physically. Prayer is our spiritual breath. We talk to God and have fellowship with Him and He talks to us. Then life means appetite and this is also true of our spiritual life. We begin to want God, to learn of Him, and we want to read his word, the Bible. Life also means activity and so it is spiritually. We begin to live for the Lord, serve Him and witness for Him. Lastly, life means reality. To be truly alive is a real experience. It is a real experience to have the life of God. Something has happened to us; our lives have changed and are changing; we now want God and we hate sin; we begin to like what He likes; we are alive to Him.

But there is something more that Paul says here. He goes on to say that God "has raised us up with Christ and made us sit with Him (that is God) in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." This is surely what Jesus meant when He said that He had come not only to give life, but to give it abundantly. You will find this in John's Gospel chapter ten. It is not only that God gives us his life,

but He can give us the kind of life and power that raised Jesus from the dead. Being raised up to sit with Him gives us the idea of authority and rest or confidence. In fellowship with God we are able to live above the vexations and annoyances of life so that they do not rob us of our peace and fellowship with God. We may live above envy and jealousy, above other's treatment of us, and above national and international conflict and bitterness. In this realm of the "heavenly places" we are in a kind of circle of blessing in Christ. I wonder if you are living there today? Not only alive in Christ, but sharing in his resurrection life and authority.

There are two more things we must think of in this passage. Paul glories in the fact that all this is God's gift received by faith. All that results from it in the changed lives of believers is for God's glory. First, then, about the way this wonderful blessing comes to us. Again and again, Paul says it is God's gift, it is by grace, it is through faith. Salvation, forgiveness, eternal life, all is the gift of God. There is nothing we can possibly do to merit it or earn it. It is all of God, planned and made real by God. Therefore all that God does for us comes because of his grace alone. His free grace and goodness brings it all to us.

We do, though, have to accept this gift. It is no less a gift because we have to take it. This is where faith comes in. One Bible version reads like this: "By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God." This means that the whole plan of salvation and the provision for it is all of God and by his gift. But it is by faith we receive the gift. Faith is recognising that we are lost and that there is no hope for us apart from Christ. It also means casting ourselves on Christ to bring us forgiveness and eternal life because of what He has done for us on the cross. This step of faith leads to an attitude of faith, trusting Jesus for all the strength and help we need in temptations and trials.

Then there is that other point that Paul makes. Read what he says in verse seven: "in order that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness towards us in Christ Jesus." You see what Paul is saying - we who are believers in Jesus are sort of show pieces for God to let coming ages know his greatness and mercy.

How wonderful is our God! I wonder whether you have received the life of God and are also allowing Him to make you the kind of person He wants you to be?

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Chapter 2

5 – Brought Near by Christ

We continue to discover together the letter of the apostle Paul to the church at Ephesus. This time we continue in chapter two. Up to now Paul has been describing all the blessings that God makes real in the lives of those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus and open their lives to Him. Now he seems to change his approach a little. Instead of just thinking about what Christ does for the individual believer, he starts speaking about God's purpose for the whole world. He speaks of God's plan to make one new society, the church, His body. He has done it by breaking down the barrier which divides Jew and Gentile.

In chapter three verse eight Paul speaks of the unsearchable riches of Christ and in this section he also speaks of these riches as a mystery. The word mystery did not mean quite the same to him and his readers as it does to us today. We think of a mystery as something strange, unusual, unexplainable, almost out of this world. Paul did not mean it like that, though. To him mystery was something that could not be known unless it was revealed by God. The church was just this. The Jews knew nothing of it. As far as they were concerned you had to be a Jew to be acceptable by God and worship Him. The Gentiles, that is all who were not Jews, certainly did not know about it because they did not know the true God. God, though, wanted his church to be a new body of people taken from both Jews and Gentiles. So Jesus came and died on the cross for mankind and provided the only way for all peoples to be reconciled to God. Jews and Gentiles who place their faith in Christ are united to Him and become the church, his body. He tells us more than once in his writings that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, male nor female, all are one in Christ Jesus.

Now, with all this in mind we come to chapter two and verse eleven of Ephesians. Most of the people Paul was writing to in this letter were Gentiles and he turns to them particularly now. "Remember", he says, that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth are called 'uncircumcised' by those who call themselves 'the circumcision'." You probably know that every male Jew was circumcised. It was part of God's covenant with them and you can find the first mention of this in Genesis chapter seventeen verse ten. It is repeated many times in the first five books of the Bible. It was this that marked them out as God's people. Paul reminds these Gentiles that, before they trusted in Christ, they were separated from God, alienated from his people, strangers to the promises God had given. In fact they were without God and without hope in the world. You see, he is saying in a different way what he had said at the beginning of chapter two. He is describing what they were like before they came to believe in the Lord Jesus. They had no hope, knew nothing of the true God, had no share in his blessings and were treated by the Jews as foreigners and aliens. But now that Christ has come, Paul says, all that has changed. By his death on the cross Christ has broken down what Paul calls "the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" between Jew and Gentile.

Out of those who believe in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, God is making one new fellowship, the church. All who trust in Christ as Saviour are reconciled to God and are also reconciled to each other. Whatever they were before they are now one in Christ. There is no barrier between. Paul puts it like this in verses fifteen and sixteen: "Christ's 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."

What does this all mean for us today? It means much more than just the reconciliation between Jew and Gentile, though it certainly does include that. It means that all who trust in Christ are made one in Him. Barriers are gone - barriers between ethnic groups, between rich and poor, between learned and unlearned, even between denominations. As far as God is concerned there is no difference, we are all reconciled to Him and are one in Him. We shall discover more about this later on in this letter to the Ephesians.

Now let us see what more Paul has to tell us about these new relationships. First, he says in verse eighteen that we have access in or by one Spirit to the Father. God is now our Father and we can go to Him at any time just as an earthly child would go to its father. He wants us to treat Him like this and go to Him at any time of need and He will be there to help us. We can talk to Him about everything; we can pour out our hearts in thanks and praise to Him and have true fellowship with Him.

Paul gives three illustrations in closing this chapter. First he says we are part of the household of God. That is what was meant just now when we spoke of access to God as our Father. You see we are all part of one great family; we share one life, the life of God, and one love - the love of God. This is the basis of our oneness.

Along the same line of oneness, he says we are part of one great state. We are fellow-citizens of one great country - God's country. We have one who rules over us who is our Lord and Saviour. We live in that country as our country and all who love Jesus Christ are our fellow-citizens whoever they may be.

The other illustration Paul gives is that of a temple. He says we are a living building and Christ Jesus is the cornerstone. We are built together and growing together into a holy temple in the Lord. We who believe are built up into this temple to form God's dwelling place on this earth. What a wonderful thought! It is different from what it was in the Old Testament times, and different from what it is when we think of earthly buildings. Buildings made with brick and stone are not God's dwelling place. God lives in the hearts of men and women redeemed by the blood of the Lord Jesus and they are formed into a living temple - his church. This is where He lives on earth and through this living temple He desires to show his glory and power. This is why Jesus said, "Where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"

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Chapter 3

6 – Paul's Purpose in Writing the Letter

Last time we reached the end of Ephesians chapter two. We were thinking of the pictures which Paul used to describe the church and its members. He said, that they were like members of one family, God's family; like citizens of one country, God's country. They were part of a living temple made up of all who have placed their trust in Jesus Christ.

Paul now tells them why he is writing of the church like this. He is going to offer prayer for them again and at the beginning of chapter three he explains one of the reasons why he is concerned for them. In verse two he says he has been given a stewardship of God's grace. This means that God had given him a special commission for the Gentiles, a special message to bring to them, and a special work to do among them. He explains how that in Old Testament times God's blessing came through the Jews, and the Jews were God's special people. Now it is different. Jesus the Messiah has come and has given his life for everyone. Now God's people are those who put their trust in Him as their Saviour and Lord. It makes no difference whether they are Jews or of some other nation or race, all must come to God through faith in Jesus alone. All who come this way make up the one glorious family and nation of which he has been writing. They all form the one living temple which is Christ's church and of which He is the head.

This was the great revelation that had been given to the apostles and prophets and of which God had set apart Paul to be steward. He was a special ambassador to declare this to the Gentiles, that is to all who were not Jews. This was the mystery that had been revealed to him and the other apostles, which no one had known or realised before. It was this revelation that thrilled him and also the fact that he had been made an ambassador to declare it.

To some Jews this was very difficult to understand. It was difficult for Peter. You can read how God had to reveal it to him when he wanted to take the Gospel to Cornelius, a Gentile. You will find the account of this in Acts chapter ten. Peter began to glory in it then as Paul did. God's plan is just the same today. The Gospel is for all of whatever family group or nation, of whatever social class, whether rich or poor, educated or uneducated. Christ died for all and all may know Him as their Saviour and be part of his church. All, too, have to come the same way. Salvation and eternal life is a gift from God and the only way to receive it is through faith in the Lord Jesus. After we have come we are all one in Christ. As far as our relationship to God through the Saviour is concerned, we are all the same, all on the same foundation.

The wonder to Paul is that God has entrusted him with this important and wonderful mission, to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to all and for all. What a remarkable description of the Gospel that is - the unsearchable riches of Christ. It all centres in the Lord Jesus Christ.. As we read in chapter two, it is all by grace through Christ. He died to bring us peace with God. He rose again that we might know by experience the life of God within us.

These blessings are what Paul calls "the riches of Christ." They are rich with love, joy, peace, goodness and all the fullness of God. Then he adds another adjective. They are unsearchable riches. The word has the idea of not being able to trace their beginning or ending, or how they came to us. We cannot describe their length or depth. They are beyond all our thought and imagination. They are far, far too big for us to describe so they must be more than enough for all our needs. Paul is thrilled with being entrusted with such a message and thrilled more than ever that it is for everyone without exception.

But he has something more to say. You will find this in verse ten of Ephesians chapter three. He says that it is God's plan that through the church the many aspects of God's wisdom might be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. Do you see what Paul is saying here? The church is a kind of showpiece so that not only people here on earth, but the heavenly beings also may see how great has been God's wisdom in his plan for the salvation of sinful mankind. In chapter two verse seven Paul says that God is going to show the immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness towards in Jesus Christ. So he describes the riches believers have through Christ as both immeasurable and unsearchable!

Paul has one last things to say before he prays for them again. These people to whom he is writing know what this great task is costing Paul in terms of suffering and hardship. He is afraid of their losing heart and so he bids them not to. He gives them two reasons why they should not be discouraged. The first was God's eternal purpose realised in the Lord Jesus. All that Paul is preaching, all that he is telling them of the riches in Christ is based on the eternal purpose of God. It cannot fail; it cannot go wrong. Everyone that comes to God through His Son will find this to be true.

The second reason is that because of God's plan we can come Him with boldness, without fear that He will not receive us. More than that, we can have confidence that as we come to Him through faith in Christ, we will find free entry right in to the presence of God to talk with Him and He with us. How real and practical is the message of the Gospel. The Gospel, Paul says in his letter to the Romans, "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. He found that it worked in his life and we may do the same.

So what have we discovered in this letter to the Ephesians so far? Let's sum it up again. The Gospel is for all people. All may come to God through Jesus Christ. In Him all may find forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, eternal life and all the spiritual blessing, the unsearchable riches, that come through faith in Him.

Ephesians

Chapter 3

7 – Paul's Second Prayer

Last time we finished in the middle of Ephesians chapter three and this time we are going to discover what Paul is going to pray for these Ephesian Christians. He has been telling them not to be discouraged by the things he is suffering for the sake of the gospel. In verse twelve he tells them that "In Christ and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence." And then in verse fourteen he goes on to say, "For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom the whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name." He is going to pray especially for them. Let's see what the prayer is all about.

He Prays for them along three lines - first, that they may have inner strength, second, that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith, and third, that they may know in reality the love and fullness of God. You will find this in verses sixteen to nineteen this chapter. He starts by turning back to the thought of God as Father and prays to his heavenly Father for these children of his. The first part of his prayer reads like this: "that out of his glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being." He wants them to have inner strength.

Notice that this prayer is for the inner man. It is what we are within that really matters; what we are in the inner part of our being. It is our desires, motives, thoughts and feelings that make us what we really are. You remember that Jesus said that out of the heart of man proceed evil things that make us unclean. You will find this in Mark's gospel chapter seven. So the heart, the inner man, is where god needs to make us clean and give us strength to resist the temptation to sin. It is here in the inner man that we have fellowship with God, talk to Him in prayer and hear Him talking to us.

Then Paul tells what kind of strength this is. It is no mere ordinary human strength. Its measure is God's measure. It is strength that comes from God Himself, from his glorious power. This shows us how God enables us to live as He wants us to live and to keep us pure in our thoughts and motives.

He says just one more thing about this strength - it comes to us by the Holy Spirit. Because He is the Holy Spirit He is able to reach right within to live in our spirits and bring cleansing and strength to us. The Holy Spirit is the one who brings us all God's blessings and does all God's work in us. Jesus tells us John's Gospel chapter three that those who place their faith in Him are born of the Spirit and so receive the life of God through the Spirit. Again, in John chapter sixteen verse thirteen, Jesus tells us that Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth. Acts chapter one verse eight says that we receive power to witness through the Spirit. There are other ways in which the Holy Spirit works in our lives and all that God gives us some by his Holy Spirit. He is the one who enables us to live the Christian life.

Then Paul prays that Christ may dwell in their hearts. There it is again - in their hearts, that is in the inner man. To dwell simply means to abide, to be at home within us. Being a visitor to a home is not the same as living there. It is not home; we cannot be thoroughly at rest there. In our own homes no rooms are closed to us; there are no restrictions. Jesus Christ wants to make our hearts his home just like that. He wants to be free to go into every part of our lives and to use all we are for his glory. He wants to feel at home in us too. That means He knows we will not rebel or object whatever He wants us to do or however He wants to make us like Himself.

Then Paul speaks again of faith. It is by faith that Christ dwells in us. As it says in Ephesians chapter two, it is by faith that we are made alive in Christ. Earlier in this chapter we discovered that it is by faith that we have boldness and access to God. And here again it is as we believe and rest in confidence in the Lord Jesus and his promises that He lives in our hearts. Faith is like the wire that brings the electricity from the power station to our homes to give us light and heat and power. When we turn the switch on, the power comes through. So when we place our trust in Jesus to save us, and put our confidence in Him for our daily lives, He dwells in our hearts and works in us.

Then, lastly, Paul wants them to know in their own experience the reality of the love and fullness of God working in them. Notice first that are to be "rooted and established in love." The soil in which they are to grow is to be the love of God, and the foundation on which they are to stand is the love of God. There are to be no other roots from which are character grows; no selfishness or self-seeking. And there is to be no self-centered foundation but we are to be God-centered.

If our roots and foundation are right, then we can know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. This sounds like a contradiction. It isn't really. We cannot fully understand God's love, but we can lay hold of it, feel and know its reality. We can know it working in us. There is breadth in it - it takes in everyone; there is length - it reaches from eternity to eternity; there is height - it reaches the highest point of heaven's glory; and there is depth - it reaches down to the deepest need of the human heart.

Then comes the prayer that they may be filled with all the fullness of God. This seems an impossibility. It does not mean that Paul expects them to contain all that God is in their human lives. That is impossible. It does mean though, that God's love and character can spread through all of their lives. They can be filled with his fullness like a bucket or sponge can be filled with the sea or the water of a great lake.

Then Paul finishes with these glorious words of confidence in God. Here they are, in verses twenty and twenty-one:

"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, forever and ever! Amen." What wonderful words. Let them sink into your mind!

Will you allow God to make this prayer of Paul for the Christians at Ephesus real in your life from now on?

Ephesians

Chapter 4

8 – The Church – The Body of Christ

Last time we were thinking about that glorious prayer Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers at the end of chapter three. In a sense this ends the more teaching section of the letter and he moves on now to more practical matters. Though this is true there is still a great deal of teaching in this section, especially about the church and our spiritual warfare as Christians.

We are going to think now about the first six verses of chapter four. Paul tells us in these verses what the church is by nature and also something about its character. This is what he says:

“As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 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.”

He has talked about the church already. At the end of chapter one and in chapter two he has said that it is the body of Christ. He has explained how Jesus died on the cross so that all mankind might be reconciled to God. The believers in Christ are God's new chosen people. The difference between Jew and Gentile has ended and now the church of Christ are the chosen people. The church is Christ's body and He is the head. Paul never thought of the church as a material building. That is a modern idea. True, he likens the church to a temple, to the household of God, but it is not a temple in a physical sense. The church is formed by all those who have been redeemed by Christ's death. It is a living church formed of living men and women from every tribe and nation and joined to Christ as the head by the Holy Spirit in them.

Paul in these verses lists some facts that are essential to our faith if we are to be part of this living church, the body of Christ. He says first that it is truly one body. We may be different in language, in colour, in temperament, in ideas on many things, but we are all one in Christ, united to Him by one life, the life of God. The person who makes us one is the Holy Spirit. He dwells in each one of us and He imparts the one life of God to each believer.

We have just one basic hope. Our hope is Jesus Christ, the only one who can reconcile us to God, and the only one through whom the world can be renewed and made what God wants it to be. Paul calls the Lord Jesus our hope again in his first letter to Timothy chapter one and verse one where he introduces the letter with these words: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope.” There is no hope at all for this world apart from Jesus, but in Him there is every hope and He will fulfill his purpose.

Jesus is our hope because He is Lord of all. There is one Lord and we can never be true believers unless we truly confess Him as Lord. Do you know that chorus: “He is Lord. He is Lord, He is risen from the dead and He is Lord. Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord”? All our confidence as Christians rest in his Lordship. This is the church's faith. There can be no other. Christ died and rose again from the dead to reconcile us to God and to be our Lord. No true believer can have any other faith than this.

Baptism is the sign of entry into the church and illustrates the fact that God intends the believer to die to sin and to rise with Christ in newness of life. Paul explains this in Romans chapter six verses one to four:

“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? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised in his death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

Baptism does not make a person a Christian, but it is an act of obedience, and an affirmation by one who has already become a member of Christ's body through faith in Him.

Then Paul finishes by declaring with triumph that there is one God and Father of all who is the source of all and the sustainer of all and through whom alone we can be saved and have eternal life. When we have that eternal life then we have the living God as our Father. This is the Christian faith; only in truly accepting the reality of these facts and trusting in Christ alone for our salvation from sin, can we belong to the church of God and be a part of the body of Christ.

Then Paul goes on to tell these believers, and so also us today, the kind of people members of this church ought to be. Sad to say, they have not always been like this, by any means. They were not in Paul's day, and that is why he writes so strongly in this and other letters to make it quite clear what kind of people those who belong to the church ought to be. Later on in the letter he speaks to individuals, but here he is speaking of the kind of life the church as a whole should live. First, he begs them to walk worthy of the high and holy calling. To please God and to keep their relationship with Him right is to be their whole aim in life. They are to be worthy of the one who loved them and gave Himself for them.

Certain characteristics stand out in verses two and three which cover all that Paul desires of them. The first are humbleness and gentleness, or meekness and lowliness one version puts it. Some people think it weak to be thought of as meek. This is not so. Only one who is strong in love can be meek. Jesus towered above all others in moral strength and yet He stooped in all humbleness to wash his disciples' feet. He was righteously indignant against injustice and hypocrisy; yet He stooped with ease to the lowest in society and truly loved them.

Then Paul emphasises patience, or longsuffering as a necessary characteristic of the true Christian. We are to love and love and love however much the one we are loving fails to respond. We are never to give up, never completely to lose hope, even for the least responsive. It means too that we are not to be impatient with the failure of others, nor to resent their rejection or ill treatment of us. Then we are to bear with one another in love; this follows on from patience. There is to be no retaliation when others don't agree with us or are hostile to us. We are to genuinely try to see the other person's point of view and to put ourselves in their situation.

Paul's last great plea is for unity. He does this often in his letters. Discord was a great problem then as it is now. Notice again what he says, “Make every effort to keep, or maintain, the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Do all that you possibly can to see that there is no disunity among you; no argument for argument's sake; no strife and the bitterness that comes from it. He did not mean that should be no disagreement, but there can be disagreement without bitterness, without falling out with each other. The Holy Spirit should be in control enabling us to find our God's will and to do it working happily together.

This is the kind of church Paul prays for. Is this the aim for the church fellowship you belong to, and have you the spiritual qualities to make your contribution to realising that aim?

Ephesians

Chapter 4

9 – One Body, One Spirit, Many Gifts

We continue our discovery of Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus. We were thinking last time of what God wants his church to be like and how its members should behave. This time we are looking at chapter four and verses seven to sixteen.

As we discovered last time, the church is made up of those who have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ and who have received eternal life. They meet together in different places, in different countries, but they are all one church - one body. God has a plan for his church. They are the people who bring true worship to Him and they also declare to others the kind of God He is. God wants his church to make known his holiness, his power and greatness, his love and mercy, and above all his way of salvation.

It is his longing that men and women everywhere may be brought back into fellowship with Him, to know and to love Him. As the church meets together for worship and to encourage each other in the ways of God they grow in grace. Also in their individual life and witness to Jesus Christ, they reach out to take the message of salvation to all around. This is God's purpose for the church as is shown in this letter and in other parts of the New Testament.

In these verses of which we are thinking Paul speaks of two things. First, he shows how God has given gifts to believers to assist the church in its growth and witness. Secondly, he urges them to grow up and become mature as Christians, and shows them how this is possible. Paul says that when Christ returned to heaven He gave to the church all the gifts that are necessary for its work and growth.

He mentions four types here. At first there were the apostles, fitted by God to go where the Gospel had never been heard and to establish new assemblies of God's people. Then there were prophets who had the gift from God to hear from Him and declare the very word that was needed for any occasion. Thirdly, we have evangelists - those who have the gift of preaching the Gospel in a way that people understand, and that brings conviction and salvation through the work of the Holy Spirit. Then we have pastors and teachers, often these go together. The word pastor really means a shepherd. Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd and the believers his sheep. So the pastor is one who cares for the church like a shepherd by comforting, reproving and challenging them and giving them direction. The church also needs some to teach them the truths of Scripture and to help them in their understanding of the faith, and there are those who are gifted to do this.

These gifts have a purpose. Verse twelve says they are "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up..." What Paul means is that every believer should be ready for the work and witness that God has for him to do. It is for "works of service". This is the word used for those chosen to serve tables in Acts chapter six, but in that same chapter it is also used for those who ministered the word of God, they too were servants of the church. So this service includes helping in the practical things that need doing in the work of the local church as well as preaching, teaching and witnessing.

If you look in the first letter to the Corinthians chapter twelve and in the second list of gifts, starting at verse twenty-seven, you will find that helpers and administrators are included among the gifts. So you see it is a very wide term. Every believer has their own gift. Some have more

than one, but everyone has some area in which God wants them to serve. God has given all these individual gifts to help the church so that every believer may be fully fitted to fulfill his or her task.

Paul now moves on to a subject always dear to his heart and one to which he returns quite often in his letters. He believes that the church, and because the church is made up of individual believers, the believers as well, should grow up spiritually and move on to maturity. In his first letter to the Corinthians and chapter three he accuses the believers there of still being babes in Christ. They had not grown up, they were still ruled by their fleshly desires. This is his theme again here in Ephesians chapter four verses twelve to sixteen. Listen to how he goes on - these gifts are "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 ..."

I wonder if we can try and discover what Paul means by this mature and spiritual manhood. It seems that there are two ways in which this maturity shows itself. The first is shown in the words "until we reach maturity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God." Faith in and knowledge of the Son of God become one. We put our faith in Christ for pardon and peace with God. He answered and made his forgiveness and peace real in our hearts. What He promised came to pass. This gave us confidence to keep trusting Him and we experienced his answers to our prayers. This enabled us to trust Him to deliver us from our unbelief so that we are no longer blown about by doubts and fears but have confidence in the Lord - as the following verses indicate.

Then Paul speaks of "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." This surely fits in with "being filled with all the fullness of God" which came in Paul's prayer at the end of chapter three. It fits in too with another exhortation which we have not come to yet. It is in chapter five and verse eighteen and says, "Be filled with the Spirit". In all three cases Paul is urging these believers to be spiritual, not controlled by their old sinful nature, but living and walking under the control of the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to rule in them.

Now he tells them the results if they do grow up spiritually. First, they will be stable. They will not be blown about; they won't run after every new idea that is exciting and stirs their emotions; they will want to find out whether it is really the truth of God. Satan knows it will not be easy to make even very new Christians commit deliberate sin, but he knows, too, that they can be easily stumbled by something that appears exciting and new; so he brings along false teachers to lead them astray. We will not be easily deceived like that if we are mature in Christ, knowing Him and knowing his Word.

The other result is that they will learn to grow in love and likeness to the Lord Jesus. Paul illustrates this from the body. This is how one translation of this passage puts it: "Under Christ's control all the different parts of the body fit together, and the whole body is held together by every joint with which it is provided. So that when each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love." You see what he means: every part of the body works together, and while all the different parts work together properly, all goes well. But, when something goes wrong, the whole body suffers. So it is in the church when an individual believer's relationship with God or with his fellow Christians goes wrong, then the church begins to suffer and sometimes the work of the Lord is hindered. How necessary then, to keep a right relationship with God and our fellow believers.

So we have discovered that God has given to each believer, and to the church as a whole, gifts to enable us to carry out His work and to witness for Christ. We have seen that God's purpose for each believer is that we grow up in Christ to be mature in faith and able to stand firm against false teaching. And the power to do all this comes from the indwelling Holy Spirit. As we allow Him to rule and control us, we will grow in love for one another and for the Lord.

Ephesians

Chapters 4 and 5

10 – The Christian Life – It's Standard

In the previous two studies we have been seeing what Paul has to say about the church. Last time we were thinking how he urged them to be fully active according to the gifts they have. He also told them to be mature, grown up in spiritual matters, and not like children. He now gets down to the really practical matters of Christian living. In verses seventeen to twenty-four of chapter four he describes how unbelievers live in hardness of heart and are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God. They have lost all sensitivity and given themselves over to sensuality. Paul says that the believers did not come to know Christ that way. God has brought them into a different way of life altogether, and he urges them to see that they put off the old life completely and are clothed with the new. He says in verses twenty-three and twenty-four that they were taught that they were "to be made new in the attitude of their minds, and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." While living this new life they must keep fresh and real and be continually renewed in their thinking.

In the following verses Paul becomes really detailed. First, they must be utterly truthful. "Put off falsehood", he says. We believers belong to the same body, we are members of each other. It is unthinkable that we should try to deceive or not be honest and open with each other. Isn't it good to know that the people you are dealing with are honest and will not deceive you?

Then we are not to let bitterness enter into our anger. It is right sometimes to be angry when people do evil and cruel things, but don't let it dwell in your mind so that your anger turns to hatred. Paul says, "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry." Forget it before nightfall. Make sure you are reconciled before you go to bed! Bitterness and vengeance arise when anger stays in the heart. "Do not give the devil a foothold", it says in verse twenty-seven.

The next point seems rather hard to understand. It is not easy to imagine a genuine Christian actually stealing. But verse twenty-eight says, "He who has been stealing must steal no longer." We must remember, though, the kind of lives from which many of the Ephesian believers had been delivered. Stealing was a part of life whenever it could be done without being found out. Things are no different today when in many workplaces a worker helps himself to all sorts of things, counting it almost as his right. We can steal our employer's time by not being punctual or by taking extended lunch breaks, and so on. That is not the way for a Christian, says Paul. Do an honest day's work and take nothing that is not yours. He says we must work doing something useful with our own hands, so that we may have something to share with those in need.

Next, he turns to the way we talk and the things we say. Paul is very concerned about the believer's talk. He mentions it again in chapter five of Ephesians. Be careful how you speak. Verse twenty-nine says: "do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building up others ..." Nothing evil, nothing filthy, nothing that is not fitting should pass the lips of a Christian. Your speech should be helpful, useful and kind. Paul would say just the same to us. "Watch your lip", he would say.

Notice how, Paul, now and again turns away from the particular practical matters and makes brief remarks about the principle of Christian living, the basis of it all. Here he says, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." He is the one who bears witness that you are a child of God and cries "Abba - Father" within you. Do

nothing to grieve Him; you cannot do without Him. He will be quick to let you know when you begin to do or say things that are hurtful to Him. His voice will speak in your conscience and your peace will be disturbed.

Then Paul has something to say about our attitudes to each other, whether living, working, talking or relaxing together. First, there are the attitudes we are not to have. There is to be no bitterness or resentment, no unkind and hateful feelings towards each other. Together with these we are to get rid of all malicious feelings of anger and slander. This is how one version of the Bible has these words: "Get rid of all bitterness, passion and anger. No more shouting and insults; no more hateful feelings of any sort." Then Paul turns to the positive side - the kind of attitude they should have. They are to be kind and compassionate and they should forgive one another, just as freely and lovingly as God forgave through the Lord Jesus Christ. That is often a very costly way.

Now we come to chapter five and another of those sections about the basis of it all. Two points are mentioned. First, we are to be imitators of God. We are to seek to follow the example of what God is as He has shown it to us in Christ Himself. Also we are to walk in love - in our attitudes, actions and thoughts. And again notice it is "just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." What an example to follow! It is only possible as the Holy Spirit lives and works within us.

Next he turns, in verse three of chapter five, to another collection of sins that are still common in our day. He links together sexual impurity, covetousness or greediness, obscenity, foolish talk and course joking. He asserts quite strongly that no one guilty of immorality or greediness has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. He even says that covetous or greedy people are the same as those who worship idols. People like this worship the false gods of money and material things, rather than the Lord. Do not be deceived, Paul says, the wrath of God comes to people like this. He urges the Ephesian believers, and us, to avoid joining in with these things. He says in verse seven, "Therefore do not be partners with them." He reminds them that they used to be just the same. They were in darkness, but now they are in the light of the Lord. They are now in an altogether different realm and must live as God's holy people. It is walking in the light of the knowledge of Christ that produces the fruit of all goodness, righteousness and truth. They are to find out what pleases the Lord and do it.

In verses eight to sixteen Paul has something else to say. Not only are they to have nothing to do with the shameful acts of the people around them, they are to expose them and bring them into the light of God's holiness. As the light of Christ is brought to bear on the evil and sinfulness around, so the Holy Spirit will do his work of conviction, those who are dead in their sins will be awakened to their mortal danger. Paul quotes from what is probably part of an early hymn of the church to make his point: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine upon you." He concludes this section with these words:

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

This is a very practical passage. It is very searching, too. If you can, read it through again very carefully and let the Lord speak to you as you do. Can we say our lives are like this? If not, let us seek the Lord, confess our sin to Him, and ask Him to forgive and cleanse us, and by his Spirit in us help us to live holy lives to his glory.

Ephesians

Chapters 5 and 6

11 – Behaviour in the Church and in the Family

We are still thinking about this exciting letter to the Ephesians. Last time we saw how Paul was very practical and very searching in his dealings with the Ephesian Christians. He dealt in detail with the kind of character they should have and the kind of life they should live. He continues along this practical line but changes his approach a little. We start this time at chapter five and verse fifteen.

Paul begins by telling them to be careful how they walk. Our Christian walk is the way we live our lives. The times are evil, he says, and so we must make the most of all the time we have, finding out continually what the will of the Lord is for us. Then he warns them not to misuse strong drink. He says there is something far better. So we read in verse eighteen: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Holy Spirit." We could read this as "go on being filled with the Holy Spirit." While there must be a first time when we are filled with the Spirit, we must continually allow Him to control our lives. That is what it means to be filled - to be completely moved and controlled by God himself by his Spirit in us. If He is always in control, then our lives will be different and our relationships in church, family and business life will be pleasing to Him and on the right foundation.

He first speaks of the change in their own lives. Lives filled with the Spirit will be filled with praise. There is an old hymn that says, "In my heart there rings a melody, there rings a melody, with heavenly harmony." When we know the Lord's presence and the filling of his Spirit, there is a song in our hearts. This does not mean that we are always singing aloud, but praise is there. So Paul says the Ephesians are to speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. He says to them, "Sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord." Then he goes on to speak of thankfulness - in verse twenty. We cannot always thank God for everything, but we can have an attitude of thankfulness for all that God is and for all that He does for us. With the Holy Spirit in control we can have this attitude however difficult things are and however dark the clouds. How much better this is than a grumbling, complaining spirit that can find nothing to be thankful about. People like this are certainly not the kind that God is looking for in his church.

Now Paul turns to the matter of relationships and how being filled with the Spirit can keep these right. Notice how the idea of subjection comes all through the passage, beginning at verse twenty-one. But note, too, that he makes it clear at the start that it is not the subjection required by a tyrant or dictator. It is subjection to one another. This will mean in practice that we listen to each other's point of view and are not always stubbornly fighting for our own. We are willing to give way sometimes so that God's work may prosper. We work together and come to a decision, where one is necessary, after deep thought, thorough discussion and after listening carefully to each other.

This mutual submission is to be true even in the marriage relationship. There are many today who find the teaching in verses twenty-two to twenty-four difficult to accept. Here is what they say: "Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." This is the God-given order for Christian marriage. There has to be one to take the lead, but this is not to be in an unloving, overbearing manner. Husband and wife should listen to each other and submit their thoughts

together to the Lord in true humility to find his will. Note that Paul immediately goes on to say, "Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her ..." If husbands really have this sacrificial love for their wives, the wives will not have much difficulty in submitting to them and respecting them. He says in verses twenty-eight and twenty-nine that "husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. After all, no-one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church."

Paul is making it very clear in these verses that the marriage relationship is a very sacred one. It is to be a relationship of mutual love, care and respect. Marriage is true oneness between man and wife. This relationship can be kept right by always living together in the conscious presence of the Lord, by always being ready to say we are sorry when we have acted wrongly, and by always being willing to admit when we are wrong. Some find it very hard to say "I'm sorry" or "I was wrong", but this is one of the most important secrets of any good relationship.

Notice how Paul uses this marriage relationship to give some teaching of what Christ has done and wants to do for us. He says that Christ gave Himself up for the church not only to wash away the guilty past but to sanctify her. He wants to make her holy, without blemish and blameless. What wonderful love that was! As we have discovered more than once in these talks, Christ died not merely to pardon us, but to make us one with Himself. He wants us all for Himself and He wants us to be like Himself.

Paul now turns, at the beginning of Ephesians chapter six, to right relationships within the family. He urges children to obey their parents. Children are to love and respect their parents. This makes for warmth and care in the home. It is worth noting that Paul quotes one of the Ten Commandments as a basis for what he is saying. These commandments were important to him, they were his guidelines to show him how to live. But it is not good enough to talk only to the children. If the atmosphere of the home is to be kept right and love to be there, then the fathers have their part to play. They must not provoke or exasperate their children. It is easily done, isn't it? Being impatient and chastising unnecessarily. Asking them to do things that seem to them to be quite useless without explaining why they are necessary. So, in verse four Paul says, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." Fathers should also teach their children, in the most interesting way possible, all that is in the Bible and all that the Lord Jesus has done for them.

Paul deals next, in verses five to nine, with another important relationship, that between slaves and masters. Of course slavery was common in Paul's time and there were good and bad masters. What the Bible teaches in these verses is still appropriate to today when we think of the relationship between employees and employers; between workers and bosses. Paul has something to say to both. We need to apply what he says to our own circumstances. The Christian employee is to do the best work he can for his employer, and to do it as if he is working for the Lord Himself. What a difference it would make if we approached our work in this way. The Christian employer is to be caring, understanding, impartial and fair in his dealings with his workers. And Paul adds this warning: "Do not threaten them, since you know that He who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favouritism with Him."

So, we have discovered some very practical teaching in these verses from Ephesians chapters five and six. May we seek to apply these things to our own lives with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians

Chapter 6

12 – Our Enemy and Our Armour

We are nearing the end of our discovery of Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians and have arrived at verse ten of chapter six where he writes: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." Paul suddenly changes his approach in this final section of his letter. Until now he has been speaking about the walk of the Christian, but now he starts to speak about the Christian's warfare. I wonder why this sudden change? I think perhaps I know. He realises how real is our enemy and how fierce is the spiritual warfare we are engaged in. Life in every part is something of a conflict, but the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ has a very special battle to fight. Let us try to discover just what Paul means when he writes about this.

He writes first about our enemy. He says in verse twelve: "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 real enemies as believers are not just people and things in this world, but they are spiritual forces of evil that are opposed to us and to God. What does all this mean? The Bible describes the evil and sinful forces in this world and in the heavenly realms as personal in character. They are beings in rebellion against God and all that is good and holy. They are demons, described as the powers of darkness, and the spiritual forces of evil. Their leader is Satan and he is the one who rules them all.

In his first letter chapter five verse eight the apostle Peter describes Satan, or the devil, as "a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." He says that we need to be alert and on our guard against this fierce enemy. Paul is saying the same thing to the Ephesians in these verses. When we are opposed or persecuted as Christians it is not the people but the evil powers moving them that we are fighting against. Satan and his followers have to be reckoned with.

In his first letter to the Thessalonians chapter two, verse eighteen, Paul writes of Satan hindering him. Again, in the second letter to the Corinthians chapter eleven, verse fourteen, he speaks of Satan transforming himself to appear as an angel of light so as to deceive with his lies and falsehoods. So, you see, the devil was very real to Paul. He speaks right here in these verses of the devil's schemes, his cunning wiles and methods. So this is our enemy who will do his utmost to turn us away from living a holy life, and will try to hinder us in our service and witness for Christ. We must always remind ourselves, though, that this enemy was defeated at the cross of the Lord Jesus and his ultimate fate is sealed.

But though the enemy is real and the warfare is fierce, yet God has provided all the enabling power we need to win the battle. Paul commences this passage with the words, "Be strong in the Lord and his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." So the first step in this battle is to take for ourselves the strength that Christ provides for us. We are to be strong in the Lord and the power of his might, for we have no strength of our own sufficient to face the enemy. Paul has already shown in the previous chapters of this letter that if we are to live our lives in accordance with God's will then our relationship with Him must be right. It is the same here. If we are to appropriate the power available to us in Christ then we must be truly right with Him; there must be nothing between, no disobedience, no barrier. We must continually exercise true faith in Him for all we need in this spiritual warfare. When the tempter comes we submit first to God then we resist the devil, and the Scripture assures us that he will flee away. As we draw near to God in this way so He will

draw near to us. Read this in James chapter four verse seven. This is using the power of the Lord to overcome. More often than seems believable, people have died of starvation with no heat in their homes, when all the time they had money enough hoarded away which they have never used. Just as money is no help unless used, in the same way it is no use just believing with our minds that the Lord has power, unless we use our faith and take the power He has for us.

Then Paul says we have to put on the whole armour of God. What does all this mean? The armour mentioned is the usual armour of the soldier of the day. Paul uses it to illustrate the kind of protection the Christian needs in his spiritual warfare. In reality the armour is the experience of the Lord in our lives.

First, he speaks of the belt of truth. The belt of the Roman soldier held all the armour together and kept it in place. This left him free to use both arms in battle because he was not always needing to make sure that his armour was in place. Truth is like this. It means the truth about God as well as the truth God has declared. It means the truth about ourselves. Contrary to what many people think today, there is only one truth. There cannot be more than one truth, and that truth is revealed to us in God's Word, the Bible. Being certain concerning the truth and trusting in what God has said gives us confidence in the face of the enemy. The Christian soldier must also be truthful, honest with himself and others. This belt of truth will help to keep all the other pieces of the armour in place.

Then there is the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate covered the vital parts of the body, the heart and the lungs. The vital parts of our spiritual lives are our desires and emotions, and our wills. It is essential that these are always guarded. If the enemy attacks us in these areas and we are not protected then we will fall. Our emotions, desires and wills must always be subject to the rule of the Holy Spirit so that we live in a righteous way. But this also means that when the enemy accuses us we can counter him with the fact that we are forgiven through Christ's death and reconciled to God. It means much more, though. It means that the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Himself is imputed to us and God sees us as clean in Him. This protects the inner thoughts, will and the emotions of our hearts. As we keep right with the Lord and his love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, we are kept inwardly protected.

The next part of the armour is the shoes. One version of verse fifteen puts it like this: "put on the readiness to announce the good news of peace as shoes for your feet." Shoes in the Roman soldier's equipment enabled him to move quickly in the battle. He also had to march long distances and so they had to be durable. Christians are in a great spiritual warfare and have a great commission to preach the gospel of peace wherever and whenever we can. Notice that word "readiness." It means being prepared at all times to be faithful witnesses of our Lord Jesus. We carry the battle to the enemy as we proclaim the truth that through the death of Christ there is peace and forgiveness for sinners. We carry the battle to the enemy as we declare the resurrection of the Lord Jesus by which He has defeated for the believer the one who has the power of death - Satan.

The next words sound the note of victory! Verse sixteen: "In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." Flaming arrows were a common method of attack in early days. It was not very easy to defend yourself from them. This was one of the advantages of the huge Roman shield. It was big enough to cover the whole body and the arrows could not penetrate it.

This is a good description of the way the devil sometimes attacks believers. His attacks seem like fiery darts. They come against our minds with evil thoughts; against our desires through impure

urges; and they can come through tragic and hurtful events. But God has promised that the shield of faith shall protect us against them all. This shield is our sure trust in the power of the shed blood of the Saviour that cleanses us. It is the certainty that we are children of God by faith in Christ and nothing can alter that. In the King James Version of the Bible the phrase at the beginning of verse sixteen is "Above all take the shield of faith." The words "above all" show us that the shield can cover every situation, that it is for all circumstances, and that it is the most important part of the armour. How wonderful that all through life we can have this protection against all that our great enemy can do against us.

We have not finished with the armour yet. There are still two more pieces but we must leave those until next time. Make sure that you have the whole armour on and that you are strong in the Lord Jesus to fight the battle.

Ephesians

Chapter 6

13 – Completing the Armour

Over the past twelve studies we have discovered many practical and important truths as Paul has set them out for us. Last time we were thinking about the spiritual armour that we need to put on if we are to be strong and victorious for the Lord in our life and witness. We still have the final pieces of the armour to consider and you find these in Ephesians chapter six starting at verse seventeen.

The next part of the Christian's armour is called "the helmet of salvation." Salvation refers to our spiritual health and to our relationship to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is not something which only looks back. The salvation which is in Christ gives us forgiveness for the sins of the past and strength to conquer sin in the days to come. Our salvation in Christ is sure. When Satan comes to us with his accusations we can point to the cross and be certain that our sins have been forgiven, and remind him that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Salvation is called a helmet because when our relationship with God is right, it protects our thinking; it protects us from the suggestions of the evil one.

Then comes the "sword of the Spirit." This is explained as the Word of God - the Bible. Each of the other pieces of the Christian's spiritual armour is defensive, designed to protect. The sword of the Spirit is the only weapon of attack and it is essential to the Christian. In Matthew chapter four we have the account of Christ's temptation in the wilderness. Each time that Satan came with his temptations, Jesus answered the temptation with a quotation from the Scriptures. This is the way we can resist the attacks of our adversary. It is also the way to take the offensive in defeating his working in the lives of others.

It is the Word of God that is living and powerful and able to bring conviction of sin and defeat Satan. This is why we should read the Bible constantly and learn verses and passages that can be used as the opportunity comes. If we have hidden the word of God in our hearts we will be able to resist the devil and we will know what God's will is.

So we come to the end of Paul's inventory of the Christian's armour. But this is not all that he has to say because in the middle of it all he gives encouragement. He says in verse thirteen:

"Therefore put on the full armour 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."

If we wear the armour then in the day of testing and temptation we will be able to withstand the enemy. We will be able to stand against him or stand by attacking. Never turn back, never give in to Satan. This is where knowing and using the Word of God is so important. This, too, is where faith is important. We mentioned this when talking about the shield of faith in the last study. Our trust and confidence in the Lord must remain strong. We live by faith and fight the Lord's battle by faith.

Paul adds something else here, though. He says, "After you have done everything, to stand." There are times when it seems impossible to attack. It is then that we are to rest in the Lord, stand firm in Him and wait patiently in faith for Him to defeat the powers of darkness. He surely will.

Now Paul turns to the matter of prayer in verse eighteen. He does not include this in the armour as such but thinks of it as the life and vitality of every believer in his walk and warfare. He says: "Pray in the Spirit on all occasions", or "at all times." This does not mean that we are to be in attitude of prayer the whole time or always actually speaking words of prayer. This would be impossible. We have to live our lives and there are other things to be done. We can, though, be in the spirit of prayer the whole time. Remember that we can speak to God at any time and in any place and in any circumstance. The Holy Spirit himself is the one who inspires our praying and teaches us what to pray. We read about this in Romans chapter eight verses twenty-six and twenty-seven:

"... the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray, or how to pray, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."

So we are to live in the spirit of prayer, inspired by the Holy Spirit. We are to talk to God about everything in our lives and in our service for Him. Nothing is too small to bring to God in prayer. We are to especially pray for other believers and for those who are serving God in preaching the Gospel or in other ways. We are to pray, as Paul asked for himself, that they will be bold and have the strength to do all that God wants them to do. Even in prison Paul wanted to be a good ambassador for his Lord. May we, then, "Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." We must always be alert to the needs of others so that we can pray intelligently for them. How important prayer is.

Paul has now reached the end of this letter to the Ephesians. He wants to assure them that he is thinking of them, and he wants them to know how he is getting on. He knows they will be concerned about him, especially as he is in prison. He sends Tychicus to give them the news. He is beloved as a brother in the Lord, and he is faithful in his service for the Lord. Paul says in verse twenty-one: "He will tell you everything, so that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you." How thoughtful Paul is, whatever the circumstances he is in!

Now comes the closing benediction. He prays for them peace, that wholeness of inner being mentioned more than once in the letter. He asks that they may receive the gifts of love and faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Then the final word. It is a word of grace to believers, to those "who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love." That is a beautiful description of all true Christians. Peter says to his readers in his first letter, concerning the Lord Jesus, "Though you have not seen Him, you love him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy..."

So we come to the end of this journey of discovery through the letter to the Ephesians. A letter that is so full of spiritual riches, spiritual food and help for our Christian lives. Someone has described the letter as "the wealth, the walk and the warfare of the Christian." That just sums it up.

In the early part of the letter we had described to us all the riches and resources upon which we can draw, and all the power of the risen Lord which is at our disposal. Then we discovered what our walk with the Lord is to be like. We are to walk in love, to walk carefully and to walk worthy of the Lord. We are to walk in the reality of those who are filled with the Holy Spirit. Then, as we have just seen, we are in a spiritual battle, but we have all the armour of God available to us to enable us to overcome in our warfare against Satan and his forces.