

The Letter to the Ephesians

THE LETTER TO THE
EPHESIANS

**An Explanation of this Letter
Especially for You**

Rock Solid #5

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uitgeverij
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Foreword

Dear friend,

I'm glad I can offer you this volume of the 'Rock Solid series'. I wrote this book for you, as I did the other volumes. In the introduction of the other volumes I wrote that I thought of you as one who has

- either just got to know the Lord Jesus
- or already known Him longer

but in either case, someone who wants to become better acquainted with the Savior who died for you to give you life. I also assumed that you were not really active in reading the Bible, but that you wanted to start reading.

With this volume it is somewhat different. I do not mean your desire to know the Savior better because that remains the starting point for writing this book. What is different is that I assume that you have become a bit more familiar with that book and it is increasingly fascinating you. That indeed paves the way to understand better the book you hold in your hands.

Here are a few practical tips that might help you:

1. Provide yourself with a good translation of the Bible. Some good translations are the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), the *New King James Version* (NKJV), the *New Translation* by J.N. Darby (JND) and the *King James Version* (KJV), preferably with the New Scofield word updates. I will be using the NASB, with permission granted by The Lockman Foundation on February 10, 2016 when referencing and quoting Scripture unless I note otherwise.

2. I tried to write this book in a way that encourages you to use the Bible. At the beginning and end of each section, I have listed the Bible verses pertaining to that section. I encourage you to read those verses before and after reading the section. It would be a good idea to keep your Bible open to those verses so you can easily refer to them.
3. Self-discipline is very important. You have to be willing to discipline yourself to take time to understand the Bible better. I suggest that you read the Bible at a set time that's best for you.

To help you with this, I have divided this book into forty-one sections. I also noted with a 'V' which verse is explained.

In the previous parts of these volumes I explain on average six or seven verses. This volume is different. Some sections are about only one verse, several sections are about two to four verses. That has to do with the special subject of the letter. After reading and studying this letter you will agree with me.

You could read one section every day. If you read at a relaxed pace, you will need about twenty minutes for one section and the Bible verses. If you can be self-disciplined in this, then after three weeks, you will have gained a little more insight into an overwhelming letter of the Bible.

The whole Bible is a splendid book and it's my prayer that you'll get this impression in an increasing way.

I wish you God's blessing!

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Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen	-	Genesis
Exo	-	Exodus
Lev	-	Leviticus
Num	-	Numbers
Deu	-	Deuteronomy
Jos	-	Joshua
Jdg	-	Judges
Rth	-	Ruth
1Sam	-	First Samuel
2Sam	-	Second Samuel
1Kgs	-	First Kings
2Kgs	-	Second Kings
1Chr	-	First Chronicles
2Chr	-	Second Chronicles
Ezra	-	Ezra
Neh	-	Nehemiah
Est	-	Esther
Job	-	Job
Psa	-	Psalms
Pro	-	Proverbs
Ecc	-	Ecclesiastes
Song	-	Song of Songs
Isa	-	Isaiah
Jer	-	Jeremiah
Lam	-	Lamentations
Eze	-	Ezekiel
Dan	-	Daniel
Hos	-	Hosea
Joel	-	Joel
Amos	-	Amos
Oba	-	Obadiah
Jona	-	Jonah

Mic - Micah
Nah - Nahum
Hab - Habakkuk
Zep - Zephaniah
Hag - Haggai
Zec - Zechariah
Mal - Malachi

New Testament

Mt - Gospel of Matthew
Mk - Gospel of Mark
Lk - Gospel of Luke
Jn - Gospel of John
Acts - Acts of the Apostles
Rom - Letter to the Romans
1Cor - First Letter to the Corinthians
2Cor - Second Letter to the Corinthians
Gal - Letter to the Galatians
Eph - Letter to the Ephesians
Phil - Letter to the Philippians
Col - Letter to the Colossians
1Thes - First Letter to the Thessalonians
2Thes - Second Letter to the Thessalonians
1Tim - First Letter to Timothy
2Tim - Second Letter to Timothy
Tit - Letter to Titus
Phlm - Letter to Philemon
Heb - Letter to the Hebrews
Jam - Letter of James
1Pet - First Letter of Peter
2Pet - Second Letter of Peter
1Jn - First Letter of John
2Jn - Second Letter of John
3Jn - Third Letter of John
Jude - Letter of Jude
Rev - Revelation

Explanation of general format

PERSONAL PRONOUNS are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

BRACKETS [] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

SHARP BRACKETS <> are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

ALL CAPS in the New Testament are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

The Letter to the Ephesians

First carefully take in Ephesians 1:1-13; please read these verses thoughtfully.

Introduction

The letter to the believers in Ephesus is a special one. There is a huge difference between this letter and the previous one, the *letter to the Galatians*, really the difference between heaven and earth. In his *letter to the Galatians*, Paul had to point out to the Galatian believers in an almost cool and sober manner, their deviation from the truth of the gospel. Although, you can certainly read between the lines his great compassion and emotional involvement with them.

Considering what was at stake, Paul warned them how much they were risking to be robbed from every blessing and even fall from grace (*Gal 5:4*). By accepting the law again in their life, the believers in Galatia gave room again to the 'elemental things of the world' (*Gal 4:3,9b*).

How totally different is the content of the *letter to the Ephesians*. This letter shows you as a Christian:

- a. what your real blessings are,
- b. where to find them and
- c. where they come from.

By reading this letter you discover that the blessings of the Christian

- a. are spiritual,
- b. are found in heaven and
- c. originally come from the heart of God.

However, in this letter you will not only find the blessing for the *individual* Christian. All believers together are the church and also the church as a *whole* has received tremendous blessings. Paul also writes a lot about the height and the depth of these blessings in this letter. It is because of her connection with her glorified Head in heaven, Jesus Christ, that the church receives these blessings. In *Ephesians 3* the apostle calls this connection a “*mystery*”.

A comparison with the *letter to the Romans* clarifies still more what the issue is of this *letter to the Ephesians*. In the last mentioned letter, written around the year 62 when Paul was a prisoner in Rome, he writes about how he defines it in *Romans 16:25* “*the revelation of the mystery*”.

In the *letter to the Romans* Paul could not expand further on this, but he indeed wanted to mention that there was more than righteousness by faith, about which he wrote in detail to the Roman believers. That’s why he lightly touched on the mystery before he ended his letter to them. But in his *letter to the Ephesians* he writes in detail about the mystery.

To point at a subject briefly in one letter and circumstantiate it in another has to do with the special purpose each of these letters has. The *letter to the Romans* teaches us what God has done to meet us in our misery in which we were living due to sin and because of our sins. In that letter man in his need is centered. The *letter to the Ephesians* shows us the heart of God. In that letter God is centered with His plan and His desire to bless us without any motive that has to do with man or man in his need.

If you read and reread this letter you will be more and more impressed by the greatness of God’s heart. Nobody else than God alone could think of blessing sinners – who were spiritually dead, living at the same time rebellious against Him (*see Eph 2:1-2*) – with enormous riches, instead of devouring them by His righteousness and holiness. One of those riches is that we have put on the new man “*which according to God is created in true righteousness and holiness*” (*Eph 4:24* JND translation). That is totally different than being devoured by His righteousness and holiness!

The following example might be helpful to illustrate what this letter tells us about God. A rich man could do a favor to a poor street-boy if he paid the fine for the crime he has committed. That would be very kind of that man. Due to this kindness the boy also escapes the punishment for not paying the fine. The kindness of this man would go further if he would give this boy the opportunity to an education in order to liberate him from ignorance. If the man would also provide his livelihood the boy would no longer be poor. That all would be kindness in view of the misery the boy lived in.

But, if the man would adopt the boy as a son and therefore have him close to him and provide the boy with wealth and influence, it would have nothing to do at all with the misery the boy lived in. That would only show the nature and the mind of the rich man, and what he enjoys himself.

That is indeed how God is presented in the *letter to the Ephesians*. Everything in this letter comes from God, from His thoughts and counsels. What man needs or would like to have is entirely not the issue. There is one more picture that illustrates what the *letter to the Ephesians* teaches us. You can find this picture in the Old Testament, in the journey of Israel from Egypt through the desert to the promised land, Canaan. In the book of *Exodus* you see the 'picture' of what the *letter to the Romans* teaches us. In Egypt the people of God are in bondage and are being delivered from that after keeping the Passover. That deliverance you find back in the *letter to the Romans*. There a man is presented to us who is living in the bondage of sin and is being saved from that through the blood and the cross of Jesus Christ.

After the Passover the people depart from Egypt and arrive in the desert through the Red Sea. There the people get the tabernacle, wherein God lives amongst His people. They can also get sacrifice services by which they are able to approach God and remain connected to Him. This is being described in the book of *Leviticus*. After *Leviticus* comes *Numbers* where the journey through the desert is being described and the means God provides for that journey. The pictures of *Leviticus* you can find in the New Testa-

ment, in the teachings of the *letter to the Hebrews* and the pictures of *Numbers* you find back in the two *letters to the Corinthians*.

Before the people enter the promised land, they camped for a certain time in the plains of Moab. That is where Moses held his big speech. You find that in the book of *Deuteronomy*. In the first chapters of that book he gives a review, but after that he looks forward, to everything that was awaiting the people in the promised land. In the New Testament you then arrive at the *letter to the Philippians*. That letter is about the Christian who is still yet on earth, but his whole heart focused on heaven.

After the book of *Deuteronomy* comes the book of *Joshua*. The people have passed over the Jordan and entered Canaan. In the New Testament you find this in the *letter to the Ephesians*. Just like Israel had to take possession of the land that God gave, you are being taught through the *letter to the Ephesians* to take possession of what your spiritual property is in the heavenly places.

All the blessings that are presented in this letter have been given to you in Christ. However, only when you have taken them in possession by yourself spiritually, with your heart, will you be able to say that they have really become your spiritual property. We can only say that a truth has become our spiritual property when not only have we given that truth a place in our heart, but when we have worshipped God for that truth. That is just what God desires according to the truths in the letter you now have before you.

Now read Ephesians 1:1-13 again.

Reflection: Thank God for what you already understand of these verses.

Ephesians 1

Sender, Recipients, Blessing | *verses 1-2*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus and [who are] faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

V1. Just as in the four previous letters, Paul presents himself here as “an apostle”. And just as in the *second letter to the Corinthians* he adds “of Christ Jesus by the will of God”. In some of the letters he also mentions a co-sender. He doesn’t do that in this one. God had announced to Paul, and to him alone, the mystery of the unity between Christ and the church. Considering the purpose of this letter, it must be plain and clear from which position Paul is speaking. That’s why he presents himself as an apostle, which means ‘sent one’. It means that he comes on behalf of Somebody else, a Superior, and he comes with a message of that Superior.

He is an apostle of Christ Jesus, Who is his Sender. To practice his apostleship, his eyes are continuously focused on Jesus Christ. By Him, Who is the glorified Man in heaven, he is also called to be an apostle (*Acts 9:1-18*). The origin of his apostleship lies in “*the will of God*” and not in his own will or the will of whosoever. Any human appointment was excluded. God was going to use Paul as an apostle. And what God wants, will be done. The authorization of Paul as an apostle is, as it were, marked by the signatures of Christ Jesus and of God. What Paul writes is therefore clothed with the authority of two Divine Persons.

Just one more detail of the apostleship of Paul. There is a difference between his apostleship and that of the twelve. The distinction lies in both the calling and the practice. The twelve are called

by the Lord Jesus when He was on earth (*Lk 6:13*). Paul is called by the glorified Lord in heaven (*Acts 26:16-18*). To him the apostleship toward the Gentiles was committed and to the twelve the apostleship to the people of Israel (*Gal 2:8*). The calling of Paul by the glorified Lord in heaven also clarifies the nature of his service. That is aimed at telling the church what her connection is with Christ in heaven. As it has already been noticed, that is the issue of this letter.

After the sender, we read about the addressees. It is not just 'to the church in Ephesus'. There is a lot more. The believers there are addressed as "*saints*" and "*faithful*". This tells a lot about their life as believers and about the spiritual condition of the church in Ephesus. That spiritual condition is significant in regard to what Paul writes in this letter. Could Paul, if he had to address them as 'fleshly' (*see 1Cor 3:1*), have spoken to them about such elevated blessings? If he had written the profound truths to the Corinthians, which he writes to the Ephesians, then there could have been two possible responses:

- a. either they would simply not have understood what Paul was talking about and would have dismissed it as a speech of someone who hides his head in the clouds;
- b. or if they would have understood Paul intellectually, they would have surely become more proud. They already rejoiced in the many gifts they had received and these blessings came on top of that.

This makes clear that every church receives a letter which is related to the spiritual condition in which she is. That condition is determined by the behavior, attitude and mind of the individual members of the church. That's why this is also applicable to you and me as individual Christians. In order to fully enjoy the wonderful things Paul unfolds in this letter, you and I must be in a spiritual condition that justifies the qualification of 'saints' and 'faithful'.

In the situation of the Ephesians these marks give a striking reflection of the condition which is necessary, not only to receive

the message in this letter, but to understand it, to enjoy it and finally to praise God for it. The teaching in this letter will also shape further the practice of their faith life.

The qualification of “*saints*” indicates that the believers in Ephesus were set apart for God. Basically that counts for every child of God that he or she is sanctified, which means that he or she is set apart for God from the unbelieving world. For the Ephesians it was not only a position, but it was also obvious that in their daily life they were set apart for God. They did not join the world, but they were obviously distinct from them.

The qualification of “*faithful*” shows they were faithful to God and to the Lord Jesus. They did not deviate from the way God wanted them to go. The Greek word ‘faithful’ can also be translated as ‘believers’. The believers in Ephesus were faithful and that’s why Paul could write them this letter.

Also the addition “*in Christ Jesus*” is very significant. This indicates that their sanctified and faithful life is anchored in the position they had in Christ Jesus. It was not about them, but about Him. Many times the term “*in*” Him appears in the letter. In this chapter you find it eight times. It is well worth the effort to check it yourself.

The letter is written to the church “*at Ephesus*”. In *Acts 18-20* you can read a lot about this city. Paul proclaimed the gospel there. He stayed there for three years (*Acts 20:31*) and met with great resistance (*Acts 19*). When he departed from there he did not leave them to their fate. He gave them after-care through Timothy (*1Tim1:3*) and when Timothy could not stay longer there he sent Tychicus (*2Tim 4:12*).

He also experienced how at last the church in Ephesus deviated from the life that was in accordance with the special privileges she possessed. He personally felt the pain, because among those who were in Asia and who turned away from him, there were also believers from Ephesus that was in the province of Asia (*2Tim1:15*).

The last remark of the church of Ephesus we find in the letter of the apostle John in *Revelation 2:1-7*. What John writes there, shows how the corruption started, the corruption that through the ages would penetrate the Christian church, a penetration which almost is complete now. It connects to what Paul predicted and against which he warned the church in Ephesus in *Acts 20:29-30*.

V2. He must have kept that in mind when he wished the saints and faithful “*grace ... and peace*”. Not just grace and peace, but “*grace ... and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*”. In *Acts 20:32* he also had entrusted them to “*God and the word of His grace*”. He knew that when it comes to holding onto the wonderful blessings which are reflected in this letter, the future did not look good. But what an encouragement for you and for me, that grace will always be abundantly present.

When you live in an active connection with God as Father and with Jesus as Lord and Christ, you can be sure that you are surrounded by that grace. The result is that you will experience peace in your heart that will give you light in your darkest days. The letter begins and also ends with grace and peace (*Eph 6:23-24*). Isn't it beautiful to see that this letter is, as it were, stuck in between ‘grace and peace’?

Now read Ephesians 1:1-2 again.

Reflection: What do ‘grace’ and ‘peace’ mean to you?

Spiritual Blessing | *verse 3*

First carefully take in the Bible verse of this section; please read it thoughtfully

Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly [places] in Christ, ...

V3. This verse is the beginning of a long sentence that ends with *verse 14*. From *verse 3* there comes one continuous flood of blessings running over you. It is as if Paul only stops after *verse 14* to breathe. In this section you find the source, the center, the area, the nature, the origin and the purpose of all these blessings.

This section can be divided into three parts. Every part closes with a praise on God's glory (*verses 6,12,14*):

- *Verse 6* closes the part that tells about the will of God (*verses 3-6*);
- *Verse 12* closes the part in which the work of the Son is centered (*verses 7-12*);
- *Verse 14* finally closes the part that tells about the work of the Holy Spirit (*verses 13-14*).

You see that all three Persons of the Godhead are involved with the blessings of the Christian.

When after the introductory words (*verses 1-2*) Paul wants to write about the blessings of the Christian, first of all a praise to God arises in his heart. He is intensely impressed by all that he – and every Christian – has received from God. He praises and honors God for that. What a wonderful beginning! Through “blessed” he wants to express that there are only *good* things to say about God. To bless means ‘to speak well of’.

He calls God here “*the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*”. That means God is seen here as God and as Father. These are the two ways in which He is related to His Son. In these two ways He is

also related to the believer. He is also the God and Father of each of His children. The Son is “*our Lord Jesus Christ*”. Paul mentions Him with His full name.

- He is “*Lord*”, He has all authority.
- He is “*Jesus*”, that is the name He received when he was born (*Mt 1:21*) and which expresses His humiliation and lowliness.
- He is “*Christ*”, and that is ‘Anointed’. That name expresses that God will accomplish all His counsels in Him, where Christ Himself will have the central place.

Both names that are used for God show His relationship with the Lord Jesus. To the Lord Jesus as Man He is God. The Lord Jesus called Him on earth ‘My God’. To the Lord Jesus as the eternal Son He is Father. In *John 20:17* the Lord used both names and He brings the disciples in connection with Him when He says: “*I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.*” By using these names He points at the quintessence of the specific Christian blessings that result there from.

These names of God, related with His Son, are the basic principle of the letter we have before us. Our blessings are connected with these two names. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the absolute *source* of all our blessings.

The believers from the Old Testament were not familiar with this name of God. That is because at that time there was neither a risen and glorified Lord to Whom this letter is connected. The Lord, risen and glorified by God, is the center of this letter. And we have also become partakers through our connection both with God and the Lord Jesus Christ. We have become partakers not only because these blessings have been promised to us, but they are our property. It is not written that God *will* bless us with them, but that He *has* blessed us with them.

We now can take a look at the *nature* of those blessings. We read that it refers to “*spiritual blessing*”. The meaning of that becomes clear if we compare it with the blessings of Israel. If Israel was

obedient, it could have counted on the blessings that it could take from the land and from the ground. You can read that for example in *Deuteronomy 8:7-10*. Their blessings were promised on condition and they were material. You could grasp them with your hands.

The blessing of the Christian is spiritual. That blessing you cannot grasp with your hands, you can 'grasp' it only spiritually, namely with your heart (see *verses 17-18*). Also there are no conditions for receiving them. The 'spiritual blessing' is the unconditional portion of every Christian. (Just a reminder: The condition indeed is that they are only enjoyed by 'saints and faithful' (see *verse 1*.)

The comparison to Israel is also clarified when it refers to the area where you can find the blessing. The blessing of Israel was on the earth, where they stood with their feet (*Jos 1:3*). That of the Christian is "*in heavenly places*", with further specifics "*in Christ*". That addition is the essence of all blessings that are received. No blessing has been given to us apart from Christ.

For God and the Father everything is connected with Him, the Man of His pleasure Who has accomplished His whole will. All that an Almighty God could think of to reward the Lord Jesus for what He did, God has given to Him (*Mt 11:27; Jn 3:35; 13:3*). The great miracle of grace is that everyone who believes (see *verse 13*), shares in what He has received (*Jn 17:22,26*).

There is one more word I want to point to before we continue with the following verse and that is the word "*all*". From what we saw, we can conclude that God did not hold back any blessing, but 'all' emphasizes that. A fullness of blessing is the portion of everyone who is 'in Christ'. The word 'blessing', which is a singular form, indicates that it is about fullness.

The fullness of blessing we can also summarize as: eternal life. Everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus, has received eternal life (see *i.a. Jn 3:14-16*). In *1 John 5:20* we read of Him: "*This is the true God and eternal life.*" So everyone who has eternal life has the Son

as his life. The conclusion is that all who believe have a portion in all that the Son has.

If you take a look at how John approaches the blessing and how Paul does, you notice a difference. John talks about life, the Son, in us. Paul says that we are in the Son, in Christ, and in that position we have received our blessings. These different approaches do not contradict, but complement each other.

Regarding this matter, I finally want to point out that many Christians are not aware of the riches they have in Christ. We can compare these Christians with the old woman who received from her son who lived abroad, a check which she could cash for a remarkable amount of money. But she did not know what to do with it. To her it was just a piece of paper. Because it came from her son she treasured it. Giving it a nice place on the wall was the only thing she could do with it. But that was not the reason her son sent the check. He wanted her to cash it in order to live without worries.

This example might not be good enough, but it clarifies how many Christians look at blessings given by God. I sincerely hope that you are not like that, but that you will enjoy all that God has given to you in Christ. And what God has given, is abundantly present in this letter.

Now read Ephesians 1:3 again.

Reflection: What do you think when you ponder over the name 'God' and the name 'Father'?

Chosen | *verse 4*

First carefully take in the Bible verse of this section; please read it thoughtfully

... , just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love.

V4. After Paul has spoken in *verse 3* about the blessing in general phrasings, he starts in *verse 4* to unpack them. This verse begins with the eternity that lies behind us (“*before the foundation of the world*”) and ends with the eternity that lies before us, when we will be with God (“*before Him*”). But this verse applies also for the present. When it is said “*that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love*” it means that God already sees us like that. That is how He looks at us. That is how He wanted it, that is how His counsel is and how it happened.

But what is God’s motive to decide and act like that? He did not find that with us. *Chapter 2:1* says that we were dead in our transgressions and sins. And with somebody who is dead you cannot start anything. Indeed He did not find the motive in something of man, in you or in me, but in Himself and in His Son. God has namely chosen us “*in Him*”, that is Christ. Christ has in eternity always been the joy of God. Now it has pleased God to involve others in the perfect fellowship that has always been between Him and His Son.

His plan has always been that He would also enjoy others as He enjoys His Son. That could not be without the Son. That is the reason that it had to be *in* the Son. Just as every man is ‘in Adam’ to his nature – which means that we are inseparably connected with this first man – just in that way God has ordained that every believer is inseparably connected with His Son.

He ordained that in eternity, before the creation of heaven and earth. Then there was nothing else than the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and the perfect love among Them. The Lord Jesus refers to that and because of that He asks: “*Father, I desire*

that they also, whom You gave Me, may be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (Jn 17:24). Before the foundation of the world God chose people from the people that would be living on earth to have them with Him.

The reason for this action is His love for His Son. You could see that also at the beginning of this verse in the words 'in Him'. When you think about the election, many questions may arise. You could ask yourself: Why am I chosen while a lot of other people are not? Are all of the other ones chosen to be lost?

Some remarks can be of help. The first one is that nobody is being chosen to be lost. Every man is lost indeed and is under judgment because of his own sins: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). When God saves people from that judgment in spite of this general judgment, it is not unfair of God, but that is His sovereign compassion.

Secondly, you should look at Israel. That nation was chosen by God from all nations to be His people. He did that only because of His own love for them (*Deu 7:7-8*). Does this mean that He did not want to have anything to do with the other nations? No, His only purpose was that Israel would be a testimony to the other nations. Through this testimony they could come to the knowledge of the one true God. Just take a look at the book of *Jonah*.

Therefore election is something that is absolutely from God, regardless of any situation in which man can be. You should belong to God to understand this. That is the reason why this truth can only be understood by believers. It should be said to unbelievers that they must be converted, otherwise they will perish.

The following example illustrates this. There is a sign above a door that says that everyone is invited to come inside to receive a big present. Many pass this door. A few go inside. When one turns inside he sees a sign above the door that says: 'You are chosen.' This clarifies that the truth of the 'election' counts only for those who are 'inside'.

We return now to the expression 'before the foundation of the world'. The fact that nothing was seen from the creation then, was and is not a problem for God. He is above time. To Him it is always present time. He knows exactly what will happen the next hour or the next century. When he looks at the future, this future is today. That is simply one of His greatnesses by which He is God. Listen to what He says in *Isaiah*: "*Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; [I am] God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done*" (Isa 46:9-10). This is beyond your understanding and mine, but we can believe it and admire it.

It is already impressive to perceive the majesty of God. It becomes more impressive when you're going to see that God in His sovereignty has even thought of you and me individually to have us before Himself. This is something that cannot be explained. You can only bow your knees and worship Him for it. How could you ever explain to somebody that He has chosen you out of all the billions of people for such an exalted position: "*before Him*"? This perfectly clarifies that this blessing only has its origin in the heart of God Himself.

That the blessing of the election was ordained before the foundation of the world, means that sin that came into the world, cannot affect this. God is not surprised that the people who He had chosen would be sinners. This problem is not mentioned here. Actually, in *chapter 2* Paul will pay attention to this. Yet sin is certainly assumed here. We see that, when we realize that God wanted us "*holy and without blame*" before Him. He who comes into God's presence, must totally correspond to Whom He is in His holiness and that is without any blemish of sin.

That is why He has ordained that all whom He would give this place to should be "*holy and without blame*". 'Holy' means 'to be set apart to be before God'. 'Without blame' means that there is no blemish of sin, totally fit to be in God's presence, Who cannot see or tolerate sin. In this way the demand is fulfilled in regard to God's holiness and righteousness. How that happened we shall

see in *verse 7*. You could say that regarding this part of God's plan, "the message" is accomplished "*which we [the apostles] have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all*" (1Jn 1:5).

However, God cannot be satisfied by this alone. He doesn't only want us to be without blame, He also wants us to feel at home in His love. He has brought us into an atmosphere that breathes pure, genuine – that is – Divine love. The only way God can be satisfied, is when it is also clearly expressed that His plan totally corresponds with the nature of His love. He who is in God's presence, sees holiness and love wherever he looks.

Now read Ephesians 1:4 again.

Reflection: Just think about the reason why God has chosen you and thank Him because He did it.

Predestined | *verses 5-6*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Introduction. Verse 4 is about the position we now have before God. We can stand before God without hesitation, because He has made us fit for this position. He does not see any contradiction in us against His nature, that is light and love.

V5. Verse 5 goes a little further. This verse deals with how we relate to God. It is a relation of sonship. Also for this purpose God has “predestined” us, also from before the foundation of the world. You may speak of ‘predestination’.

While ‘pre’ looks back, “destined” makes us look forward. There we see the purpose of Gods plan: He wanted us as sons for Himself. The word “adoption” also appears in *Romans 8:15,23; 9:4* and *Galatians 4:5*; it means ‘to put as son’. God has put you as son before Him. In that relation you stand now before Him. Incredible but true!

God is surrounded by myriads of angels and they serve Him, but in them He can never find the joy He found and finds in the Son. That joy He only finds in the Son *and* in those who are connected with the Son and who stand in the same relationship to Him as *the* Son.

Take note that this time it is not written ‘in Jesus Christ’, but “through Jesus Christ”. When it comes to the relationship in which we stand as sons before God, we are not equal to the Son. There will always be a distinction between Him, Who was and is the eternal Son, and us who were made sons, because we were not. This distinction you also see in *John 20:17* where the Lord Jesus

says: “I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God” and not: ‘I am ascending to *our* Father and *our* God.’

By ‘adopting’ us as sons God does much more than saving us from the distress we lived in because of our sins. Regarding the latter, forgiveness would have been sufficient. But you know: here it is about the desire of God’s own heart and not about our distress. In order to fulfill that desire He ‘adopted’ sons. He accepted people into His family who were not entitled to anything, and made them sons before Him.

Apart from being son you are also a child of God. Childship and sonship are different indications which both suggest a specific relation to God. To be a ‘son’ you do not have to be mature; from your conversion you are a child as well as a son. To be a child of God indicates that you are born of God and have received His nature. In sonship we see the desire of God to have fellowship with His children. You can rejoice with your children, but with your son you also talk about certain matters. Sonship is about sharing the same interests. That is what God thought of when He adopted us as sons.

When He did that, He acted “*according to the kind intention [or: good pleasure, JND translation] of His will*”. This is another beautiful expression that indicates how God came to this action. If He did that just because He wanted that, it would only have emphasized His sovereignty, but then His inner motive would have remained hidden. That’s why “*the good pleasure*” is being connected to His will. It shows the joy with which God accomplished His will.

A wonderful example of this you can find in the Gospels. There you hear more than once: “*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased*” (Mt 3:17; 17:5). In this statement you hear how pleased the Father is about Him. The Father was pleased because the Lord Jesus, as the only Man on earth, perfectly did what He desired. Regarding this, the Lord Jesus said: “*My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.*” (Jn 4:34). So

the motive of the Father's action was the pleasure that He had in the Lord Jesus.

V6. His purpose was: "*The praise of the glory of His grace.*" Not just 'His grace', but "*the glory of His grace*". His grace would already have become visible by forgiving us our sins. We deserved judgment and hell. Now that He does not allow that to happen, but saves us from that, we should therefore praise and honor Him forever and ever. But as you have seen, He had a much higher plan with us. We can be with Him as sons. Therefore it is no longer only 'His grace', but "*the glory of His grace*".

As already said when we were at *verse 3*, herewith closes the first part of the *verses 1-14*. The part that now follows shows what God did to give us this wonderful position before Him and what the consequences of this position are for the future. This part ends with *verse 12*, again with "*the praise of His glory*".

Until now you have heard about the plan of God. In the part that follows Paul shows which steps God took, so to speak, to implement this plan. The first step is "*which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved*", which also can be translated with "*He made us accepted in the Beloved*". This is just another wonderful expression. To 'be accepted' means to 'be made pleasant'. It is about having favor in which we stand before God (*see Rom 5:1*).

You and I are not pleasant in ourselves. We have become pleasant because God looks at us in His Son, to Whom is being referred here by the significant word 'Beloved'. It is not said 'in Christ' or 'in Him' as in the previous verses. That would not be sufficient here. It is not about the *position* that the Lord Jesus has before God. No, it is about Who the Lord Jesus *Himself* is before God.

The word 'Beloved' shows how much the Lord Jesus is the precious object of God's affection and pleasure. All love from the Father is focused on His Son. That has always been the case in eternity. The pleasure the Lord Jesus has given to the Father during His life on earth was one more reason for the Father to love Him. You can read that in *John 10:17*: "*For this reason the Father loves Me,*

because I lay down My life so that I may take it again." By this the Lord Jesus was referring to the work that He would accomplish on the cross. There He would glorify the Father magnificently. That was another reason of the Father to love Him. And in this One, the Beloved by the Father, we are blessed.

Regarding this, we find a beautiful picture in the Old Testament. You can read about the burnt offering in *Leviticus 1*. That is a picture of the Lord Jesus in His full devotion to God. In *Leviticus 7:8* it is said: *"Also the priest who presents any man's burnt offering, that priest shall have for himself the skin of the burnt offering which he has presented."* Here you see in a picture about what we read in this letter. The priest receives the skin of the burnt offering with which he may clothe himself.

This is what happens with the believer. The priest is the picture of the believer who is telling God what the Lord Jesus has done for Him (that is how we define 'offerings' now). The believer who does this can be sure that he has been 'made accepted in the Beloved'. So when the Father sees us, He sees the Lord Jesus.

Now read Ephesians 1:5-6 again.

Reflection: Why did God want you as son?

The Mystery of God's Will | *verses 7-9*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight 9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ...

V7. In these verses we see the following steps that God made to realize His plan. We have already seen that God has 'made us accepted in the Beloved'. Now we are reading what more we have received in that Beloved. In Him we also have the "redemption" and "the forgiveness". You could say that these are the means by which the will of God could be accomplished, regarding us. Forgiveness as well as redemption have been accomplished through the work of Christ and were necessary because sin has come into the world.

'Redemption' was necessary because we were totally imprisoned by the power of sin. We could not liberate ourselves, but by the blood of Christ redemption has been achieved. This is illustrated beautifully in *Exodus 12*. The people of Israel are in bondage in Egypt and God is going to redeem them. The basis for this redemption is the blood of a lamb that had to be slaughtered. In *Exodus 12:2-13* you can read what the Israelite had to do with that blood and what that meant to God. On the ground of the blood the judgment passes from the Israelite and their redemption from the power of Egypt takes place.

It must be clear to you that the lamb in Egypt is a picture of the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus. What you have deserved He underwent in your place. In Him you are redeemed, you have received redemption.

Apart from redemption also 'forgiveness' of your transgressions was necessary. You were not only under the power of sin, you also

lived accordingly. Your deeds made that very clear. Whatever you were doing, it was in every way a transgression of what God had said. Transgressions always ask for punishment. But how amazing it is that God did not punish you for that, but punished His own Son in your stead. In Him you have received forgiveness.

Although redemption and forgiveness brought what was necessary for you, your need is not the main thing here. No, the Holy Spirit is emphasizing the redemption and the forgiveness “*the riches of His* (i.e. God’s) *grace*”. In this way *God’s* heart and mind are being exposed.

In this verse, where we are involved with our sins, ‘*the riches of His grace*’ is being exposed. In *verse 6*, where God is centered, it is ‘*the glory of His grace*’. The riches of His grace is in contrast with the penury of our sins in which we found ourselves. Actually, it is not only grace that provides in our needs. God doesn’t measure His grace to *our* needs, but to a lot more than that. He provides to *His* riches.

V8. Those riches are expressed in the *verses 8-9*. There you see a dead, impotent sinner (you!) being uplifted to such a great height that he (you!) obtains insight in the mysteries of God’s heart so that he (you!) can share them with Him. This is also about the eternal plans in God’s heart that are yet to be achieved.

So this is quite different to what you have seen until now, namely what God’s plan was for you and what He has also realized. You share in it: you are blessed with all spiritual blessings; you are elected; you are holy and without blame before God; He has adopted you as a son; you are made accepted in the Beloved; He has redeemed and forgiven you. That is all said in *verses 3-7*. All really and totally true.

But, as if there is no end, besides that He has still more blessings ready for you to which we will give attention now. Also in those blessings He wants you to partake so that you already now may enjoy what is to come. In order to enable you to share what is in His heart, He has provided you in the abundance of the riches

of His grace “*all wisdom and understanding*”. How would we be able to understand anything from God’s plans and deeds if He Himself doesn’t help and enable us to do that? Also here you find abundance: God doesn’t give a little bit of wisdom and understanding, but “*all*”.

He knows exactly what is necessary to lead us into the plans of His heart. That’s why He first made us sons. As you will remember, He did that in order to share His thoughts with us. As sons He has ‘uplifted’ us to a position where He can speak to us at His level. Besides He supplied us with ‘all wisdom and understanding’. You may want to proclaim something, but if your ‘target group’ doesn’t understand anything of what you are talking about, it’s no use. That is not what God did.

V9. He gave us wisdom and understanding, because “*He made known to us the mystery of His will*”. This is what God wanted to share with us. It is about things that He has never told anyone, not even anyone of His people in the Old Testament. What this mystery involves is dealt with in *verses 10-11*. It is about the reign of the Lord Jesus over all things.

Now you might say: ‘But that was no mystery actually; that was also known in the Old Testament.’ And you could for example refer to *Psalms 8*. That is true, but that is not the mystery that is the issue here. *This* mystery is about the reign of the Lord Jesus over all things *together with the church*. That has not been made known in the Old Testament. The apostle Paul is the one to whom this particular ministry was given to unfold this mystery. In *chapter 3* he will clarify this.

The mystery of the unity between the Lord Jesus and the church is still a mystery to the world. In *1 John 3:2* you read the same thought: “*Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.*” John means that the world doesn’t see a thing of the fact that we are children of God. The world will see that only when the Lord Jesus returns and we with Him (*Col 3:4; 2Thes 1:7-10*).

The mystery has been only made known to them who belong to the church. Unfortunately, even to many members of the church this unity is still a mystery. All who think that the church is a continuation of Israel, do not realize that the origin and the purpose of the church are in heaven. Because their focus is on the earth, these Christians ignore the 'pleasure' of God.

God finds His pleasure in these things in this time to share with all His own. Just take a look at *verse 6* again where you have read about the pleasure of God. There it is His joy to have sons before Him, even now already. Here it is His joy to make known to those sons what He will do with Christ and the church.

God was not obligated at all to share this secret "*which He purposed in Him*" (*verse 9*) with us, but He wanted that very much. Again the emphasis here is on the fact that all His plans find their origin in Him. He had no obligation to anyone whosoever to make them known. He could have kept them to Himself as well. Nevertheless He came out with His plans and made them known to a group of people selected by Himself. Isn't it a great miracle that you and I may belong to that group?

Now read Ephesians 1:7-9 again.

Reflection: Consider once again the steps God has taken to achieve His plans and thank Him for every step.

Summing Up of All Things In Christ | *verses 10-12*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

... 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, [that is,] the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, 12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.

V10. In the verses we have now before us Paul is telling what the mystery of the previous verse means. *Verse 10* clarifies that God will gather together in one all things in Christ, as the one Head. In *verse 11* we learn that we are destined to be heirs in Christ.

God will fulfill this plan in “*the dispensation of the fullness of the times*” (NKJV). The word ‘administration’ or ‘dispensation’ here means: the way God reigns and leads something in a particular period of time. You might have heard of the ‘doctrine of dispensation’. This is about the classification of the history of humanity in different ‘dispensations’ or periods.

So the first dispensation is ‘the dispensation of innocence’ in which the period of the creation till the fall of man in sin is designated. Then God ruled over the creation through Adam before the fall. A following dispensation is that without law. That is the period from Adam after the fall till Moses. Then the period of the law follows, that is from Moses to Christ (*Rom 5:13-14*).

Every dispensation has its own characteristics. They all lasted a certain time. During that time God ruled over man and creation in a way that was adjusted to that time. In all dispensations man had become disobedient to God over and over again. In this way man also lost again and again the blessings that God promised if they would be obedient.

But here God is proposing a dispensation which is mentioned as 'the fullness of the times'. That is the period in which all previous dispensations will find their fullness and fulfillment. By the way, this is not the same as what is mentioned in *Galatians 4:4* "*the fullness of the time*". There 'fullness' means the passing (become full; ripen) of a particular time after which the big event, the birth of the Lord Jesus, happens. There it is just about the length or the duration of time.

Here in *Ephesians 1:10* it is not about the duration of the time, but about the characteristics, the content of this dispensation that will dawn. It is about what is characterizing the coming period. In the previous dispensations man has spoiled everything again and again. That will not happen in the coming dispensation. This assurance lies in Him to Whom God has entrusted the government in that dispensation: Christ.

As said, the government of Christ was of itself not a mystery. But the mystery that will be revealed will show that the government is in the hands of Christ *and* the church. Then Christ and the church will rule over "*all things ... things in the heavens and things on the earth*". This will be seen in the Millennium; then Christ will be the Head.

In *Genesis 1* and *2* you can already see in a description that it was God's plan. There we see how God in the beginning entrusted Adam, as the head of creation, to reign and rule over creation. After that He gave Eve as his wife to support him. Together they form *the man* (*Gen 1:27*). Adam became unfaithful, but Christ will remain faithful. He will reign in a way that will be fully to the glory and pleasure of God and a blessing to the creation.

The government of Christ will therefore embrace more than that of Adam. Adam ruled over the earth; Christ will rule over the heaven *and* the earth. In *Hebrews 1:2* you read that God "*appointed*" the Lord Jesus as "*heir of all things*". He has received the right for the inheritance through His work on the cross at Calvary. In *Revelation 5*, where you see Him as the Lamb standing as slain,

the time has come that He will indeed demand the right to the inheritance. He is worthy!

V11. But what do we see here to our surprise in *Ephesians 1*? That “*in Him we also have obtained an inheritance*”! That exceeds our highest expectations! How amazing! We have not ‘become an inheritance’. That would mean that we are a part of the inheritance, but that doesn’t meet with God’s plan. What we have received is much more wonderful. We will not be objects of blessing, but givers of blessing, together with the Lord Jesus.

We have not *become* an inheritance; we have *received* an inheritance together with the Lord Jesus. We are “*heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*” (*Rom 8:17*). We even read of “*having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will*”.

We have already come across the expression ‘being predestined’ in *verse 5*. There it was about the adoption as sons. I think that this shows how much in God’s plan ‘heirs’ and ‘sonship’ belong together. This relation you also find in *Hebrews 1:2* where it is about the Son, and in *Galatians 4:7*, where it is about us. You can also read that in *Luke 15:11-12*.

In the ‘adoption as sons’ here you especially see the relation to God, just name it the private side. After all it was for Himself. In ‘heirs’ you especially see the relation to the inheritance, just name it the public side. After all, soon the world will be publicly ruled by the Lord Jesus, together with us. Then He will be come to be “*glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believed*” (*2Thes 1:10*).

This is included in “*the counsel of His will*”. In *verse 5* Paul writes about ‘*the pleasure of His will*’ in relation to the ‘adoption as sons’, and in *verse 9* about ‘*the mystery of His will*’ in relation to the government of Christ and the church. Now you see that there is also ‘*the counsel of His will*’. These three expressions show together that God in His pleasure (*verse 5*) works out the mystery (*verse 9*) according to His counsel (*verse 11*).

His counsel is determined; nothing or nobody can stop Him to do that. You can firmly count on it that it will happen just as He wants it. We need to have this assurance because it is about something that is yet to come. You already share the adoption as son and the mystery has already been revealed to you, but the inheritance still has to come.

V12. And if we have taken possession of the inheritance, together with Christ, we will be *“to the praise of His glory”*. In that time we will be one great song of praise on His glory. We will reflect God’s glory. God’s glory indicates all His excellent features. They will be exposed in us, in all that are sons and heirs. In every person from that countless group something will be visible of God’s glory and His superiorities. How great He must be to have such a glory! How great must be the praise to be given to Him.

Now there is yet the question who are being meant by *“we who were the first to hope in Christ”*. I think that Paul here means the Jews who believe in Christ and who trust in Him before He will appear publicly. In this ‘we’ Paul includes himself, because he was also a Jew from his birth. In the following part I will give more attention to this.

Now read Ephesians 1:10-12 again.

Reflection: So the mystery is made known. Put in your own words what this mystery means.

Sealed With the Holy Spirit | *verses 13-14*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of [God's own] possession, to the praise of His glory.

V13. As I said at the end of the last chapter, I will clarify the change from “we” in *verse 12* to “you” in *verse 13*. I have already said that in *verse 12* Paul speaks especially about the Jews who are now already related to the Lord Jesus by faith. They have already received what is meant for the people of Israel in the future. The people of Israel still have to repent and be converted. That will happen when the Lord Jesus returns to reign on earth. Then they shall look upon Him Whom they have pierced and they shall acknowledge their Christ under the confession of their sins (*see Zec 12: 10-13*). Therefore the word “first” in *verse 12* means the present time: the time before the period that Christ will live perceptibly on earth. In the present time He is only seen by faith.

In *verse 13* the Gentiles are indicated with ‘you’. They are also in Christ, but the difference is that you cannot say of them that they have ‘first’ trusted in Christ. Just read that in *chapter 2:12*. There you read that before their conversion they were outsiders in every way. Only after their conversion they have become partakers of the inheritance of Christ, together with the Jewish believers: together they have become heirs in Him (*verse 11*).

So it is not true that the Gentile who has been converted is a partaker in the blessings that are promised to Israel. He is partaker, together with the Jewish believer, to much higher spiritual blessings that have to do with adoption as sons and being heirs. We have seen this before. In *verse 13* the sealing with the Holy Spirit is an additional blessing, with Whom the Jewish believer as well as the Gentile believer is sealed.

Before Paul speaks about this issue, he first clarifies in a very striking way how the Gentile has become partaker of the Holy Spirit. The sequence is very remarkable: first hear, then believe and finally the sealing with the Holy Spirit. First hear and then believe is in accordance with *Romans 10:14*: “*How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?*” And *verse 17 of Romans 10* says: “*So faith [comes] by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*” That what is named “*the word of Christ*” in the letter to the *Romans*, here it is called “*the message of truth*”, with the addition “*the gospel of your salvation*”. The Bible is ‘the Word of truth’ in which God has revealed His truth, *the truth* about all things.

This Word of truth means ‘the gospel of your salvation’ to everyone who accepts this Word. Gospel means ‘good news’ and it surely is to a person who realizes that God should judge him as a sinner. The gospel offers him salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus. The content of the gospel is written in *1Corinthians 15:1-4*: “*Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, ... For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.*” So the gospel is about the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

In *Romans 4:24-25* is added “*those who believe in Him [i.e. God] who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, [He] who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification*”. So a man is saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Who was delivered up in death by God and has also been raised from the death.

God puts His seal on every man who believes that, as a proof that such a person is His property. This seal is the Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in that person. The Lord Jesus says in *John 14:16* of the Holy Spirit: “*That He may abide with you forever.*” This makes clear that the seal of God’s ownership is inviolable.

God’s Spirit is called here “*the Holy Spirit of promise*”. This is not so much about the fact that the Holy Spirit is promised, but it is

more about what is related to the sealing with the Holy Spirit. To be sealed with Him includes a promise.

V14. That promise is being expressed in what follows. The Holy Spirit is namely the "*pledge of our inheritance*". The fact that He is the pledge or means that we do not own the inheritance yet. A pledge is a sort of assurance that you will receive something in the future that you do not have yet. In everyday language the pledge is always less than the issue. That is not the case here of course. That the Holy Spirit is called 'pledge' here has to do with the *assurance* that the rest is yet to come.

Because He has been given to us, we can already enjoy the inheritance now, although we cannot practically take possession of it yet. The inheritance lies in the future. Also the Lord Jesus Himself has not yet received the inheritance. You read in *Hebrews 2:5-8* that the *world to come* will be subjected to Him. Only then He shall reign and we with Him.

Before that will happen, something else must happen first with that inheritance. We read namely about "*the redemption of [God's own] possession*". You understand that by "*possession*" is meant the inheritance. This inheritance is already our possession now, but it still lies under the curse of sin. That curse must first be taken away. The Lord Jesus has achieved on the cross what was necessary for that. There He became 'a curse' and paid the price so He could take away the curse of the creation. Through the sin of the first man, Adam, a curse came upon the creation. Through the obedience of the second man, Christ, this curse will be taken away.

The purchased inheritance will be redeemed by Him Who has every right to that inheritance. Also *Revelation 5* makes clear Who has the right to that inheritance (that right is described in the scroll): the Lord Jesus. He is at the same time the Lion from the tribe of Judah (*Rev 5:5*) and the Lamb standing, as if slain (*Rev 5:6*). The Lion has triumphed by giving Himself to be slaughtered as Lamb.

He will take possession of the inheritance when ‘the dispensation of the fullness of the times’ has dawned (*verse 10*). That will happen in a way at the beginning of the millennial kingdom of peace. Then satan will be bound and sin restrained. But in the millennium there will still be sin and that’s why a perfect situation is not the case yet. However, at the end of the millennium, sin will be completely banned out of the creation. Then the word of John will entirely be fulfilled: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (*Jn 1:29*).

When the purchased inheritance has been redeemed and when the church together with Christ has received the rule over it, then the counsel of God has been completed. Then God’s glory will glimmer with a radiance that will never fade. He then shall receive all praise of everything there is. The new creation will reflect His glory: all will breathe His praise. All people, in heaven as well as on earth, will reflect His glory and all will praise Him. To Him be all glory forever and ever!

Now read Ephesians 1:13-14 again.

Reflection: Thank God in your own words for what you have learnt in these verses about His plans with and for you.

Faith and Love, Wisdom and Revelation | verses 15-17

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which [exists] among you and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention [of you] in my prayers; 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.

V15. With this verse the final part of *chapter 1* starts. That part is a prayer. The apostle Paul prays here for the believers in Ephesus. The content of his prayer is very rich, very instructive and also very necessary. Because to know God's counsels is one thing – Paul explained that in *verses 3-14*; but it is something else to honor and cherish that in your life. And for that Paul is going to pray.

He doesn't ask God to give the believers something, but he asks if He would give them more insight into all that they already possess. The purpose of his prayer is to focus the hearts ("*the eyes of your heart*", *verse 18*) of the believers on the Source of the counsels. He wants us to look, beyond all the wonderful gifts, at the glory and riches of the Giver. The believer who lives in a conscious relationship with Him, will understand more and more of God's ("*His*") calling (*verse 18*), God's ("*His*") inheritance (*verse 18*) and God's ("*His*") power (*verse 19*).

The apostle could pray this prayer for the Ephesians, because they had the right mind. He had heard about their faith in the Lord Jesus and that they loved all the saints. You might think: 'What's so special about their faith in the Lord Jesus? Isn't that normal that believers do that?' You are right, but it is important to notice that "*faith in the Lord Jesus*" characterized their whole attitude.

For them faith was not only a matter of being saved from hell. Recently somebody said to me: 'Of course I believe, for who would choose to go to hell?' That was somebody who was seriously de-

viated from the Lord and in whose daily life there was no contact anymore with the Lord. That was not the case with the Ephesians. Faith meant to them: confidently living from faith and putting it into effect in all aspects of their life. In our days 'faith' is too much secondary. It is treated as certainly important, but not the main thing and not all pervasive.

If, in your case, the Lord Jesus is the all determining Object of your faith, then you will also love your fellow believers. The one results from the other. There is no better proof of a vital faith in the Lord Jesus than love in actual practice given to the saints.

V16. From the moment Paul heard that from the Ephesians, he started to thank God for them. Is that also familiar to you? To thank God for the believers in whom you see that the Lord Jesus means everything to them and that they also commit themselves for their fellow believers? Paul doesn't stop at thanksgiving, he adds intercession.

V17. The apostle's address is to "*the God of our Lord Jesus Christ*". In *chapter 3* his second prayer is written. There his address is to "*the Father*" of our Lord Jesus Christ (*Eph 3:14*). There it is about the Lord Jesus as the Son of the Father, about the love of the Lord Jesus and about the fact that He dwells in our hearts. Here it is about the counsels of God and how we received a place in these counsels.

In the explanation of *verse 3*, where both names 'God' and 'Father' are being mentioned, I already pointed to the difference between them. When God is called 'the God of the Lord Jesus' we see the Lord Jesus as Man. Because He Himself is Man, the Lord Jesus can share the blessings that He has received from God, with man. You and I could only be related to Him if He became Man. In this prayer, the issue is about the Lord Jesus as Man, and you can also derive from this, the fact that we read about His resurrection from the dead (*verse 20*). As Man He could die, but not as God the Son.

So Paul is praying to the God of the Lord Jesus, of the Man Jesus Christ Who is the center of all the counsels of God. God has never

made any decision towards any man or any case, in heaven or on earth without the Lord Jesus being the center. We shall see that very clearly in the following verses.

If we want to understand how God has made us partakers of His calling and of His inheritance, we should especially look at His power as it has become visible in raising the Lord Jesus. It is namely that power that was put into effect in us. What God did to the Lord Jesus, He also did to us.

Paul also calls that God "*the Father of glory*". That means that He is the source of glory and that it came from Him, He is the Distributer of it. To get a good perception of the glory of God's counsels, Paul asks the Father of glory to "*give the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him*".

Imagine: God has unfolded the most profound thoughts in His Word. We could, for instance, learn them by heart. But what would be the use of it if He wouldn't give us the ability, the capacity to understand those things? We then would not even be able to ever thank and glorify Him for that. And that is what God designed us for: the praise of His glory.

That purpose will not be achieved by giving us an intellect to get to know God intellectually. To know and understand Him is only possible through "*the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him*". In general terms you may say that God has provided every believer with all wisdom and understanding (*see verse 8*). Yet, learning to know and enjoy God's counsels consciously is quite different. To do that you not only need to possess wisdom, but you also need the 'spirit of wisdom'; that makes you desire to spiritually intrude in getting to know Who God is. True wisdom is learning to know God in order to let this knowledge penetrate your whole life. He, who knows Him, also knows His plans.

Yet that is certainly not everything. We also shall have to be aware that to know God not only depends on our own efforts, but that it also depends on the revelation He gives of Himself. Here the desire of the believer and the work of God go hand in hand. If we

desire to know much of God, it will not come naturally. And if we may know much of God, we can never boast on our own efforts.

When we get to learn to know more about the truth of God, there is a great risk that we forget that to understand that spiritually, we have to be and remain dependent on Him. The risk gets greater the more we have good intelligence and good memorizing skills. It is important to know: what we know, we know because He has revealed it to us.

Furthermore it is not insignificant to understand that Paul does not pray for the knowledge of truths or dogmas. It is not about getting to know the truths, doctrines and teachings, but about the 'full knowledge' (as it is written literally) of *God*. If we may get to know the hope, the riches and the power of what has been given to us, then we should always relate that to Him Who is the origin of it.

You may read this explanation and receive a good overview of what God shows us of His counsels, but it doesn't make you to know God as He wants to be known. I would love to join Paul and pray that God will give you and me "*the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him*".

Now read Ephesians 1:15-17 again.

Reflection: Thank and pray for yourself and for the believers you know after the example of Paul here.

God's Calling, Inheritance and Power | *verses 18-20*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

18 [I pray that] the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. [These are] in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly [places], ...

V18. Paul also asks God to give the Ephesians “*eyes of their understanding being enlightened*”. So he doesn’t pray for ‘enlightened eyes of their intellect’. As remarked already, knowing the things of God and to bring them into practice is not merely about our intelligence, but about our mind, our desires.

The word ‘understanding’, or better ‘heart’, here means the inner man, the place where all the considerations take place. The ‘heart’ is about the emotions and desires: the motives that lead someone in his speaking and acting. As the heart is physically the center of a body, is how Paul is using the word ‘heart’ here as the center of the spiritual existence. He is now asking God to supply this center with ‘enlightened eyes’. Only then can you look further to what follows and also understand it.

If you *desire* to know what your blessings are, you will also receive spiritual insight for that. The Holy Spirit will meet your desire by instructing you in the things of God and present them in an understandable way for you. You will get to know, sense with your heart, and also enjoy what is meant by God’s calling, God’s inheritance and God’s power. Because that is finally the purpose of his prayer: “*That you will know.*”

Next he doesn’t ask that the believers would know which wonderful blessings *they* have received. Then it would be written ‘*our*

calling' and 'our inheritance'. If we think of our blessings, we often only think of the great privileges that *we* have received by them and the great joy *we* experience with them. Of course that was also why God gave them to us, but this is not what is being presented to us in these verses. Here the issue is that we rise above all the benefits and joys that these blessings bring *us*.

Paul prays that the Ephesians (and we also) get around to it that it all came from *God* and that it is His purpose that *He* is being glorified thereby. If you think of it this way, you can better sense how necessary the prayer of Paul is. To look at our blessings in this way, so in relation to the Source, the Father of glory, demands from us that we forget about ourselves. That is quite difficult, but if Paul's prayer has effect, that will be an enrichment of our spiritual life.

And now the essence of Paul's prayer: he prays that they would know three things. First, "*the hope of His calling*", that is actually the calling of God. *God* has called us. What for? What we have read about in the *verses 3-6* of this chapter. There it is written that God has chosen us that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love; He has predestined us to adoption as sons to Himself. Because He has called us now, our election and destination have become a reality. Do you see how wonderful, how great, how overwhelming that calling of His is? From eternity it has been in God's heart to give this to us, you and me. And when it was His time He called us and made us partakers of it.

We shall only know and enjoy the full result of His calling when we are with Him in His glory, in the Father's house. That's why it is named "*the hope of His calling*". Don't you also think that the only right response that we can have is to adore Him for that?

The second thing for them to know is "*what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints*". Paul wrote about that inheritance in the *verses 10-14* of this chapter. There you see that we, as heirs, together with Christ would take possession of this inheritance. But the issue here is to see that it is *God's* inheritance. That

means that *God* will own everything. *He* will be praised by the whole creation and every knee shall bow before *Him*.

God will take His inheritance through us, His saints, the believers of the church. You can compare it with how God took possession of Canaan, which He mentions as *His* land (*Lev 25:23*). He used His people Israel for this. They took possession of it by expelling all enemies from there so His people could dwell there and He could dwell in their midst.

This is what will happen with the creation. Christ shall rule over it, together with the church. When the 'saints' are ruling, God has taken possession of the inheritance. And the saints will reign to all eternity (*Rev 22:5*). Then the time will have come that God will be all in all (*1Cor 15:28*).

In the whole creation that will then be, there will be no more dissonance heard. There will be nothing that is in contradiction with God's holy and righteous Being. God will fulfill everything with His glory. How great must be its riches, that wherever we look, we only see the glory of God. Don't you desire to know more of that now already?

V19. The third thing Paul is praying for is that we shall know is "*what is the surpassing greatness is of His power toward us who believe*". Here a new section starts that continues till *chapter 2:10*. In this section we are told how God could and will give us the blessings in the *verses 3-14*.

How could God give us, who were dead in our transgressions and sins (*Eph 2:1*), such wonderful blessings? He could do that only because of the exceeding greatness of His power. And to know how great the power is "*toward us who believe*", we should pay attention to what He did to Christ: "*He raised Him from the dead*" and then He gave Him a place above every imaginable power. There we may see what God did to us 'who believe'.

The first thing we read in this letter about Christ, regarding His life on earth, is that He was dead. About His perfect life on earth

we read nothing here. The reason He is presented in this way here, is because He took our place by doing so. Before God could give us His blessings, it was necessary that Christ would seek us and identify Himself with us in the situation we were living in. We were dead because of our transgressions and sins. But He voluntarily went into death and all that God then did to Christ, He also did to us. That is what *chapter 2:1-10* shows us. God could do that because this Man glorified Him perfectly in everything on earth.

V20. 'The surpassing greatness of His power' that God showed toward us, He first showed Christ "*when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly [places]*". Here we see God's power in action with a power that is also active in us. But first Christ is being presented. That is to make clear to us that we will never comprehend anything of our blessings if we do not learn to look upon the Lord and the place He now has as *Man*, the place at God's right hand in the heavenly places.

Now read Ephesians 1:18-20 again.

Reflection: For which things is Paul praying that we should know them?

The Church, Christ's Body | verses 21-23

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

... **21** far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. **22** And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, **23** which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

V21. God gave the Lord Jesus a place that exceeds everything. He received that place as *Man*. He had always been above everything as Creator. But now as *Man* He is exalted above every imaginable power: in the human world as well as in the world of angels and demons – not only now, but also in the future.

In the future, powers will be revealed that will overshadow every former power. You find them amongst others in the book of *Revelation*, chapter 13: 'the beast out of the sea' and 'the beast out of the earth'. They will, with an almost unlimited power, rule through a reign of terror during a period the Lord Jesus calls "a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will". But the Lord Jesus will see to it that the days of their reign of terror will be shortened (*Mt 24:21-22*). The power of our Savior is that great.

But not only *then* will He show a power that exceeds every comparison. We know that already now "all authority ... in heaven and on earth" has been given to Him (*Mt 28:18*), although that power is not publicly visible yet. It seems like all decisions, for what concerns life in this world, are being taken in Washington, Brussels or Moscow. But faith looks up, far beyond the most powerful people on earth and sees the Lord Jesus at the right hand of God.

And not to mention the deceiving demons, full of uncleanness, that are poisoning the minds of billions of people through television, internet and spiritual centers. But faith looks up, beyond the meanest and most influential satanic powers and sees the Lord

Jesus at the right hand of God. In *Hebrews 2:8b-9* it is written this way: “*But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. But we see Him, who was made for a little while lower than the angels, [namely,] Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor*”. Then all human and satanic power will be as nothing!

The distinction between the different names of the powers above which the Lord Jesus is exalted, is not easy to indicate. I looked them up in a dictionary where words of the New Testament are explained. On this basis, I will try.

- “*Rule*” refers to a position above and over others.
- “*Authority*” is the freedom and the right to exercise power.
- “*Power*” is the ability and the possibility that a person owns to achieve something.
- “*Dominion*” also refers to a place above others, but therein others are subject, while in ‘*rule*’ it is more about the position itself.

Above all these forms of power the Lord Jesus is exalted.

V22. Apart from that He is exalted above everything; also all things are subjected under His feet. Although all unbelievers and all demons have not subjected themselves yet, God has established that in His counsel. And that will certainly happen, because God wants it that way. The Lord Jesus is now already exalted above all things and soon all things will be *visibly* subjected to Him too, because He has humiliated Himself on the cross to death: “*For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (*Phil 2:9-11*). So everything will be subjected to Him.

But there are exceptions. The first one we find in *1 Corinthians 15:27*. There we read that God, Who has subjected everything under the feet of the Lord Jesus, is being excluded. That makes perfect sense. But now comes the incredible, what no man could

have ever thought: the second exception is the church. How could God do this? He could do this by uniting the Lord Jesus and the church. God gave the Lord Jesus “*as head over all things to the church, which is His body*”. It is obvious that a body and a head form an indivisible unity. Here we find the revelation of the great mystery that is already highlighted in *verse 10*. How could the church be able to reign together with Christ? It is by becoming one with Him.

And look at how God did that: He doesn't give the church to Christ, but He gives Christ as a gift to the church. That is what is written here. When we give somebody a gift, then the person is always more valuable than the gift. That cannot be the thought here of course, but it rather indicates *how* God appreciates the church.

He appreciates the church that much that He had not only known her from all eternity in His counsel, but that He also gave her what was most precious of what He had, His own Son. God gave the Lord Jesus to the church, while He is “*head over all things*”. Due to that the church is also raised to that position. It is just like with Adam and Eve. When Adam was put as head of the creation in Eden, he received Eve in that position. She is allowed together with Adam to rule over creation.

V23. And yet, not all is said about all glory, wherein the church partakes due to her unity with the Lord Jesus as Man. The final words of *chapter 1* add something more that is far beyond our understanding. It can only be admired and be seen with ‘the eyes of understanding being enlightened’ (*verse 18*). Of the church as His body it is also said that she is “*the fullness of Him who fills all in all*”. Here it is said that the church is the ‘fullness’ of the Lord Jesus, which means that she makes Him complete, complements Him as the perfect Man Jesus Christ. When the Man Jesus Christ will reign over all things, He will be, said with reverence, a complete Man: man and wife.

This we also recognize in Adam. When he woke up from his deep sleep and saw Eve, he said: “*This is now bone of my bones, and flesh*

of my flesh" (*Gen 2:21-23*). The fact that a group of people would become the body of Christ is nowhere to be found in the Old Testament. That was only possible after the Lord Jesus' return to heaven and the Holy Spirit could come to form the believers into that body (*1Cor 12:13*). The church is seen here as the whole of all believers from Pentecost till her rapture.

And then the words "*who fills all in all*". Here we stand in front of a mystery that we will never be able to fathom: He, Who is being completed as Man by the church, is indeed perfect in Himself! By this perfection He fills the whole universe. He is always and everywhere present. We must never forget that He, with Whom we are united as Man, will always remain: the eternal Son of God.

Now read Ephesians 1:21-23 again.

Reflection: Which aspects of the greatness of the Lord Jesus have you found in these verses? Give Him praise for that.

Ephesians 2

Dead In Trespasses and Sins | *verses 1-3*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Introduction. In *chapter 1* you have seen what God's intentions were, already before the foundation of the world. In *chapter 2* you will get a clarification of what God has done with your life here on earth and what your position is in the world. It is not that much about the counsels of God here; that we have learnt in *chapter 1*. In *chapter 2* God shows His grace and power with which He realized His counsels. Only God was able to change the condition in which we lived. In *verses 1-10* the power of God becomes visible in making alive those who were dead; in *verses 11-22* we see His power in bringing close to Him those who were far away from Him.

V1. *Verses 1-3* describe the nature of man, what his works are and to which influences he is subjected. Man is dead by nature; he is doing his works (deeds) under the influence of the devil and in this way disobeying God. The first verse is connected with *verse 20* of the previous chapter. There it is about the death of Christ in which He has chosen to enter into voluntarily. Here it is about our death, where we were, due to our own faults. You stand here at the starting point of your life as a Christian. That starting point is

death. Death here means that there is not a single trace of life to be found in human nature that is focused on God.

Still there was energy, a certain kind of life. After all, it is said: *"In your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked."* However, a life in sin is no life at all, it is death. Every step was made without the recognition of God and was therefore a false step. Every path was taken without asking God if that was the way He wanted you to go and was therefore a wrong road.

A good illustration of this you find in the history of the prodigal son in *Luke 15*. The youngest son is asking his father to give him his part of the inheritance in advance. Then he goes away and squanders all that he owns in a lawless life. You can imagine him very engaged with all sorts of depraved activities. To his father however, he was dead, for what does this father say later? *"For this son of mine was dead"* (verse 24). In *1 Peter 4:6* death is spoken about in the same way: *"For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead."* Here also people are included who are actively participating in the society, but without focusing on God.

Your and my activities were all in the category of 'trespasses and sins'. 'Trespasses' means that a rule that has been given is consciously being trespassed. 'Sins' are all deeds that are done without taking account of the authority above us. In *1 John 3:4* it is put as follows: *"Sin is lawlessness."* Lawlessness means that there is no recognition of authority, whereas God has the highest authority.

V2. That characterized our walk, our whole behavior in the world. This attitude was fully in line with the *"the course of this world"*, that is the elements through which the world is being guided, the character in which the world reveals itself. It is the atmosphere in which the world is plunged and where the goal of men is being determined, whereas God and His thoughts totally remain out of view. God is not only ignored, but all human activities are against Him. Man is adverse and rebellious.

Behind this rebellion there is a director who is full of hatred against God and His plans, "*the prince of the power of the air*", that is satan, God's unchangeable adversary. He fills the whole atmosphere with his unbounded hatred. Every human who is not connected to God breathes in that atmosphere. He wants to obstruct God as much as possible in the achievements of His counsels. Of that spirit of rebellion Job speaks in *Job 21:14*: "*They say to God, 'Depart from us, we do not even desire the knowledge of Your ways.'*" (see also *Job 22:17*). The important point is to recognize the source from which all words and deeds come, who is behind it.

This 'spirit', this demonic mastermind, makes an exceedingly strong couple with "*the sons of disobedience*". It is not about 'children', but it is said 'sons'. The word 'sons' speaks of maturity, of dealing with understanding. If you just remember *Job 21:14*, you see that there is a matter of consciously rejecting God.

This is the picture that *God* shows here of you and me; this is how we were and this is how every person still is who does not take account of Him. Nobody is to be excused if he does not know God (*Rom 1:18-21*). In contradiction of what we formerly were, it is said in *1 Peter 1:14* that we now are "*obedient children*" or according to a better rendering "*children of obedience*." Here it does not say 'sons', because it is about the nature we received, a nature characterized by obedience. You have received the Lord Jesus as your new life. His life was all obedience. If He is now your life then you will not express this life differently than He did.

V3. Unfortunately we are not all the time obedient as children of God. That is because we sometimes give room to our flesh. Then practically we are back for a moment in the same condition where we formerly lived when we "*lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind*". This means that emotions, will and mind were all put into the service of satan. He used (and uses) all of the human's mind for his evil goal.

I suppose I don't have to say much about 'the lusts of our flesh'. Everything in this world is about the satisfaction of wants. The world provides in this and maintains itself through it. Television

commercials and bill boards along the road are adapting to it in a shameless way. Also the internet is such a fulfiller of fleshly desires. Everyone who cannot live without it is doing 'the lusts of his flesh'. The human will is involved here. He consciously makes the choice to do it. A moment may come when it becomes an addiction and that such a person is unresistingly being guided by his lusts. But this was not from the beginning.

The mind also has a part in this. How often did someone fulfill his lusts by first thinking about certain things? If the wrong thinking is not being cut off, it will come to a volition and subsequently to a deed.

So all in all it may be clear that people who are dead in trespasses and sins are "*by nature children of wrath*". Here they are called 'children' and not 'sons'. It is about the nature, about what characterizes the condition in which such a person lives. Because this is totally without God, it cannot be other than asking for His wrath. God cannot allow a condition that is against His nature. If He works towards a situation in which He will be 'all in all' (*1Cor 15:28*), He shall wipe out in His wrath all who want to prevent that.

If that was also for you and me, who "*even as the rest*" were under God's wrath, what then has stirred God to let us escape from that and to give us blessings that are far beyond our understanding? That will be made clear in the following verses and our admiration for Who God will thereby increase more and more.

Now read Ephesians 2:1-3 again.

Reflection: What are the characteristics of a person who is not a child of God?

God, Rich In Mercy | verses 4-6

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus, ...

V4. In *verses 1-3* you have seen what the human nature is (dead, without any connection to God) and how he acts by his nature. This all is subjected to the wrath of God and is therefore the only prospect for man. We cannot imagine a view that is more hopeless than this. And then come those hopeful and shining words “*but God*”. These words bring a mind-blowing transformation in the desperate situation of a person and open a source of blessing which is beyond our thinking.

You’re going to see what the nature of *God* is and how *He* acts by His nature. In *Romans 5:8* and *Titus 3:4* you also read these words “*but God*”. There also these words are an introduction on what God has done and contrast sharply with what man is and has done.

In our verse God has not acted (or God doesn’t act) because we are so desperate. The first thing is not our misery or need. No, God is operating from Who He is and therefore His whole glory is being revealed. In what God is doing here, He alone is in action. Nothing is demanded from man; there is even no appeal for conversion. After all, how could a dead person hear anything, not to mention that he would be able to accede to any appeal?

Surely, man is called to convert and is held responsible to heed that call. That side of the truth you find in the *letter to the Romans*. In the *letter to the Ephesians* everything comes from God. God is love, and mercy comes from His love. God is rich in mercy. How rich He is in mercy you can see when you think of the desperate

and miserable situation as it is pictured in *verses 1-3*. In His great mercy God has bent down to you and raised you from that situation. In *Ezekiel 16:1-14* we see a striking illustration of that.

As already said, this action of God is based on "*His great love*". Love goes a lot further than mercy. Mercy has to do with the misery in which a person is found. Love is above everything and apart from everything. God is love. He was that also when sin was not there yet and therefore there was no reason to show mercy. Then He had this thought to bless people with such wonderful, eternal and heavenly blessings that are only to be found in the mind of an almighty God.

When He wants to bless them, He finds them in a situation of the *verses 1-3*. (It is important always to bear in mind that this is the background of God's action.) Is God embarrassed by this situation? That is impossible. God would not be God if He would not use the situation, just exactly to let shine "*His great love with which He loved us*".

The expression 'with which He loved us' appears also in *John 17:26*. Doesn't it impress you that the expression there refers to the love of the Father for the Son? You see there that God loves us with the same love with which He loves the Son. This clarifies once more that it is about an eternal love.

These are all actions out of God's great love. You see how everything that God did to us, is associated with what He did to Christ. God's great love we see exactly in the fact that He not only had compassion for dead sinners to whom He has shown His mercy, but that He also wanted us to be partakers in everything that belongs to the inheritance of His beloved Son!

This is quite a lot more than that only our sins would have been forgiven, isn't it? Surely that would have been great on its own. And it would have been totally wonderful if He would have brought us back to paradise. But in connection with Christ God goes beyond all limits. To recognize this is the greatest revelation we could have after our conversion.

V5. Just explore it. The first step in the unfolding of His great love is that He 'made us who were dead in trespasses' "*alive together with Christ*". This was the first thing that was necessary for us. It is clear that this step was needed to be taken by God. The same applies for the steps that follow after the first one, that these were made by God in order to bring us where He wanted us, according to His counsel. Receiving a new life, a new nature, stands in contrast to the depraved nature that characterized us in the past.

It is also not only said that we were made alive; that also can be said of the believers in the Old Testament. Not a single man will ever enter God's kingdom without having been made alive, which means without having life from God. However, only of the believers that belong to the church, can it be said that they are made alive "*together with Christ*".

Through our connection with Christ God gave us life that went through death. The life we received is resurrection life. The life that every child of God received who lives after the death on the cross, the resurrection and the ascension of the Lord Jesus, is the life of the risen and heaven-ascended Christ.

Before Paul continues to describe God's actions, we read the words "*by grace you have been saved*". This emphasizes how lovingly God dealt towards us, who had entirely no right or capacity to deserve God's favor in any way.

V6. Also the second step to God's purpose is taken by Him: He "*raised us up with Him*". This step is closely related to the previous one; they are also very similar, yet there is a difference. The words 'made alive' are about a change in our *condition*. We were dead and have received new life. The words 'raised up' are about a change in our *position*, the area in which we are. We were in the world, the area of death. When Christ was raised up from the dead, He also came into another area and He had nothing to do anymore with the world that was before His death and resurrection. The problem of sin was solved.

What God did to Him, He also did to us. Because we are raised up together with Christ, we are neither in the same manner in the world as when we were in it before we were made alive. We now breathe in the atmosphere of life. And yet, God has not finished His actions towards us.

The third step is that He has "*seated us with Him in the heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus*". You don't read here that we are seated *with* Christ in heavenly places, but that we are there *in* Him. It is written this way, because we are not really there yet. He is there actually, and because the church is one with Him, we are also there. Although you are still on earth with your body, through faith you can accept that you are already in heaven in Christ.

The three steps we paid attention to and in which God showed us His great love, He had taken with a purpose. That purpose is described in the following verse.

Now read Ephesians 2:4-6 again.

Reflection: How did God show His great love in these verses? Do you know more proofs of that great love?

Saved By Grace | *verses 7-10*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

..., 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, [it is] the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

V7. The words “so that” indicate that what is now being described is the target of the previous verses. After you’ve seen to which high position you were taken by God – made to sit in the heavenly places in Christ – you will now see why God gave you that position. With receiving that high place your blessings haven’t finished. There is far more to be expected by you. There will be a time, that is called here “*the ages to come*”, that the whole world shall see what God has done to you.

At the moment this is all a mystery for the world, as it is said in *Colossians 3:3*: “*And your life is hidden with Christ in God.*” It will be different in the ages to come, because right after that it is said: “*When Christ who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory*” (*Col 3:4*; see also *1Jn 3:2*). Then “*the surpassing riches of His grace*” will be visible. In *Ephesians 1:7* we also saw the “*the riches of His grace*”. There you have seen what you already have received, such as forgiveness and redemption. But everything you already have, will be displayed by God to the entire creation. That makes ‘the riches of His grace’ from *chapter 1:7* the ‘surpassing riches of His grace’ from *chapter 2:7*.

In *verse 8* we still speak of God’s grace, but first I want to look with you at “*His grace in kindness toward us*”. If you are fully aware of all this it makes you small. Kindness is the riches of God’s goodness which is in His heart and is being expressed through His

actions. And hasn't that goodness 'come upon us', upon you and me and every other child of God?

Who were the 'us'? People who first were depraved, dead sinners; insignificant small creatures that hated God; who dared to lay their dirty hands on their Creator; who abused Him, scourged and mocked Him and spat in His face; who nailed Him to the cross and after they erected it, even there mocked Him and challenged Him to come down from the cross to make Him prove that He was Who He said He was: the Son of God. In this way you and I have treated Him and so killed Him. That was you and me. And 'us' He has blessed with such blessings! Can you imagine greater grace? Eternity will not be too long to worship Him for that.

And due to Whom will we be the representatives of God's kindness in the ages to come? It is the Lord Jesus, as it is "*in Christ Jesus*" that God will show us His rich grace in the ages to come.

V8. It is all grace! Again Paul returns to this point. There is not a thing from man involved, regarding this point. Even faith is called here a gift from God. It all fits with the content of the letter in which *everything* comes from God. If man would say: 'But I have contributed to receiving the blessings, after all I have believed?' then Paul takes away this argument. Even faith is a work of God; He worked that in us. You could say: grace is the basis of agreement for God to bless us; faith is the path by which, or the means through which, He could give us that blessing.

Actually, with 'the gift of God' not only 'the faith' is meant. That came from the reply I received from Gerard Kramer (an expert in the Greek original text) to my question what the word "*it*" refers to in the phrase "*it is the gift of God*". Does it refer to what is right before that phrase, "*through faith*", or does it refer to further back, "*for by grace you have been saved*"?

His reply was: The interesting thing is, there is no 'it' in the Greek original. Literally it is said: "*and that [neuter] not of yourselves, of God the gift*". So the words "*yourselves*" and "*God*" are in contrast with each other. That's why the question should be answered

to which the former “that” (neuter) referred. The word “faith” is feminine, actually. That’s why you could say that the meaning of ‘that’ (and so of ‘it’) actually goes a little further and that they both refer to *by grace (also a feminine word!) you have been saved through faith*.

The blessing is called here “*have been saved*”. The original meaning of this word is: to arrive in a safe place right across all dangers. When Paul says here that we *have been saved*, it means that we have, as it were, already arrived safely. Also that fits with this letter. Saved here means the spiritual and eternal salvation, including all blessings that God gives to everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus.

Faith is not present in the heart of man naturally. The weed, that comes out of the heart of man naturally, is described to us in details in *Romans 3:9-19*. Faith is not a wild plant or a plant that runs wild, but a beautiful flower that cannot be pulled out anymore if it is once planted by the heavenly Father. It is impossible to take away ‘the gift of God’. What He gives remains of Him and therefore remains in eternity.

V9. To exclude all misunderstanding, the apostle adds to it that it is “*not of works*”. Through my own works it is impossible to receive God’s blessing. How could you expect any activity from a corpse (we were after all dead in sins and transgressions)? Everything has to come from God and indeed it happened like that. Concerning man, we must say that all glory is excluded. That glory belongs to God alone.

V10. Does the previous verse mean that ‘works’ don’t count at all to the believer? To that question there is a clear answer, again entirely in accordance with the content of the letter. Actually it is about a totally different kind of works than what the law requires from man. The works of the law are given to sinful people in order to enable them to deserve life.

The principle of the law has nothing to do with grace and faith, but with achievements that are to be expected from a sinful per-

son: “However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, “HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM.”” (Gal 3:12). Here in the letter to the Ephesians, however, it is about works that are the result of our salvation. They are the result of the fact that we are a new creation, “for we are His [i.e. God’s] workmanship”.

Indeed, as natural human beings we are also His workmanship: “And the LORD God formed man of the dust from the ground” (Gen 2:7). He is our Creator, Who “is mindful that we are [but] dust” (Psa 103:14). Or as how Elihu puts it: “I too have been formed out of the clay” (Job 33:6). In this letter, however, it is about what we have become as new people. And just as Adam in no way had contributed to his own creation, we neither have contributed in any way to become a new creation. And just as Adam received the commandment to work, we as new creations also have to work.

The works that God expects from us as new people, again fits with the content of this letter. You don’t have to rack your brain over what you should do. God already had thoughts about that when He thought of you in eternity. Just as He had predestined you for sonship (Eph 1:5), He also had prepared good works beforehand that you should walk in them. Your *position* finds its origin there in eternity and also your *good works* find their origin there.

You see that here it is about works that were already prepared before the law was given. It is one of the proofs which show that a believer, who belongs to the church, has nothing to do with the law; the law cannot be a rule of life to him. The law is destined for man who belongs to the earth, the old creation. The believer doesn’t belong to the earth anymore, but – as a new creation – to heaven. There he is already made to sit in Christ, as somebody who is “created in Christ Jesus”, Who is seated at His right hand in heavenly places (Eph 1:20).

What is said here of ‘good works’ clarifies that the believer is not only seen as in heavenly places, but that at the same time he is also on earth amidst the old creation. He is someone who can realize heavenly matters in daily life on earth, the old creation.

It is about 'good' works, meaning that the Christian from God is given to do things that are to the benefit of his environment.

For a Christian who recognizes these works, life will lose all rigidity. What is more simple than to walk in the works in which God already has provided and thereby only to trust on His grace? In short, walking in good works consists of the following: to show on earth Who the glorified Christ is in heaven. In the *chapters 4 and 5* that will be developed further.

Now read Ephesians 2:7-10 again.

Reflection: What demonstrates the riches of God's grace?

The Gentiles | *verses 11-13*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," [which is] performed in the flesh by human hands — 12 [remember] that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

V11. A new section starts at *verse 11*. Paul looks back. He did that also in *verse 1*. There it merely was about our *personal* past in order to demonstrate in the next verses which personal blessings we possess in Christ. From *verse 11* it is about our *collective* past and subsequently we see which blessings we together have in Christ. Both cases regard the time of our life on earth. That is a difference with *chapter 1*. There the issue is the counsels of God from before the foundation of the world, so out of time and apart from the earth.

In *chapter 2:1-10* you've seen what God has *personally* worked in us, after our desperate situation has been presented. In *verses 11-22* you will see what God has done *to us collectively*, after our desperate situation also has been presented first. With 'collectively' I mean *all believers from the Jews and the Gentiles together* for that is the point here.

The unity that has arisen between Jew and Gentile is a miracle of God's grace. Paul demonstrates how great this miracle is by making a comparison between what the Gentiles once were and what they now have become. Most of the readers of this letter, then and also now, consist of those who once belonged to the Gentiles. They are being stimulated to remember how desperate their situation was in the past, that they will be more aware of what their situation is now.

To illustrate their once desperate situation, he compares it with that of Israel. It is important to bear in mind that in this comparison the issue is the former position in the flesh of both Gentile and Jew. Paul puts down seven aspects of the position of the Gentile. They are, as it were, sledgehammer blows. Every blow makes the Gentile sink deeper in his miserable situation.

The first blow: they were “*the Gentiles in the flesh*”. The expression ‘in the flesh’ indicates that their whole life was controlled by fulfilling their lusts. In *Romans 7:5* it is put as follows: “*For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were [aroused] by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.*” God had given His law to Israel that in obeying the law they should enjoy life in fellowship with God.

The second blow: the Jew looked down on the Gentile with contempt and scolded them for “*Uncircumcision*” (see *1Sam 14:6; 17:26,36*). As noticed, it is about a comparison regarding their outward position. That’s why Israel is called here “*by the so-called ‘Circumcision’*”. It is only about the external form, which is emphasized by the addition “*[which is] performed in the flesh by human hands*”.

V12. The third blow: the Gentiles once were “*separate from Christ*”. Christ, that means the Messiah to Israel, was not promised to the Gentiles; He was promised to Israel alone. When He came on earth, He came for ‘the children’ of Israel, not for ‘the dogs’, the Gentiles (cf. *Mk 7:24-30*).

The fourth blow: the Gentiles were not categorized under the civil rights of Israel. Therefore they lacked many privileges that were included in this commonwealth. There may be all kind of social and religious privileges, but also statutes and rights that God gave to His people. In this way their life was so much organized that they could live at the highest level, in health, peace and safety (*Deu 4:8*).

The fifth blow: as “*strangers*” the Gentiles had no part in “*the covenants of promise*”. God had made various covenants with Israel

since Abraham (see *Gen 15,17; Lev 26:42; Psa 89*). They had one collective promise: the coming of the Messiah, Who would fulfill what God had promised in the covenants.

The sixth blow: “*no hope*”. The situation becomes more and more hopeless. You might hope that after all that is said previously, a change would come for good. But also for that matter there is no change. There is no ground to expect something good of the future.

Finally the seventh, the biggest blow: “*without God in the world*”. The Gentiles had all turned their backs on God (*Rom 1:20-21*). That’s why “*in generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go in their own ways*” (*Acts 14:16*). They were left totally to themselves, without any connection to God. From among all the nations God had chosen Israel. Through this nation He revealed Himself to all other nations.

Now what is the intention of this comparison? Before I explain that, I first want to tell you what the intention is not. The comparison is in no way to prove that the Gentiles have now certainly become partakers of the blessings of Israel. A big misconception is the explanation that in these verses it should be said that the Gentile has been drawn near because he should have become Jew. That cannot be the right explanation, as also in the Old Testament there was the possibility to become a Jewish member, a so-called proselyte.

Furthermore God also had blessings in store for the Gentiles in the Old Testament. But we have to consider the following. In the first place the blessings mentioned in the Old Testament for the nations are not given to those nations *themselves*, but to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and later to Israel. In the second place we see that the nations can only receive blessings *by the means of* Israel. When in future Israel will be God’s nation again, all nations will also join in this restoration. This will happen when the Lord Jesus has established the millennial kingdom of peace.

V13. But what in fact is made clear to us in *Ephesians 2*? That there is blessing for the nations *apart from* Israel! *Verse 13*, where we now are, explains that further. The Gentiles were in two aspects of view far off from God. Firstly, by being apart from Israel – this you have just seen. But they were also far off from God from the spiritual point of view. However, also the Jews were from the spiritual point of view far off from God.

Where both of them stood far off from God, both Jew and Gentile had to be brought near to God and that *“by the blood of Christ”*. The Gentile certainly doesn’t become a Jew and even fewer a Jew becomes a Gentile. Both are being brought in a totally new position and that is *“in Christ Jesus”*. It is not spoken anymore here of ‘Gentiles in the flesh’ and neither of ‘Israel in the flesh’. Together they are a new unity, of which is mentioned that they both have been made one (*verse 14*), and that they were created *“into one new man”* (*verse 15*) and that they were reconciled *“both in one body”* to God (*verse 16*).

Jews and Gentiles are taken from their natural environment and are placed in a whole new unity: the church. To the Gentile, as well as to the Jew, that is a great transformation. Formerly in a double point of view so far off; now, ‘through the blood of Christ’, so near to God, even been brought to His heart.

“The blood of Christ” draws our attention to the offering of Christ. Through His blood we are reconciled with God. On that basis God has taken away every obstacle to allow us to come into His presence and to bless us with all spiritual blessings. We will never finish figuring out the value of that blood.

Now read *Ephesians 2:11-13* again.

Reflection: How did the difference in position between Jew and Gentile disappear?

Christ Is Our Peace | verses 14-16

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both [groups into] one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, [which is] the Law of commandments [contained] in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, [thus] establishing peace, 16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

Introduction. In the previous verse you have seen that we ‘have come near’ and that ‘in Christ’ and on the basis of His blood. Therefore it is possible that we can come into God’s presence. However, if there was nothing else, it could mean that the church was no more than an improvement of Judaism. For the Jew the door to God was closed, for the church it is open.

How great this privilege might be, nothing is said of what the church has *more* than Israel. The church doesn’t consist of an arbitrary number of Christians that now have the privilege to be in the presence of God. That privilege doesn’t necessarily mean that the distinction between Jews and Gentiles is removed. And one of the unique characteristics of the church is that now this distinction has indeed disappeared. That is what these verses will clarify.

V14. The disappearance of this distinction is the result of what Christ has accomplished through His death on the cross. “*He Himself is our peace*”, with the emphasis on His Being. *He* has worked peace between God and man *and* – and this is where the emphasis is – between Jew and Gentile. This is something completely new.

In the Old Testament the separation between Jew and Gentile was made by God Himself. There He gave the law as “*the barrier of the dividing wall*” or “*the middle wall of separation*”. The law was a sort of fence. Within that fence God stood in connection with His peo-

ple Israel, a relation that was laid down in many commandments and ordinances. That fence functioned also as a division between Israel and the surrounding nations that did not have this law.

By indicating this formal separation between Jew and Gentile not all has been said yet. In principle it could have been that they, as it were, had cordial contact with each other over the fence. That is not the case. Apart from a distinction in position there was also enmity. This enmity was also the result of the "*Law of commandments [contained] in ordinances*".

The Gentile was separated from that, in which the Jew boasted (*Rom 2:23*). The Gentiles did not want to have anything to do with God. They had their own gods and subjected themselves to the rules they established themselves. In the Old Testament the Jew was appealed to tolerate the idolaters by no means.

In this situation – that regards both the position of both and the hostile spirit they had towards each other – a radical change has happened. First the law as the middle wall of separation *has been broken down* or dissolved, disempowered.

V15. Also the law as an expression of God's will has been abolished or suspended. Both the breaking down and the abolishing happened through what Christ did "*in His flesh*". The expression 'in His flesh' refers to His body that He surrendered in death on the cross. The law was brought to a definite ending for everyone who has been brought near, not only Jew, but also Gentile.

Also the believer who was originally a Jew had to understand that the law has been brought to a definite ending for him. The same law that kept the Gentile at a distance from God, also kept the Jew at a distance from God. He had broken the law after all! That brought him under the curse. If the Jew wanted to have peace then also for him the law had to be abolished.

Yet it is neither the breaking down of the middle wall of separation between Jew and Gentile that makes the church that special. It was necessary but not sufficient. The most significant character

of the church is not that Jew and Gentile now freely have contact with each other. Then the fence would have been built again, only a little further so that the Gentiles would be within the fence. The difference between Jew and Gentile would have been removed by uplifting the Gentile to the level of the Jew. It would be totally unthinkable to let the Jew, after breaking down the wall, descend to the level of the Gentile.

None of these possibilities reflects how God has formed the church. After the breaking down (negative) something new (positive) is manifesting itself and that is "*one new man*" and "*one body*". To this which is new, Jew and Gentile are brought together.

First, something about the new man: Christ is in a most intimate way connected with the new man. He has created him "*in Himself*". The word 'create' indicates that it is about something that hasn't ever existed before, but that is produced by Christ. He did not do that as with the first creation in *Genesis 1*, by speaking a word of power: 'Let there be peace!' No, with His *work on the cross* He was "*establishing peace*" between Jew and Gentile.

Jew and Gentile as one new man, introduces a new being, with totally new features. Shortly said this is the new man: Christ as He lives and becomes visible in every believer. To present the new man it is only possible with all believers, as each of them shows another aspect. For every believer personally it is applicable that He is in Christ and therefore a new creation (*2Cor 5:17*).

V16. How lofty it might be what we see in the new man, everything hasn't been said yet about the nearness in which the church has been brought to God. After the unity in essence, that is seen in the new man, follows the greatest unity that is possible: "*one body*". One body is not a number of people that make the new man, while each of them shows a different aspect of that one new man. One body goes a step further. It means that those people together form an inseparable unity. They are united with each other as the members of a body are united with each other.

This also is totally new. In the picture of the one body it is expressed most clearly how totally new the position is for both Jew and Gentile. The old position is definitely history.

Another picture can make this clearer. In *John 10* the Lord Jesus speaks of the sheep He brings out of the sheepfold (*Jn 10:3-4*). Those are the Jewish sheep, believers from the Jews. He also talks about "*other sheep, which are not of this fold*" (*Jn 10:16a*). Those are the believers from the Gentiles. Then He proceeds: "*I must bring them also, ... and they will become one flock [sheep from Jews and sheep from Gentiles] [with] one shepherd*" (*Jn 10:16b*).

The Gentiles are not brought to the fold of the Jews. Jew and Gentile are neither brought to a *new* fold, so to speak, within a new system with new rules. No, they are being shaped to a new flock, under one Shepherd.

Now back to our chapter. Jew and Gentile can be together in one body as reconciled with God in His presence. This is also the result of what the Lord Jesus did on the cross. Should there be a way to create a situation of harmony between God and "*them both*", then it was only through reconciliation. Reconciliation is needed where there is enmity.

On the cross Christ was "*made ... sin*" (*2Cor 5:20-21*). There, in Christ, everything was judged by God and everything was taken away that cannot exist before Him, so that He could bring us near to Him. The cross also means the end of the old feud that existed between Jew and Gentile, as through the cross was "*put to death the enmity*". This is how the cross works reconciliation between God and men and between men and men.

Now read Ephesians 2:14-16 again.

Reflection: What did God do in Christ to bring us near?

The Access To the Father | *verses 17-22*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

17 AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; **18** for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. **19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, **20** having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner [stone], **21** in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, **22** in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

V17. For the third time in this chapter peace is spoken about. The first time was in *verse 14*. There the *Person of Christ Himself* is peace. Subsequently in *verse 15*, where peace is the result of the *work of Christ* on the cross. Here in *verse 17* it is about the *preaching* of peace. Also this announcing is ascribed to Christ.

Yet “*and He came*” cannot refer to His life on earth. Then He indeed preached peace to His Own (“*those who were near*”, *Jn 14:27; 20:19-21*), but never to Gentiles (“*you who were far away*”). He did not come to earth for the latter (*see Mt 10:5-6*). Now, however, the Lord Jesus has, as you have seen in the previous verse, brought reconciliation through the cross, followed by His return to heaven. From there He preaches this peace to everyone, through His apostles and disciples.

What His representatives are doing on earth at preaching His peace to Jew and Gentile – as there is no distinction anymore – is *His* work. Here you see again the unity there is between Christ in heaven and His own on earth. Through this that peace has also come to *us*, and you and I have also become partakers of it.

V18. After all previous magnificent results of the work of Christ, we now come to the highlight of our spiritual privileges: the ac-

cess to the Father. You can be perfectly happy and at home with Him, without desiring anything else. This access is for “both”, Jew and Gentile, “through Him”, that is Christ. He has opened the way through the cross. He has made it possible that you can come to the Father, without any inward hesitation and without any outward mediation of others apart from yourself. You personally can go directly to the Father.

He, Who enables you to do this, Who gives you the power to do this, is “one Spirit”. For the fourth time we find the word ‘one’ (see also the verses 14-16). Each previous unity is worked by this one Spirit. Every distinction is gone. The Spirit does not give a different access to the Jew than to the Gentile. There always is free access to the Father for every ‘son’. God is not hidden anymore behind a veil as when He dwelled among Israel in the tabernacle and in the temple.

The relationship with God is not being ruled anymore by law, but by liberty. Every restriction of that liberty by introducing again something of the law, means an obstacle of the free access. That is a shortage to the child of God, but a greater shortage still to the Father Who loves to have His children near Him.

It is not so much of what you *do* near Him. Surely, you can praise Him, you can also ask Him things. But the greatest desire He has is that you *are* near Him; that He sees that you search for Him because of Who He is: the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. You are with Him as somebody who is made one with the Lord Jesus. To be with the Father is actually enjoying all what the Lord Jesus is to the Father and to be aware that that relationship also is yours, as we are one with Him. Then you can only worship.

V19. From this great privilege yet other privileges follow. The words “so that” in *verse 19* indicate that. Where you live and where you are at home, you are not a stranger and foreigner. On earth we still are indeed ‘strangers and foreigners’ (1Pet 2:11), but with the Father we are at home, together with other “fellow citizens with the saints”. Not citizens of an earthly land with the same

nationality, but of a heavenly land (*cf. Phil 3:20*) where all dwell who have the 'nationality' of heaven.

Besides the relation with each other, we may live near to God and be "*God's household*". It is His house, a house that is characterized by fellowship with Him and with each other. As said it is *God's* house, the house where He lives. That is the step to the last verses of this chapter. There you see how this house is built.

V20. It is a good thing to notice that until now the church has continuously been brought before us in the picture of a body. Now Paul is going to use another picture for the church and that is that of a house. That is necessary, because herewith things can be clarified that have to do with building. In this way you can view the church in the Bible as a building that is built by God, but also as a building that is built by men. Because the latter here is not the subject, I neither will pay attention to it. Here it is about the building of the house by God. In *Matthew 16:18* you find the same thought. There the Lord Jesus says that *He* shall build His church.

The building of the church by God and the Lord Jesus takes place on "*the foundation of the apostles and prophets*". You could say that they are the foundation in two respects. They are themselves the foundation, the first stones of the building, on which other "*living stones*" (*1Pet 2:5*) were built. Next to that they have shown by their teachings how the building has to go.

It is clear that the prophets, who together with the apostles are the foundation, cannot be the prophets from the Old Testament. From *Ephesians 3:5* it is clear that it is about something that was unknown in the past. Also the order – first 'apostles' are mentioned and after that the 'prophets' – clarifies that it is about prophets of the New Testament.

But the foundation of this house is not the most important. The whole house, including the foundation, rests on the cornerstone, "*Christ Jesus Himself*". The whole house draws its value from Him. The character of the cornerstone confirms the character of the building.

V21. This character is expressed in *"in Whom"*. From Him, in connection to Him, *"the whole building"* is *"being fitted together"*. The whole is being fitted together and built in the right way, without any chance of cracks. In Him this building is growing by a continuous addition of new, living stones. This growing, or building, continues until the last stone is added and the building is finished. That is the moment when the Lord Jesus comes to take the church to Him. In the view of the building, the church shall perfectly serve the purpose to which she is grown and that is *"into a holy temple in the Lord"*.

In the Old Testament the temple is the place where God dwelt and where also the priests dwelt. When the Lord Jesus in *John 14:2* says of the Father's house *"in My Father's house are many dwelling places"*, He seems to be referring to the temple. In the house of the Father we eternally shall live with the Father and the Son and we will worship Them.

V22. Yet God will not wait until the building is finished. That's why the last verse speaks of the church as a building, a place where God already dwells now. This building is being shaped by all believers who live now on earth. That is a building of which stones disappear, which happens when a believer dies, but to which also stones are added, which happens when somebody converts.

It is a great joy to God to have a house on earth, in which He can dwell, through His Spirit. To this purpose the original Gentile Ephesians (*"you also"*) were also built. To this purpose you and I, who didn't have any part of this (or had the right to), are also built. What a grace!

Now read Ephesians 2:17-22 again.

Reflection: How and when do you make use of the access to the Father?

Ephesians 3

The Mystery of Christ | verses 1-4

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles — 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ...

Introduction. Chapter 3 is actually a sort of parenthesis. You will understand what I mean by that if you compare *verse 1* of this chapter with *chapter 4:1*. After having written about God’s counsels in *chapter 1* and about the way God made us partakers of them, you might expect that Paul is going to tell us now what that means for your practice, your walk.

It looks like he wanted to start with that in *chapter 3*. Yet, that only happens in *chapter 4*. There he starts with nearly the same words with which he starts *chapter 3*, and then the admonitions follow which belong to his teachings he gave in *chapter 2*.

Yet the Holy Spirit leads him, however, to first write *chapter 3*. Why? To explain that to him, Paul, was entrusted this particular service to make known “*the mystery of Christ*” (*verse 4*). That mystery was not an idea or invention of his own, but it was revealed by God (*verse 3*). This mystery is about the fact that Jew and Gentile together form the church and that they are connected to Christ as one body. The difference between Jew and Gentile has disappeared.

V1. He starts with “I, Paul” and thereby stresses the absolutely unique truth that was only revealed to him. He was the first man, who was made aware of this by God. It also stresses the apostolic authority with which he now passes on this revelation. What Paul is teaching is totally apart from what the Jews read in the Old Testament. That is right indeed, as we cannot find there the things we saw in *chapters 1-2*.

The preaching of this truth has made him a “prisoner”. That’s why he writes that he was a prisoner “for the sake of you Gentiles”. When he spoke of God wanting him to go to the Gentiles in *Acts 22*, the Jews went furious and wanted to kill him. That did not happen, but the whole story (to be read in *Acts 23-28*) ends with him being held prisoner in Rome. Yet he does not regard himself as a prisoner of Caesar, but as “the prisoner of Christ Jesus”.

What we can learn from this is, that whatever happens in our lives, we can see everything in relation to the Lord Jesus. That will protect us against bitterness. Then we shall indeed be able to cope with disappointments. Paul could have been mourning about not being active anymore for his Lord. But what do you see? Exactly in his imprisonment he writes some letters we read in the Bible. The *letter to the Ephesians* is one of them.

V2. Paul stayed for three years in Ephesus (*Acts 20:31*). In that time the Ephesians became familiar with “the stewardship” that was entrusted to Paul. The word ‘stewardship’ is derived from the word economist (literally: a householder). An example of such a person is Joseph, who was the manager of ‘the house(hold)’ of Potifar and to whom all persons and goods of Potifar’s house were entrusted.

This fact associates with the previous chapter, in which the household of God is being spoken about. To Paul God entrusted the goods of that household, the wonderful truths of that household. He is allowed to present the goods of God’s house in their glory to those who were members of that household. Paul is very impressed by that.

His amazing service, however, doesn't make him proud. He points out that this service that was given to him for the sake of the church, flows forth from "God's grace". Also the whole content of what is entrusted to him consists of this grace. It is important to continuously be aware of this if you may do something for the Lord. You may do it because you know His grace; this grace is also what you pass on to others in your service.

V3. "The mystery" that God made known to Paul "by revelation", was still hidden in the Old Testament. There are two conceivable misconceptions concerning this mystery. The first one is to assume that it was secretly present in the Scriptures of the Old Testament and was now instructed to Paul by the Holy Spirit where to find it. But that is not right. It was not something that was hidden in the Old Testament. Secrecy here literally means 'mystery'. It was unknown to the greatest prophet. He could never ever have discovered it.

The second misconception is to assume that it is also for us still a mystery. If we think that, we ignore the revelation of it. It is often also an excuse not to deepen yourself too much in this matter, for it is not possible to understand it; it is a mystery after all. Sometimes even *1 Corinthians 2:9* is being referred to, while the next verse is being ignored for convenience's sake.

It is really true that on the one hand it is something that was hidden in God from eternity (see *verse 9*) and on the other hand it is now made known, first to Paul and afterwards through him to you and me and every other member of the church! Paul "wrote before in brief" about this. He is referring here to what he wrote in the previous chapters about this.

V4. He presents what he just said to the readers to consider. They could conclude that he writes as one who is fully informed. It sounds easy, but you can only form a view of what Paul writes, when you *read* what he writes. That is what he says to the Ephesians, and also to us. Reading therefore means more than just to see letters only. Reading is receiving the message, trying to understand what the writer says. In this case a right spiritual mind

is an absolute condition. Beware: it is not about an intellectual capacity, but about a heart that desires to receive and understand the mystery (*see Eph 1:17-18*).

It is about nothing less than the “*mystery of Christ*”. You might have expected that he is now going to speak about the ‘mystery of the church’ as that is the subject here. After all it is about the particular character of the church wherein Jew and Gentile have been made one. Yet that doesn’t happen and Paul writes about ‘the mystery of the Christ’, as it is literally written.

In fact this detail shows us the core of the mystery. It is not only that the believers from the Jews and Gentiles are related to each other, but that they have been made one body. The issue is the unity between the Head in heaven and the members on earth.

God had the purpose to unite us together, but above all to unite us with the Head. It was His plan to give a body to Christ. In *chapter 5:32* we see another picture of that mystery: “*This is a great mystery, but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.*” So when ‘the Christ’ is spoken of, then it is because God wants to have all emphasis on Him.

You and I consent to that heartily! It is about Him.

Now read Ephesians 3:1-4 again.

Reflection: What does the ‘stewardship’ of Paul mean and what is ‘the mystery’?

Fellow Heirs, Fellow Members, Fellow Partakers | *verses 5-7*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

..., 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 [to be specific], that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, 7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.

V5. The mystery of the church was not revealed in the time of the Old Testament. It was not only unknown to the people of Israel, but "*to the sons of men*". How privileged Israel was in whatever God had made known of Himself to them, yet the church was *not* mentioned in those communications. Not to a single man, Jew or Gentile, God mentioned anything about *this*. It was really a secret.

But that secret has now been revealed to all 'saints and faithful in Christ Jesus' (*Eph 1:1*). To all unbelievers it is still a mystery, and unfortunately also to all believers who are not interested in these things. This lack of interest can be caused by indifference, but also by a wrong conception of the position of the believer on earth. He who thinks that the greatest mission for the Christian is 'to improve the world', will not manage to discover the real Christian life. That real life is to show on earth that all his interests are in heaven, because Christ with Whom he is made one, is there.

There is another significant aspect regarding the fact that the church was not made known in the Old Testament. That is the fact that something like a 'church since Adam' can't exist. God kept silent about the church in the Old Testament. In *Matthew 16:18* the Lord Jesus breaks this silence when He says: "*Upon this rock I will build My church.*" This is the first time that this mystery is spoken about.

The Lord Jesus also uses the future tense: 'will ... build'. In order to build His church He had to die, arise, ascend to heaven and send from there the Holy Spirit. Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a happening that is mentioned in *Acts 2*, the church is 'baptized to one body' (*1Cor 12:13*). Those who were present at this happening did not realize that that was the beginning of the church.

The meaning of the church, what God's thoughts are about her and the way He works out His thoughts, He revealed to Paul. Only in the letters of Paul you will find teachings about the church. For this reason he is especially set apart, one of those "*holy apostles and prophets*" of Jesus Christ.

V6. What that mystery means, is described in *verse 6*. There are three phrases that are used here and of which none of them is found in the Old Testament: "*fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers*". It is about this completely new phenomenon, that the Gentiles and the Jews together (which is the meaning of 'fellow' here) have become

- heirs,
- one body and
- partakers

of the promise in Christ Jesus.

In a certain way blessing was also promised to the nations in the Old Testament, but only *via* Israel, that remained a separate nation. Also in the future, in the millennial kingdom, when all the blessings that God made shall be reality for both Israel and the nations, Israel will remain a separate nation. That the nations would be fellow heirs and members of the same body, in which every difference between Jews and other nations has disappeared, *that* was hidden until the moment that God revealed it to Paul.

How does the mystery of the church actually rise above what has been given to Israel? First, because believers from Jews and Gentiles are related as "*fellow heirs*" to Him Who shall reign over 'all

things which are in heaven and which are on earth' (*Eph 1:10*). This amazing inheritance goes far beyond what Israel will possess, as a separate nation in the future.

You can be heirs together, but yet have no further relation with each other. The Jewish believer and the Gentile believer, however, are not separated anymore from each other. The words "*fellow members of the body*" indicate a connection that cannot be described more intimately. It means that the believers from the nations now belong to the same body together with the Jewish believers: they form one body together.

This second "*fellow*" goes further than the first "*fellow*". It was quite understandable for the Jew to share an inheritance, but to be made one body with the Gentiles is beyond his understanding.

The third "*fellow*" regards the being partakers of "*the promise in Christ Jesus*" of both Jew and Gentile. The question is what promise is meant here. It is not about any promise that God has made in the Old Testament. Since we are aware of what *verse 5* says, it is about a promise that was formerly hidden in God. But isn't a promise something you make to a person? Yes, that's right, and I think that *Titus 1:2* can be a help to the question. There you read about "*eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago*" i.e. before time began.

So when yet there was no man, God already made a promise, but to whom? It cannot be about anything else than the promise that the Father made to His Son, the eternal Son. This promise is the eternal life. Although *Titus 1* is not about Christ and the church, but about what God promised to every single believer, the character of the promise is still applicable to the church.

The accomplishment of this promise could only happen when the Lord Jesus was on earth and accomplished the work that the Father wanted Him to do (*see Jn 17:1-4*). Only then could God accomplish "*the promise of life in Christ Jesus*" (*2Tim 1:1*) by giving this life to all who are related to Him. The eternal life is the part of everyone who belongs to the church. Because of being partakers

of this promise, we are capable of enjoying the blessings of the other two things we share.

Also this promise goes beyond all the promises that were made to Israel, literally as well as spiritually. The promises to Israel have to do with life and material blessings here on earth. The 'promise in Christ Jesus' is in accordance with the eternal life and the spiritual blessings in heaven.

All the glorious aspects that were embedded in 'the mystery of the Christ' (*verse 4*), have come to us "*through the gospel*". That is the way through which God has revealed to us all the riches of Christ.

V7. Paul became a servant of the gospel; he preached the gospel and in that way made known the mystery. He doesn't boast about it. He is aware that he received it by God's grace. The content of his preaching, the enormous riches of it, the way he serves, are all through the grace of God only.

Who is capable to measure God's grace? Nobody indeed! That's why nobody is capable of measuring the content of the gospel that Paul brings here. Paul considers this a task for which he himself has no power. But God gives him the possibility to fulfill his service "*according to the working of His power*".

The grace of God is the source from which everything comes. We have seen that already and we shall see that more. Only by the power of God Who made Paul capable to preach this rich gospel, have we also become partakers.

Now read Ephesians 3:5-7 again.

Reflection: Which differences came forward in these verses between the blessings for Israel and that of the church?

The Unfathomable Riches of Christ | verses 8-10

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; 10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly [places].

V8. It is striking to see how Paul speaks of himself here, seen in the light of this letter. This is a letter of contrasts. First, man is pictured in his absolute corruption (*Eph 2:1-3*). Opposite to that you have seen how the man in Christ has received a tremendously high position. This contrast you also see in picture in the ministry of Paul. Formerly he was a persecutor of the church and therefore of the Lord. And exactly this man, who destroyed the church, received grace to proclaim the unfathomable riches among the Gentiles. That's why he calls himself "*the very least of all the saints*".

It has such a great impact on him when he thinks of the content of the message he is allowed to proclaim, that it causes him to call himself that way. This is the attitude that suits everyone who is given a task from the Lord (and who doesn't have that?). Everything we understand of the truth should make us think less and less about ourselves.

When it is about this glorious ministry that was given to him, he compares himself with "*all saints*". To them this letter indeed is addressed (*Eph 1:1*) and to them he announces all this wonderful news. But he doesn't put himself above them, but on the contrary, below them. Paul has this attitude all the time. When he compares himself with other apostles, he calls himself "*the least of the apostles*" (*1Cor 15:9*). When he compares himself with the sinners he says "*among whom I am foremost [of all]*" (*1Tim 1:15*). The truth which he is allowed to proclaim has an influence on his attitude. That we understand the truth should be a matter of our heart

and then we shall also see our littleness. When only knowledge counts, we will be puffed up (*1Cor 8:1*).

Paul feels his littleness when he sees the huge size of his ministry ("*the Gentiles*") and the all surpassing content ("*the unfathomable riches of Christ*"). He, and no one else, receives the order to preach (literarily: to evangelize) things that are so rich, that they could never be fully searched by anyone. Here also it is about the Christ again, which means: Christ together with His church.

V9. Through the proclamation of such lofty things it became clear ("*to bring to light*") what was hidden in God till then. About the words 'stewardship' and 'mystery', I have already said something in the study of the *verses* 2-3 of this chapter, where these words also appear. By practicing his ministry, Paul fulfills his stewardship. To him God entrusted what He kept for Himself before: a mystery that only the three Persons of the Godhead knew. The moment then came that God came out with His counsels. Paul was the instrument that God had chosen to make known His mystery.

The purpose of this revelation is said in *verse 10*, but first one more thing of God is said, which must not be overlooked. That is the expression "*God who created all things*". How can Paul refer here suddenly to the creation, while he is dealing with so many heavenly and eternal things? Surely, our feet are still on the earth, but until now this letter is about our position in heavenly places and our blessings in and with Christ, isn't it? That is also true, but just because our feet are still in the first, old creation, we still have everything to do with it.

The will of God is that His counsels, that all relate to something totally new that has been realized outside the old creation, will be made visible in this old creation. God has created all things to be of service, as a platform, to display what was hidden in Him.

He could have taken away the old and introduce the new. He also could have placed the new next to the old. He could have shaped the old to the new. He didn't do anything of that. He uses the old

to make visible the totally new, that is Christ and the church as perfectly united together.

V10. And that is not just later, when *chapter 1:10* will be fulfilled, but already “now”. God had revealed Himself in the past in certain ways. He did that in the creation (*Rom 1:20*). Yet He didn’t fully reveal Himself in it. What we see in it, is His creation wisdom. The angels have seen that wisdom and have rejoiced in it (*Job 38:7*). They also saw that God created men, that man enjoyed the special attention of God and that He went His ways with man. They saw it and admired how God dealt with man that became rebellious.

But now that same God showed something that first was not known. He will submit everything to a Man in future. But the Man to Whom He submits that, is new, as that Man is Christ and the church. This was hidden in God’s heart, but is being made known to the angels through the existence of the church.

The good and evil angelic powers (“*the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly [places]*”) have no words for what they see of wisdom, when they look at the church. This wisdom is so unique, that it exceeds all other wisdom. This wisdom is completely new and not just in a new phase of unfolding His wisdom. It is “*the manifold wisdom of God*”, which means a wisdom in every possible glorious aspects. And that wisdom is seen in those who form the church together, not what they are of themselves, but what God has made of them.

That God is almighty and sovereign was known by the angels. If God wanted to put man above angels, He was free to do that. But the *way* God does that, reveals His wisdom and that is the issue here. He does not only deal in omnipotence, but He does that in a fully righteous way and in accordance with all that He is in Himself: the perfect revelation of love and of light. When He deals like that with the church, it doesn’t mean that He is unfair against one of His other creatures or in contradiction with something that is in Him.

Angels had a higher place in the creation than men. Is it not unfair then that He now has given insignificant creatures that were disobedient to God and in addition to that brought the Creator to the cross, a place above angels that have always served Him faithfully and have never done anything against Him? No, for the work that was necessary to do that, is done by a *Man*, Jesus Christ, on the cross of Calvary. There He has revealed that God is light and love.

He has shown God's hatred against sin and His love for the sinner in all its aspects. He has restored there everything that was destroyed by the work of satan and his angels. He opened the way for God, so He could fulfill His counsels. God rewarded Him for that by giving Him a place above everything, and there He made the church one with Him (*Eph 1:20-23*). The angels see that and recognize in this God's manifold wisdom.

Now read Ephesians 3:8-10 again.

Reflection: Why is the church now on earth?

Boldness and Access | *verses 11-13*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

11 [This was] in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. 13 Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.

V11. What Paul presented in the previous verses, what was highlighted by him, was in God's heart from eternity. I mean by that, the time before creation, that you actually cannot call 'time', for in eternity every notion of time is missing. Eternity is timeless. God stands outside and above time. We now know something as time because God has created it. That you can read in *Genesis 1*.

Before creation, there was already a purpose of God regarding the church. When the time started, God did not make known this "eternal purpose" right away. He hasn't spoken about it in a prophecy anywhere or given a promise about it to people on earth. About this eternal purpose we also read in *chapter 1:4,11* of this letter. There it is about our personal blessings. Here it is about our blessings as the church, that all believers have received together.

But whatever blessing is regarded, it is never apart from the Lord Jesus. God has "carried out" this eternal purpose "in Christ Jesus our Lord". He is the center of it. It speaks of the wonderful pleasure that God has had in His Son from eternity. That pleasure has got an extra reason through the life and death of the Son of God Who became Man (*Jn 10:17; Mt 3:17*). Everything that God purposes and does, points at His Son.

The Son is mentioned here by His extended name.

- He is the "Christ", that means 'the Anointed', the Man of God's pleasure, in Whom God finds His joy.

- He is “*Jesus*”, the humble Man Who perfectly lived on earth to God’s glory and Who accomplished His work.
- He is also “*our Lord*”, the Person to Whom we submit ourselves completely with pleasure, acknowledging His authority over our lives.

He, who knows Him, heartily agrees with God’s eternal purpose to make Him the Center of the universe and eternity.

V12. The previous verse is not unfolded for ‘the enlightened eyes of your heart’ (*Eph 1:18*) just to admire, how superb it all might be. It invites to boldly stand in these blessings. That means that you may feel at home in the presence of the Father. Just think about what the basis is for this boldness.

Until now you could have admired the amazing counsels of God. You were impressed that God has allowed you to glimpse into the mysteries of His heart that were there from eternity, and that He also made this known to you. It is all so great that it would make you become so shy that you would not even dare to put one foot on that holy ground. But what did you indeed also see? That the Center of all those counsels of God is ‘Christ Jesus our Lord’. If you would be too timid to put your feet on those counsels, then you may think: the center of all this is our Lord, isn’t it?

Before there was time, before the angels fell into sin, before man fell into sin, He was already the Center. When sin came into the world, He came and solved the huge problem of sin. You entrusted yourself to Him. He is the One, Who came on earth for you and Who died for you, not only to redeem you from your sins, but also to give you these wonderful blessings. Of these blessings He is the Center.

Then you don’t have to feel timid to stand in those blessings and to enjoy them. You can move and express yourself freely in them. “*Boldness*” means something like having a free conscience to say everything that is in your heart. Without any burden in your heart you can stay there and fully enjoy.

But even if you have the boldness now, it would not help you if you didn't have access to those blessings. That is what the second part of this verse makes clear. You have the "access" and that even "confident access". God took away all hindrances. The access is free. You have confidence that God loves to see you in His presence. It is not the case that He just tolerates you in His presence, but He really loves to have you with Him, as the basis is "through faith in Him".

You might be thinking here that it is about the faith in the Lord Jesus as your Savior. That surely has to do with it, but I think it goes a step further. It is about the faith in Him, in Whom God has achieved His eternal purpose, that is Christ Jesus our Lord. Surely He is the One Who went to the cross to die there for your sins and in that way give you access to God (*Rom 5:1-2*). But in the letter to the Ephesians you see Him as the Center of all the counsels of God. If you have learnt to know Him like that and accepted Him through faith like that, then you can enter God's presence in full confidence to admire Him and worship Him for everything He had in mind for the church from eternity.

That you may belong to the church, you owe to the work that Christ has accomplished on the cross. On the cross the perfect dedication and glorification of God have reached their peak and crowning. On this basis God shall achieve His plans. That you, as a member of God's church, are involved in those plans, is a miracle of grace that is worthy of all worship.

V13. Since He has paid the price to give you all this, then you should "not lose heart" at tribulations. In the previous verse your relationship with God is presented. In this verse you see how you are related to the world. To God you have boldness, access and confidence. From the world you may face tribulations. Even if you don't understand why you have tribulations, you can accept through your confidence in Him that there is wisdom and love behind them. You trust that everything is just for your own good. To Paul that was the case.

The word “*therefore*” with which this verse begins, refers to the previous one and gives the reason to the question. God could have liberated him from his imprisonment as He liberated Peter (*Acts 12:7-11*), but He did not. What did the Lord do? He was with Paul, helped him and gave him insight of everything that we now have in his letters.

The imprisonment, apparently the end of his ministry, became the crown of his work, the entire fulfillment of his stewardship. The reason that Paul was imprisoned and had tribulations there, was because of the truth he brought to the Ephesians. They shouldn't be *discouraged* by his imprisonment, but rather *encouraged*. To be related to a heavenly Christ and to live consistently according to that relationship, just creates hostility from religious people who adhere to an earthly or carnal religion.

Paul is not busy with his own situation. He is worried that all the wonderful truths would not have effect in the lives of the believers in Ephesus, because of his imprisonment. They could have been thinking: ‘We are not willing to pay that price.’ That’s why Paul points out to them that he was imprisoned just because of the practice of his stewardship that consisted of the proclamation of the ‘unfathomable riches of Christ among the Gentiles’, to which the Ephesians also belonged. The tribulations were not an addition, but they go wholly together with the proclamation of the truth. To him, tribulations were the earthly counterpart of the heavenly glory.

The Christian who is aware of that will look at the tribulations that arise, as a privilege and a glory, because of his relation with a heavenly Lord.

Now read Ephesians 3:11-13 again.

Reflection: What are your privileges with regard to your connection with God and what is the consequence of that for your connection with the world?

Second Prayer (I) | verses 14-17

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; [and] that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ...

V14. The great truths that Paul has been able to present till here also fill his own heart. Overwhelmed by all that he received from God, he falls on his knees before “*the Father*” of our Lord Jesus Christ. In *chapter 1:17* he already went into prayer to God. There he focused on “*the God of our Lord Jesus Christ*”. I already clarified the distinction between ‘the God of’ and ‘the Father of’ in the study of *chapter 1:3*.

In *chapter 1* Paul prays that the Ephesians would also learn to understand and enjoy the riches that he has described. He surely could write to them that they were blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, but he didn’t have the ability to make them capable of making those blessings their own and also to enjoy them. ‘The God of our Lord Jesus Christ’ had to make them capable for that. That’s why he lifts up his eyes to Him and asks if He will grant them ‘the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened’.

The blessings Paul speaks about here are the possessions of every believer *individually*. It’s wonderful to see how Paul commits himself to make them aware of these blessings and that they enjoy them. For him it is not a matter of delivering a message and going further afterwards. He wants what he has passed on, to ‘arrive’ in the hearts of the believers.

Although it is hard to understand some things, he is very decided not to adjust his message. That is still often the tendency in Christianity today. The message becomes a product that is being adjusted to the desires of the 'client'. But when Paul proclaims the Word, he does that as it is given to him and simultaneously he asks his Sender, in Whose Name he preaches, if he would work out that the Word that has been preached, would also be understood. This example should be followed by every preacher.

Paul was certainly aware of the needs of his 'audience'. He knew that he could not write the contents of the *letter to the Ephesians* to the believers in Corinth for example. They were not ready to receive this message yet, because they were fleshly-minded. That he could tell the Ephesians about the tremendous blessings – to the individual believer and to the church – doesn't mean that they were able to understand all this on their own. It is actually not about intellectual capacities, a great intelligence, but about the heart. When it is understood with the heart, it will have its effect in life. It is Paul's desire that this happens and he prays for that, in *chapter 1* as well as in *chapter 3*.

The motive for his prayer here is what he said in the previous part. The essence of that is the "*unfathomable riches of Christ*" (*verse 8*). This is what he means by "*for this reason*". It is his desire that the believers will also understand the blessings they have received *collectively*, as the church, besides their personal blessings. The blessings of the church are perhaps even greater than those of the individual believers.

An example may clarify this. You can throw a big number of stones on one stack, but you can also build a house of those stones. In both cases you have the same number of stones, but when a house is built of it, that stack of stones has an enormous added value.

That is also the case with the church. All who know the Lord Jesus are living stones, because they have Him as their life. But they represent more. Together they are the house of God, that is the church of the living God (*1Tim 3:15; 1Pet 2:5*). The same goes for

the church as a body. Every believer is a member of that body. They are not members who each live for themselves. *Together* they are the body of Christ. Of that body He is the Head. Paul just told about the wonderful blessings that are connected to it.

Here also he is aware of his incapacity to make them capable to take the blessings with their heart and to enjoy them. For that he starts to pray. He is now praying to 'the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' because the following part is about the Lord Jesus, Who, as the eternal Son, is the Center of all God's purposes. In *chapter 1* he wanted the believers to be aware of all that God had done *for* them through Christ. Now he desires that the believers will be aware of what the Father works *in* them through His Spirit.

V15. The glory of the Father is very great. It reflects from all families that finally will fill the heavens and the earth. All those families are named after Him because they come forth from Him. He is the 'Author' of it. He gave them all a place in His plans.

These families can be families of angels and all sorts of families of people, both Jews and Gentiles. Not that all families call Him Father. That is only applicable for those who became His children by faith in the Lord Jesus. We are brought to that intimate relationship. The Lord Jesus is the Son of the Father from eternity. That's why He also – in a way – is the Head of those various families. The church, however, is directly related to Him. All who belong to it are the family of God in a special way. That will be expressed in the most wonderful way when we soon enter the Father's house to stay there forever with the Father and the Son (*Jn 14:1-3*).

V16. Here Paul is asking the Father to work in accordance with His glory in the believers "*through His Spirit*". They have the Spirit as a guarantee (*Eph 1:13*). It is also only possible through the Spirit "*to be strengthened with power ... in the inner man*". Something must happen *in* the believer and not only *with* or *for* him.

By "*the inner man*" are meant the mind and the sense of man, his considerations, everything that is not visible (*cf. 1Cor 2:11*). What

Paul desires, is that the Spirit of the Father gets the opportunity to fill up that whole 'area' with His power. Wouldn't that be wonderful if you and I would pray that for each other? And what a consequence it would have!

V17. "So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." Oh, may that happen to us, yes, to each child of God. Paul desires that Christ will continuously be the predominating Center of your deepest emotions and affections. That is only possible 'through faith' which means that this place is given to Him in full confidence. Through faith you focus with all you have, on Him.

Also in your life He would be the Center, as He eternally was and is and will be to the Father. Then Christ is not 'just visiting' you, a temporary Guest, but He can 'dwell', which also means that He finds rest there. About this 'dwelling' the Lord makes a wonderful remark in *John 14:23*.

Inseparably linked with this, is "love", which is the true embedding of the previous. God is love. His love is the origin of all His counsels. He, who has his roots in the Divine love ("rooted"), extracts from there the juices for life; he has this love as the foundation for his life ("grounded"), and is capable of enjoying all the glories that Paul has summarized. In the following verses we will have a further look at that.

Now read Ephesians 3:14-17 again.

Reflection: How can it be realized that Christ dwells in your heart through faith?

Second Prayer (II) | verses 18-21

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

..., **18** may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, **19** and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. **20** Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, **21** to Him [be] the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

V18. The word “*may*” indicates a desire, which is connected to what is previously said. Paul prayed in *verse 17* that Christ may dwell in their heart through faith. He also drew the atmosphere of this dwelling by pointing at being rooted and grounded in love. When faith and love work this way, then believers can “*comprehend*” and “*know*” the things that follow.

This is an important principle for Bible study. Intelligence is not the main thing, but the fact that the Center of God’s counsels lives in our hearts. Bible study without having Christ as the Center, and without it being embedded with love, results in knowledge that makes a person puffed up with pride. That’s why this prayer is so important. Being ‘capable’ is not a question of intelligence, a certain rational capacity, but a spiritual capacity to comprehend the following things. These things have to do with all the counsels of God that especially have been brought forward in *chapter 1*.

In this second prayer Paul connects those counsels in a very special way with Christ Who is the Center of them. If you want to understand this, you cannot act on your own. You will need “*all the saints*”. That is also logical. The manifoldness of all those counsels and the boundlessness of Christ’s love are only to be known by pondering over together and sharing these things with each other. In order to have a most complete picture of God’s counsels and

of the love of Christ, each saint is necessary. How could you or I, limited creatures as we are, be able to understand such glory?

The glory of God's counsels and of Christ as the Center of it, have an incalculable outreach.

- Try to think about the “breadth” of it. That includes all the saints from the Day of Pentecost until the rapture of the church.
- Then the “length” of it – that is from eternity to eternity.
- Just look up, in the “height”. There you see Christ, above all principalities and powers, and His church united with Him.
- Just look down, in the “depth”. In those depths you were lying, lost in your sins. But Christ went deeper, picked you up and placed you and me and all who belong to the church in the height, in the Father's House, to the heart of the Father.

V19. Christ did that all, driven by a perfect love for His Father, for the church and for each member of the church separately (cf. *Exo 21:5*). Above all, His love shines in His work on the cross.

It is a profound desire of Paul that we learn to know this love better and better. At the same time he says that it is actually impossible to know that love. How could that eternal, Divine love be fully begirded by the heart of a man? Is that discouraging? No, it is challenging! Who would not want to penetrate into a love which can never be fully fathomed?

I will clarify this by the following and often used example. A child stands at the ocean with his small bucket. He scoops water in it and says, ‘Hey look, I have the ocean in my bucket.’ This will be the desire of every heart that knows Him, in Whom that perfect love of God has become visible, to be filled with that love completely.

The result is that “*you may be filled up to all the fullness of God*”. As it is said, it is not possible for a creature to be filled *with* the whole fullness of God. If we, however, stretch ourselves to know the

love of Christ more and more, we will grow more and more in that direction. Then we will be back at the beginning. After all, it all began with all the fullness of God, right? Through Christ we have all received of that fullness, and grace upon grace (*Jn 1:16*). In Christ that fullness appeared on earth: *"For it was the [Father's] good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him"* (*Col 1:19*).

To 'be filled with all the fullness of God' – that is the final purpose of Paul's prayer – therefore means that we are fully focused on Christ, and that our hearts and lives are full of Him. You can sense that there is no lower purpose. At the same time you might also sense how hard it is to realize that in the world we live. There are so many things around you that want your attention and of which you sometimes have to give attention to.

V20. That's why the content of *verse 20* is such a great encouragement. In any case it is a wonderful verse. You can apply it in every practical situation, but the main intention is that you understand the context in which this verse is used. Then you get the true meaning that is above the application to our daily needs. You will desire that the content of this prayer will become true in your life.

It will be clear that it is all about that and not about something that only happens in heaven. There we don't need prayers anymore. No, on earth this prayer is truly necessary. On earth you are aware of your shortcomings and you doubt sometimes if you will succeed. In this way your eyes are being focused on Him Who is able to realize it in your life. Then you will pray for that. Again you look up, to Him Who is capable of answering your prayer.

Sometimes you don't even pray and you only think how wonderful it would be if your life would be filled with Christ and His love. Then you look up again. Then you see Him, Who knows your thinking and Who is able to fulfill your desires.

It is already amazing to look up to Him Who knows your praying and thinking and replies to it, but it goes much further. He *"is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think"*. Everything is exceedingly abundant and goes beyond whatever a man can

pray or think. That suits completely to the way in which God is presented in this letter, namely as the Source of all blessing. God doesn't give in dribs and drabs. When He gives of His fullness, there is no limit. In praying for and thinking about God's counsels, you sink in it.

Having arrived at this point, Paul only addresses the believers. He involves himself in it and says "we". He also senses that he is dependent on "*the power that works within us*" for the realization of that. By that he points back to the beginning of his prayer, *verse 16*. The Spirit of the Father can work that the things you pray for and about which you think, can be fully effective in your life.

V21. This glory of God has been fully unfolded by Paul. That glory has become visible in God's counsel in respect to the church, while Christ is the Center of it. Overseeing all this, only one thing is left and that is to praise the Father of glory and say to Him that He is worthy to receive all glory.

What is visible to only a few and is shown by just a few today will be seen through all eternity. All generations of all ages will worship and adore that glory in the church and in Christ Jesus.

Paul closes this praise, this special prayer with a suitable "amen". He confirms the content by that: so it is.

Now read Ephesians 3:18-21 again.

Reflection: Pray that you may learn to know the love of Christ as it is presented in this prayer.

Ephesians 4

To Walk Worthy Of the Calling | *verses 1-2*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ...

V1. The word “*therefore*” indicates the beginning of a new section. This word is the transition from the primarily doctrinal part to the more practical part. In more of his letters (see e.g. *Rom 12:1; Col 3:1*) Paul uses the word ‘therefore’ for a transition. The point is that we shall put the teachings of the first part of the letter in practice now. We are now appealed to, to take on responsibility. How important knowledge may be, the intention is that this knowledge will be of effect in your life and mine.

Paul admonishes his readers to walk “*worthy of the calling with which you have been called*”. If you want to heed this admonition, you should know what is meant by this calling. We already came across this word ‘calling’ in *chapter 1:18*. There it is about our personal blessings. It is not about that calling here. The calling here has to do with what we have read in *chapter 2*. There we saw that we, together with all saints, have become one body and one house. It is our calling to put that into practice.

In other letters Paul also speaks about ‘to walk worthy’. Just as in the *letter to the Ephesians* the admonition to walk worthy adapts there also to the doctrine that is given. To the Philippians Paul says in his letter to them: “*Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ*” (*Phil 1:27*). In that letter he writes about his defense of the gospel and the fellowship the Philippians, he

wished, should have therein with him. He desires that their conduct in daily life will be in accordance with that.

In *Colossians 1* the prayer of Paul is focused on encouraging the Colossians “*that you will walk worthy of the Lord*” (*Col 1:10*). That meets the purpose of the letter, namely to focus the hearts of the Colossians on the glorified Lord as the Head of the church.

In *1 Thessalonians 2:12* it is that the believers “*would walk in a manner worthy of God*”. In that letter our eyes are focused on the future when God will establish His kingdom. Paul admonishes there that we as believers show God’s government, that will soon be visible on the earth, already now in our lives.

It is remarkable that Paul starts this chapter with almost the same words as the previous one. But, as you have seen there, after those opening words he first had to speak in some kind of parenthesis about “*the mystery of Christ*” (*Eph 3:4*). In *chapter 4* he picks up the thread with almost the same words. That stresses once more that *chapter 4* actually connects to *chapter 2*.

Because of that you also understand that the calling has to do with what has been brought forward in the last part of *chapter 2*. In the following verses you will see confirmed that it is our calling to keep the unity of the church as body and house. You will surely remember that the unity relates to what Jew and Gentile became *together*. In the church the distinction between both has disappeared. That was preached by Paul and that made him end up in prison.

By presenting himself as a prisoner, must have made his appeal to the believers more urgent to heed his admonition. Take notice that he didn’t see himself as a prisoner of Caesar. Neither did he scold the Jews who handed him over, as if it was their fault. No, he saw himself as “*the prisoner of the Lord*”.

The Lord, to Whom he had devoted his life and service, directed his life. Paul knew he was in His hand. He would have never landed in prison if the Lord had not allowed that. And when the

Lord allows something, He surely has wise intentions. That was the reason Paul had the peace and confidence to adapt himself to the circumstances he was in. In the same way you and I can learn to look at circumstances and situations in which we may be involved and how to deal with them.

V2. After his admonition to walk worthy of the calling, he describes in *verse 2* in what mind this walk should take place. The mind of such a person will be expressed in: lowliness and gentleness with longsuffering, love and bearing with one another. The purpose that should be achieved is to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The different characteristics of that unity are summarized in the *verses 4-6*.

The first characteristic is "*humility*". 'Humility' doesn't mean that you think bad about yourself or always speak about your own insignificance. If that was the case, then you yourself are still the center. Humility means that you don't talk about yourself at all. It indicates the condition of your heart. You are not the one who is important, the Lord and His own are important. It is not about your honor but about His honor.

He, who is really humble, has learnt to renounce himself and to look upon the Lord. Your own self has only been erased when the Lord is at the forefront. Humility effaces itself to make Christ to be everything. This is how every good communication between believers starts. That's why 'all humility' is firstly mentioned.

After humility follows "*gentleness*". Just as we have to learn to be humble we also must learn to be gentle. Therefore our urges and pride need to be judged: our own 'I' must be held in death; that means in the death that Christ died, for there we – there I – died. It took Moses forty years before he was ready for that. In those forty years he changed from an irascible man to a humble man (cf. *Exo 2:12* with *Num 12:3*). After that change he could be used by God to lead His people.

He who is humble will be no threat to anyone; he who is gentle doesn't feel himself threatened by anyone. This was perfectly

present in the Lord. He could say: *"I am gentle and humble in heart"* (Mt 11:29). He was always that. That's why he could precede that phrase by saying *"learn from Me"*. We are *not* humble and gentle by nature, but we can become like that if we want to learn from Him. His offer to learn from Him is still applicable.

Now it can be the case that you by God's grace have made progress in the classroom of the Lord. But you still have to deal with your brothers and sisters. You may then notice that there are some who want to assert themselves, which can cause that others feel threatened by that and irascibly react to that. How do you have to deal with that? You must learn to deal with that *"with patience"*.

'Patience' or 'longsuffering' means 'to bear for a long time', that you can put up with your brother or sister for a very long time. So it is about dealing with patience towards your fellow believers male or female, by being humble and gentle.

There is a danger that you show this attitude, but that you have the feeling that you're better than the other. You may have the attitude of someone that has achieved a lofty status, from which you may look down at others who are not that far yet, with contempt. Paul is aware of that danger and therefore adds that we should bear each other in love. You should realize that the three characteristics mentioned, can only flourish when they are rooted in love. Love enables one to bear the other in love, who has not yet fully developed, just as you are not perfect yet.

To see what love does and how it works, you can read *1 Corinthians 13*. The features of love mentioned there are those of God, for God is love (*1Jn 4:8,16*). All His features emerge from that. This is how it was with the Lord Jesus. It should be the same with us, who have received the Lord Jesus as our life.

Now read Ephesians 4:1-2 again.

Reflection: Which characteristics do you need to keep the unity?

The Unity of the Spirit | verses 3-6

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

..., **3** being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **4** [There is] one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

V3. In the previous verses we saw the characteristics that are necessary to be able to preserve the unity of the Spirit. Now let us take a look at preserving the unity of the Spirit on its own. This is an extremely important element that is often misconceived. It is not said that we should preserve the unity of the body. The unity of the body already exists.

Unfortunately that unity has not been preserved *in practice*. Disagreements among us Christians are the cause of that. We do not follow the Lord Jesus together. For example, everyone has his favorite doctrine or preacher. Our human preference has gotten priority above what God has said in His Word about the church.

Yet as a (local) church, it is possible to show that there is one body. That happens where the unity of the Spirit is being preserved. Therefore the appeal is not to make efforts to preserve the unity of the body, but the unity of the Spirit. There is only one Spirit, Whom all have received who have believed the gospel of their salvation (1Cor 15:1-4; Eph 1:13). Also through that one Spirit the one body has come into being, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost (1Cor 12:13). Now all who have received the Spirit are being appealed to preserve the unity of the Spirit. So it is not an appeal to the individual Christian, but it concerns all who belong to the one body.

To walk in and to be led by the Spirit (Gal 5:16,18) can happen individually, but preserving the unity of the Spirit can only take place *together with others*. The unity of the Spirit is not just simply

a unity in thoughts, a unity that can be acquired by an agreement with each other, sometimes through a compromise. To such unity the Spirit has no part. It is about a unity that we see in the beginning of Christianity. Then they were “*of one heart and one soul*” (Acts 4:32).

That unity has not been preserved as that of the body hasn't. Yet we are called here to preserve the unity in the bond of peace, even endeavor to do that, which means to make efforts. We can do that by taking care *with our fellow believers* not to give room for the flesh. This care came because the flesh, the human mind, has found a way to have influence in preserving the unity of the Spirit.

The activity of the flesh has come to expression in two ways. On the one hand people have formed a unity that is broader than that of the Spirit and on the other hand they have formed a unity that is narrower than that of the Spirit. A unity that is broader than that of the Spirit you find in churches where people are being accepted as Christians when they are not. You find them in churches, where one can be a member without having really been converted and without having a God fearing walk, which is a result of that. People can be a member there through baptism and by confession without having even the slightest change in the heart. There the unity of the Spirit is not being preserved, but a human unity is being formed.

The other side, a unity that is narrower, more limited than that of the Spirit, you see everywhere where believers with a God fearing walk are being refused, because they do not consent to rules made by man. You find this in churches and communities where demands are made that the Lord does not command us to do. In practice those demands get more authority than the Word of God, while they are in fact commandments of man.

The unity of the Spirit includes all children of God. The only demand for preserving the unity of the Spirit, you find in *2 Timothy 2:20-22*. There it is said that one must call on the Lord out of a pure heart, what only a genuine believer can do, and that we

must walk in separation of evil. Where the unity of the Spirit is being preserved in this way, the unity of the body can become visible.

I don't know which denomination you frequent, but here you have a touch stone to judge in which way people are gathering, whether it is or is not according to the will of God. Because this is such an important subject, I have given it a more thorough consideration. More consideration could be given to this, but I think I have mentioned the most important features. It depends on us to apply them.

For a right application Paul yet points to "*the bond of peace*". It may be clear that all that is mentioned must happen in peace when we put it into practice. In your diligence you might forget to consider others or you would possibly impose your will on others. In both cases peace is missing. Peace is not so much the absence of quarrels, but it is a kind of making efforts with fellow believers harmoniously to preserve the unity of the Spirit. When peace is the bond in which you show your diligence, you're doing right.

V4. In *verses 4-6* the word "*one*" appears seven times to present the seven aspects of unity. These seven aspects of unity you can subdivide into three groups. *Verse 4* forms the first group. There it is about genuine believers, about the inner side of our unity, something we share inwardly.

1. Only true believers form "*one body*";
2. only they have the Holy Spirit indwelling, they have "*one Spirit*";
3. only they can speak about "*one hope*" of a calling that came from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To this calling Christian professors (unconverted Christians) have no part. It is about the calling in connection to heaven on which the hope of the believer is set and which will be fulfilled when

the Lord Jesus comes back. Then we shall fully enjoy all glorious blessings of which we read in this letter.

V5. This verse shows the second group. Here it is about the practical unity of the genuine believers.

1. The world cannot see anything of the inward aspect of *verse 4*. What they do see, is that the believers live in submission to “*one Lord*”. He Himself is not visibly present on earth to exercise His government, but His authority is apparent in the life of His servants. Their confession is that they acknowledge Christ as Lord. They serve Him voluntarily before the time comes that everyone will be coerced to do that.
2. What also is visible is “*one faith*” – maybe not so much visible, but rather audible. Those who want to keep the unity of the Spirit, confess one truth of faith, however different they may be among themselves.
3. They also have a totally different position towards the world, which is in contrast to them who belong to the world. That they have shown in “*one baptism*”. The world can be a witness of somebody being baptized. From the baptism flows the testimony that the baptized one chooses the side of the dead and rejected One, Whom we know as the glorified Lord. Through baptism you are being separated from the world and from a life in sin and you are added to Christ as Lord, in order to walk in newness of life henceforth (*Rom 6:1-4*).

So baptism is an external characteristic to which a new kind of walk of life is connected and which is noticeable for the world. She sees the people who are baptized to the Name of the Lord Jesus; people who acknowledge Him as their only Lord and who confess one truth of faith.

By the way, baptism has nothing to do with becoming a member of the body of Christ. You do not become a mem-

ber of the body of Christ by baptism, but by receiving the Holy Spirit.

V6. “*One God and Father of all*” shows us the third aspect of the unity of the Spirit. All genuine believers have been brought in connection with God as Father and may know Him in that way. The believers have been brought that close to God. At the same time He is also “*over all*”. After all He is God and we remain creatures. But He works also “*through all*”. He becomes visible in the life of all His own, He works through them.

Finally He is also “*in all*”. I think *John 17:23* gives the best reflection of what “*in all*” means. There the Lord Jesus says to the Father: “*I in them, and You in Me.*” The Lord Jesus is in us, because we have eternal life in the Son (*1Jn 5:11-12*). Because the Son is in us, is why the Father is also in us. Isn’t that a great thought?

Now read Ephesians 4:3-6 again.

Reflection: What is your contribution in ‘preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’?

Christ's Gift | *verses 7-10*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." 9 (Now this [expression], "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

V7. In the previous verses the unity of the church has been highlighted. Now you are going to see the other side. Within the church each member has his own unique role to practice. Every member has his own specific function and each separate function is meant to let the whole body function as a harmonious unity.

Now it is not said here that a gift was given to us, but that "grace" is given to us. I think that in this way the emphasis is more on what is needed for you to fulfill your function than on the function itself. You may be aware of the fact that you have a function in the body, but you must also be aware of being dependent on the necessary grace to practice that function. Well, you may know that the grace is there already, you don't have to wait for it anymore. You may start right away. And you also have received the exact measure of grace that you need to practice your gift. It has been measured by Christ very precisely. He is the One Who gives grace.

V8. In *verses 8-10* Christ is put one more time in the spotlight. Who is He, Who distributes this grace and does that with the exact measure? He is the One, Who has thoroughly defeated the enemy. He is the One, Who is above all and all things as a result of that. He is the One, Who distributes gifts to the members of His body from that position.

Let us first take a look at the victory that is described in *verse 8*. This verse is introduced by the word “*therefore*” and is followed by a quotation of *Psalms 68:18*. At first sight it may seem strange that Paul quotes a verse from the Old Testament to illustrate his teachings. But wasn’t it that in the Old Testament there was no mention of the church? He discussed that issue in detail in the previous chapter, didn’t he? That is right, but in the Old Testament *Christ* is being spoken of, and with reference to Him, Paul quotes this verse.

The word ‘*therefore*’ indicates that the quotation from *Psalms 68* is meant as a confirmation of *verse 7*. In that verse it is about Christ as the Giver. *Verse 8* emphasizes both the place from where He gives, “*on high*”, and what He has done so that He could give, “*He led captive a host of captives*” or “*He led captivity captive*”.

Psalms 68 is a victory psalm. There you read how the Lord (Yahweh) scatters His enemies and puts them to flight. Kings, who were rebellious against Him, perish in front of His face. To His oppressed people God’s action means liberation. That’s why they celebrate. This scene foresees the beginning of the millennial kingdom of peace.

Paul quotes this psalm because he knows that the victory that will be publicly seen then, is now already a reality for faith. The Lord Jesus has gone through death; after that He rose and “*He ascended on high*”. The word ‘*ascended*’ makes you taste Divine power, the majesty of the Conqueror. That He has ‘*led the captivity captive*’ means that He has disempowered everything that brought men into captivity. Therefore you read in *Hebrews 2:14b-15*: “*That through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.*” He has conquered the power of sin, death, world and flesh for all who belong to Him.

But He did not only liberate them, He also gave them gifts. First, God gave Him gifts in reward for His victory. In His turn Christ gives the gifts to all who partake in His victory and those are we. So the gifts come from One Who has triumphed and is in heaven

now. So in *verse 8* we see the Conqueror Who ascends on high in triumph. And His victory is very great, as He not only defeated him, who kept us in captivity, but also his whole government machinery, everything that served him. Also we, who were in captivity, are freed. Therefore He can also give us gifts.

V9. *Verse 9* makes clear how the victory happened. It happened because He descended to earth and not only to earth, but into the lower parts of it, which means in death. If He had only come to earth, He couldn't lead the captivity captive. He had to descend into death, into the grave. It is the victory of Someone, Who entered the den of the lion, Who went through death and appeared as Conqueror.

He showed that He is above the power of satan. All who are connected to Him and are partakers of His work on the cross, are also partakers of its results. With Him they are saved from the power of death and are made to sit together in the heavenly places with Him. This only concerns the believers. As far as the unbelievers are concerned, they are still under the power of sin and death.

"Descended into the lower parts of the earth" doesn't mean 'descended into hell', as if the Lord Jesus had been in hell. This is what is included in the Dutch confession of faith, but not in the Bible. It can surely be said that the Lord Jesus underwent the judgment of God when He was judged because of our sins. Had He not done that, then we would have been eternally condemned to hell under the wrath of God. The judgment He underwent was surely not less than what our part would have been in hell.

V10. He didn't stay into those 'lower parts of the earth'. He had been highly raised *"above all the heavens"*, after He triumphed, with the purpose *"that He might fill all things"* (cf. Jer 23:24). There is no depth too deep but He has been there and there is no height too high but He is exalted above it.

'Above all heavens' is a remarkable expression. It is the superlative degree of superiority. In *Mark 16:19* you read about the first degree. There He, the true Servant, 'is received up into heaven'.

In *Hebrews 4:14* you see the second degree. There He is the great High Priest 'Who has passed through the heavens'. In our verse He is the triumphing Man Who has ascended 'above all heavens'. This is the third degree, the superlative, the all exceeding degree.

He will fill all things with His presence. That reminds us of what we read in *chapter 1:23*. The difference is that there it is about Him as God, while here it is about Him as Man. It clarifies that there it is about one Person Who is God as well as Man. Incomprehensible and inexplicable for human intellect, but faith 'worships and bows down'.

The glory of His Person is unfathomable and unsearchable. It invites you to be occupied with that Person and to enjoy Him more and more and to admire Him. In eternity there will be no place in heaven or on earth where His glory will not be visible. Then there will be no room for anything else. It is Him and Him only. What He will be then may be already reality for the heart of each one who is connected to Him. The Holy Spirit wants to focus our heart on Him. How He does that, you will see in the following verses.

Now read *Ephesians 4:7-10* again.

Reflection: Tell in your own words what you see of the greatness of the Lord Jesus in these verses.

The Purpose of the Gifts | verses 11-13

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

11 And He gave some [as] apostles, and some [as] prophets, and some [as] evangelists, and some [as] pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

V11. "And He", that is how the verse begins, that has the emphasis. He, Whose great glory and superiority you saw in the previous verses. He has ascended on high and is there the triumphant Man above all things. He has made captive the power that ruled over men. His victory and His power are not visible for the world yet at the moment. Yet He proves already His power in this world. Do you know how? It is because He, as He had promised (verse 8), gives gifts to the people He has liberated from the power of the enemy.

That He gives gifts to the church is the proof that He is above all things. The church is in the world, on the territory where satan rules. Yet satan has not a bit of authority over the church, but Christ has all authority. His power is so great that He uses former captives of satan as instruments to also redeem others and to build them up.

Now you should read the following very well. It is said: "He gave some ..." So it is not that He gave gifts to particular persons. That you can read for example in *Romans 12:6-8*. There somebody has a gift. The same goes for *1 Corinthians 12:4-11*. But here the person himself has been given as a gift to the church by the Lord Jesus.

In each gift mentioned here, you see something of what Christ is to His own. He is the Apostle of our confession (*Heb 3:1*), the Prophet raised up by God (*Acts 3:22*), the Evangelist, Who

preached the gospel to the poor (*Mt 11:5*), the good, great and chief Shepherd of the sheep (*Jn 10:11,14; Heb 13:20; 1Pet 5:4*).

The first who are mentioned are the apostles. Together with them, the prophets have already been mentioned earlier, in *chapter 2:20* and *3:5*; here they are mentioned second. In *chapter 2:20* they are the preparers of the foundation of the church as the house of God. In *chapter 3:5* they are the ones to whom God made known the mystery of the church so that they would pass that on.

In both cases it is about a unique happening, as preparing a foundation is something you only do once and a mystery that has been made known doesn't have to be revealed anymore afterwards. As such the apostles and the prophets, who are meant here, do not need followers. You will also search in vain for such a thing as 'apostolic succession' in the Bible. We have no apostles anymore.

That becomes clearer if you think about the conditions to become an apostle. That is somebody who

- must have seen the Lord Jesus (*1Cor 9:1*) and
- must be known by his signs (*2Cor 12:12*).

The same goes for the prophets. It is not about Old Testament prophets. If that was the case, it would not have been said here 'apostles and prophets', but 'prophets and apostles'. No, it is about New Testament prophets who together with the apostles prepared the foundation of the church and to whom God has made known the mystery of the church.

But even though these gifts are no longer present on earth as persons, we do have their service. Their letters are in the Bible actually. Apostles are Matthew, John, Peter and Paul and prophets are Mark and Luke. When we read their Gospels and letters and take them to heart, we will be made suitable more and more as members of the church to fulfill the task we have as members.

The three following gifts are still as persons among us. Evangelists are taking care of new 'accretion' of the church. Shepherds

and teachers make sure that these new members get pastoral care, nourishment and teaching.

V12. This is reflected in the multiple purposes that are mentioned in *verse 12*. The service of the gifts is focused on *“the saints”*. The result of the service is that these saints finally will come to the *“measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” (verse 13)*. So the gifts are focused on the saints, on you and me, first of all *“for the equipping of”* us. The meaning of that is that all members of the body will be made aware of which place they have in the body and also which function they fulfill as members.

So it is about the functioning of the whole body and that can only happen when every member functions properly. The Lord Jesus cannot be satisfied with an inadequately functioning body. That’s why it is important that every member separately should make use of these gifts. That means to be occupied with God’s Word, by using bible commentaries from teachers who are faithful to the Scripture, listening to their sermons, attending the gatherings where the Word is being clarified and practiced. By the way, this doesn’t mean that we should not examine if the things they write or say are in accordance with God’s Word (*see Acts 17:11*).

In this way members like you and I, are being equipped *“for the work of service”*. We shall become more and more capable to do the task that the Lord destined for us to do when He added us to the church through the means of His evangelists. This ministry is also not on its own, but goes for *“the building up of the body of Christ”*. It is about the whole.

You’re not a member just by yourself. It doesn’t work that way in the human body and neither in the spiritual body. Everyone is there for the other and is put to the service of the whole body. (So it is not limited to some members of the body who you know and with whom you gather.) And that whole body is there for Christ.

V13. The work of the gifts is only ready when *“we all attain to the unity of the faith”*. As long as there are divisions, there is no ‘unity of the faith’. It is not a confession of faith that is established

by people and through which believers, however, are being separated in practice. Therefore each of the gifts that are given by the Lord Jesus, are meant to bring all members together on the ground of the one and whole truth of God.

It is not possible to experience this unity of faith and at the same time be a member of a church or group. There is only *one* truth. And the only membership we read of in the Bible is the membership of the body of Christ. In heaven there will be no difference in views and neither will there be division. There shall be unity in believing the one truth.

The gifts are working on that already now. They shall teach all members together the whole truth of faith. They therefore do not proclaim a number of truths of faith or dogma's, but a Person. In the unity of faith it is about "*the knowledge of the Son of God*". The concern of the gifts is that all members grow together to Him and that the Lord, Who is the eternal Son, is sufficient unto them.

That is the characteristic of genuine ministry, a ministry that perseveres until all members have come "*to a mature man*", that is until spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is measured by the fact that Christ is formed in them (*Gal 4:19*). That is the meaning of "*the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ*". This is how God measures the growth of the church. God cannot and will never lower that standard. We shall heartily agree with that when we have become aware of the glory of the Christ of God Who has been given by God to the church.

Now read Ephesians 4:11-13 again.

Reflection: What is the task of the gifts?

Grow Up Into Him Who Is the Head | *verses 14-16*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all [aspects] into Him who is the head, [even] Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

V14. In the previous verses you saw that the Lord Jesus gave gifts to the church with a specific purpose, namely to come to the fullness of Christ. That purpose will only be perfectly achieved when we are with the Lord in heaven.

But also for here and now a purpose is achieved when the gifts can practice their tasks on you and me. That purpose is that we stand firmly and will not be wiped out immediately when the enemy attacks us. When you and I as members of Christ are filled with the fullness of Christ, the doctrines of the enemy will not get a chance to toss us to and fro. The enemy will do his utmost to prevent the members to grow together to be 'a perfect man', full of 'the knowledge of the Son of God' (*verse 13*).

One of his tested means is sowing seeds of disunity among the members. He starts with driving a wedge in the unity. For him it doesn't matter what the theme of the disunity is, whether it is a quarrel about a normal everyday thing, or a wrong doctrine about the Person or the work of Christ, as long as the members get into fights. The result is that the image of the fullness of Christ is not to be seen anymore.

When the members form a unity, when they are together and support each other, they are strong. When they are separated from each other, they are weak. Then the church is not a testimony

anymore of the unity of the faith. And when the members are set up against each other, satan's success really is complete. Because they are not firmly rooted in the teaching of the Scripture, they quickly drift about back and forth, when they hear people preaching their own 'truth'. And when those 'preachers' know how to preach convincingly, they deceive a lot of people. Quite a few of American television preachers are living examples of that.

The enemy achieves his greatest success in churches where the believers remain as babies or "*children*". Those believers do not grow in the truth, they are stunted, immature. They know nothing of the unity of the church and, the more miserable thing is, that they have no desire to know that. That's why they have no stability and are an easy victim for sly people who just mislead them with their deceptions. With their deceptions they let the unstable members go astray. Often these believers remain dependent on a specific type of leader.

Every gift, every genuine servant, feeds a child in faith in a way that it doesn't stay dependent on him. The true servant becomes happy when he sees that babies in faith are growing more and more into the Lord and more and more independent, because of his teaching.

V15. In his teaching he shall certainly make use of truth and love. Those are the right ingredients in order to grow into Christ. The verse starts with "*but*" and therefore forms a contradiction to the previous. Truth stands over against deception and error, and love stands over against craftiness. Truth as well as love is needed to grow healthily. Truth without love is weak and leads to carnal tolerance.

"Speaking [or: holding] the truth in love" means that you, as a member of the body, are truthfully in your performance. You live from the truth and you reflect the truth. You do that in a spirit of love. Love is as it were the smell of a good perfume that surrounds you.

This was perfectly seen in Christ. Everything He said and did was truthfully and embedded in love. A result of that is, that what is

said without the mind of Christ, is not really true. It comes from the flesh. To 'impose the truth' on somebody is not "*speaking the truth in love*". I'm afraid that I'm not the only one who shamefully has to admit to have said things that were indeed true, but which were not surrounded by the perfume of love. Truth is only that which is also kept in love.

The opposite is also true. Only that which is true love is in accordance with truth. When you are only being nice and never speak of things that are wrong, you are not truthfully in love. Then love is hypocrisy, just fake. True love will correct the other on the wrong things, because wrong things cause damage. When you do that, you prove that you love that person, as you prevent him from damage or you limit the damage.

What goes for the individual also goes for the church as a whole, and that is the main issue here. A companionship that holds on to the truth in love is not easily tossed here and there by every wind of doctrine. That is a company of people where every believer has his own firm and inextricable link with Christ, the Head of the body. Together they grow up into Him in everything. All aspects of their common lives are permeated with the features of the Head. As already said, truth and love are the features of Christ. When these are found in His members, the result will be that they will look like Him and they will grow up into Him.

V16. In his turn, growing up into Him is also the result of being linked with the Head. From Christ – as the Head of the body – everything flows, what is needed for the body to grow. The point is that the body grows. But the whole body consists of all parts that are linked to each other by joints. For the growth of the body it is necessary that every member grows. There should be no member doing his own thing, taking care of himself, apart from the Head. Such a conduct would obstruct the growth of the whole and can cause imbalance.

It is God's intention that each member grows by being linked with the Head. In this way every member will be able to work in such a way as is suited to the position he has in the body. The

'teamwork' between the members mutually will occur harmoniously. The joints, the invisible links between the members, will not do their job squeaking and creakingly.

God has decided the measure of every member. No member has to do more, but should neither do less than is appropriate to do. A hand should do only the work of the hand. It must not want to do the work of the foot or add that to his work, as that will break the balance of the body. Then the whole body is not visible anymore, but only some functions which also 'perform' even badly. In this way the Head, Who loves to see His reflection in His whole body, is dishonored.

When the members serve each other and make each other happy, it is the result of Christ's work in them. He serves and makes happy. When the work of Christ can be manifested in this way in the members, they will together show Christ on earth. When the body functions that way from the Head, it builds itself up. Through the service the members serve each other with, they will grow up into Him, Who is the Head.

This rich verse ends with the words "*in love*". Love is, just as for speaking the truth, the only suitable 'climate' in which the growth can be realized at its best.

Now read Ephesians 4:14-16 again.

Reflection: What is the point of these verses for you?

Past and Present | *verses 17-24*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self [lit man] which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self [lit man], which in [the likeness of] God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

V17. There is a big contrast between *verses 17-19* and the previous verses. The spirit of the world, wherein everyone is living just for himself, stands completely against the body and the members where everyone is there for the other. But Paul points to the danger that the spirit of the world may exert its influence in the church. You should always be aware that your old habits may suddenly arise. It is dangerous to think that your past cannot influence you anymore. The only security to escape from that is to remain close to the Lord Jesus.

You can notice from the introductory words of Paul that you must take this warning seriously. The words “*so this I say, and affirm*” emphasizes what he is going to say. The addition “*with the Lord*” indicates the fellowship in the Lord between writer and readers.

The starting point of his admonition is the absolute separation between the believers and the Gentiles, to which they belonged in the past, but not anymore now. The separation is radical and must be seen in their whole walk, in everything.

The walk of man is strongly related with his “*mind*”. The ‘mind’ consists of his thinking, in the widest sense of the word. The origin of his walk is there. He lives in accordance with his thinking. The mind of man produces nothing of permanent value: it is ‘futile’. How different it is what God expects from the believer. The Lord Jesus says to His disciples: “*I ... appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and [that] your fruit would remain*” (Jn 15:16).

V18. The “*understanding*” is the capacity to gain knowledge, to fathom something. In the world people look up to others who have a great intellect. Awards are given to people who have achieved brilliant brainwork. However, if these people are not related to God through conversion and new life, all their works have been achieved in darkness. Darkness rules everywhere, where God’s light doesn’t shine. They are in darkness and darkness is in them.

There is no life from God in them; they are “*excluded from*” it. They have always kept it at a distance. They do not want to share in it. They closed themselves to it. They don’t know anything of it and don’t want to have anything to do with it.

This attitude is the result of “*the hardness of their heart*”. The heart is the inner core of man; it is the center of his whole being. A hardened heart is inaccessible for the good and is incorrigible. Actually it is a circle: he who always rejects everything that comes from God makes his heart blind; and he who has a blinded heart always rejects everything that comes from God.

V19. Yet Paul is not finished with the black painting of the man-without-God. To God everything is futility, darkness, death, ignorance and hardness. To themselves and to their environment, there is no sense of what is appropriate. Their natural feelings do not work anymore; they are “*callous*”. He who is on the one hand ‘excluded from the life of God’, is on the other hand very familiar with life in sin. There he feels at ease and at home.

Such people have lawlessly given themselves to mostly depraved things. With greediness they throw themselves to every thinkable excess of dissipation (1Pet 4:4). By “*impurity*” often is meant,

sexual uncleanness. By “greediness” is meant, that there is an inner pressure to have more and more. There is an insatiable craving to fulfill the unclean desires.

V20. After this description of the impetuous walk of the Gentiles, it becomes apparent that there is a huge contrast with Christ. It is remarkable that Paul doesn't present opposite to the world's way of living a Christian way of living, but he presents a Person. The believers in Ephesus did not receive a new doctrine, but they received Christ. He is the content of all that they have learnt. All the plans of God are connected with Him and have Him as the Center and purpose. There is no truth of the Scripture that is apart from Christ.

The Christ Who was preached to the Ephesians, was the Man of God's right hand. Everything He is and Who He is, is completely strange to the content of the *verses 17-19*. There is no connection at all between Him and the Gentiles. That means that for the Christian who is related to Him, the previous must be ‘passé’, past time.

V21. By the name ‘Christ’ you can think of the Lord Jesus as the Man of God's counsels. In this way you have learnt to know Him after you have accepted Him as your Savior and Lord. That opened the door to an unknown glory. In that glory you penetrate furthermore, the more you learn about Him. All truth of God is present in Him. That truth you see, said with reverence, in the flesh in ‘Jesus’.

By using the name ‘Jesus’, you can think of His life when He was on earth. Paul doesn't often mention ‘Jesus’ without any addition. He only does that when he points at Him as the humble Man on earth. Paul does that here to present Him as an Example. In order to know how to reflect the truth of God on earth, you should look at the life of Jesus.

V22. ‘The truth in Jesus’ becomes visible in our lives when we have put off the old man and have put on the new man. “*The old man*” is the fallen Adam as he is reflected in all his aspects (characteristics) in all human beings: very pleasing or very unpleasing

and everything in between. “*Our old self (or: old man) was crucified with [Him]*” (Rom 6:6). That is how God dealt with it. The consequence is that we should look at the old man that way, we should put off.

Therefore there is nothing at all to be improved on the old man. On the contrary, only deceiving desires come from it, which improve a process of destruction. At your conversion the connection with the old man and his walk is radically broken. In *Acts 19:18-19* you can read how that happened, regarding the Ephesians.

V23-24. Instead of the old, something completely new has come. A new source of thinking has come, which causes a new walk. In the new walk “*the new self*” becomes visible. That new man is totally in accordance with Whom God is. The Lord Jesus was that also. Yet, He is not the new man. Of the new man it is said that he is created. The Lord Jesus is not created. But the features of the new man are just the same as those of the Lord Jesus. In Him and in God there is nothing present that belongs to the old man. The new man is everywhere to be seen where believers show the features of the Lord Jesus.

The new man is therefore not a restoration of the first man, Adam. You cannot say of Adam that he has been created “*in true righteousness and holiness*”, as when he was created, there was no sin yet. He was not ‘righteous’, but innocent; he had no knowledge of good and evil. That knowledge came after his fall into sin. From that moment he could do no good anymore – he could do only evil.

The new man also has the knowledge of good and evil, but he always chooses the good and rejects the evil. ‘Righteousness’ means doing what is right, in the midst of, and against the evil. ‘Holiness’ means separation to God, while we are surrounded by the evil.

Now read Ephesians 4:17-24 again.

Reflection: What are the differences in your case, between the past and present?

The New Man | verses 25-29

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE [of you] WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another. 26 BE ANGRY, AND [yet] DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not give the devil an opportunity. 28 He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have [something] to share with one who has need. 29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such [a word] as is good for edification according to the need [of the moment], so that it will give grace to those who hear.

V25. The word “therefore” indicates that the admonitions that now follow arise from what has just been said. The believers in Ephesus had heard about the ‘truth in Jesus’. Paul had told them about the old and the new man. He made it clear that the new man ‘is created according to God’. You might know all that, but you only have really understood it, if that is also visible in your life.

That’s why Paul now gives his teachings real substance. He demonstrates how the features of God should be reflected in the life of the believer. You have the possibility to do that. After all you ‘are created according to God’. That means that you have been renewed to look like God by reflecting His features in your daily life.

The first Man on earth in Whom it was perfectly seen, is the Lord Jesus. Not a (half or whole) lie have ever come out of His mouth (cf. 1Pet 2:22); He always spoke the full truth. And that should also be the case with everyone who is created according to God.

Lying is a conscious denial of the truth or a conscious twist of that. You throw dust in people’s eyes, because it brings you profit. That doesn’t always have to be financial profit. It can also help you to cover your true intentions. But that is not how God is and

neither how the Lord Jesus was when He was on earth. God is perfectly transparent, as was the Lord Jesus also on earth. He only spoke truth and could say: "*I am the truth*" (Jn 14:6). And "*no lie is of the truth*" (1Jn 2:21).

Of course 'not lying' and 'speaking the truth' is something you should always do towards everybody, but here it is said especially towards your fellow believers. When you lie towards your brother, you deceive yourself. That is in fact embedded within the words "*for we are members of one another*". This approach is completely suitable for the letter in which the unity of the church is so significant.

V26. Lying is always wrong and happens deliberately at almost all times. 'Getting angry' is not always wrong and that happens at almost all times spontaneously in cases of injustice. We speak of 'holy anger' which arises in a situation where God is being dishonored. That anger is appropriate. Here the apostle even appeals to it: "*Be angry.*"

Getting angry is not against love. God is love, but He is angry about sin and therefore anger is not against love. The Lord Jesus was angry about the dishonor that had been done to His God and cleansed the temple in anger (Mt 21:12).

The point is that we are risking that our anger becomes a sinful anger. That's why there follows the addition straight afterwards: "*And do not sin.*" When we get angry in a case of a certain injustice, we can get that indignant and agitated that we lose our self-control. In such a case we may unthinkingly say or do things that are not 'according to God'. Regarding the Lord Jesus, we see that anger and sadness go perfectly together in balance (Mk 3:5); regarding us, there is a chance that anger goes together with being hurt personally.

Moses 'anger became hot' once. That happened when he got down from the mountain and saw the people dancing around the gold calf (Exo 32:19). That anger was appropriate. Afterwards he got angry again and struck the rock instead of speaking to it,

as God commanded. There he was quick tempered and for that anger God had to punish him, because he then was sinning and gave room to the devil (*Num 20:7-12*).

That the sun should not go down on your wrath, means that we should not cherish wrath, but take this to God. *Psalms 4:4* points to that. When you cherish wrath, the sun will also go down on your wrath spiritually. You will get sour and all light and prospect you have, will fade away. Wrath can then change into hatred and resentment.

It is possible that you have come to such a situation, due to an injustice done to you. You should then search for somebody you can trust to help you. Just do something to get into the light again!

V27. “*Do not give the devil an opportunity*” means: do not give him any room to let you sin. When you have done that, take that away immediately from him, so that your life is not being pushed further into darkness. He has no right to it, as the Lord has conquered him. Let him no longer take advantage of you (*see also 2Cor 2:11*).

V28. After Paul has dealt with our speech and emotions in relation to the old and the new man, he now comes to our deeds. Stealing is enriching yourself at the expense of others; giving is to enrich others at your own expense. The law is clear about lying and stealing: “*You shall not ...*” (*Exo 20:15-16*). Paul doesn’t appeal to the law, however! The Christian, who is made to sit in Christ in heaven and is blessed there with all spiritual blessings, does not live in the realm of the law anymore.

Of course he should not lie and steal, but nobody wants that at all, who ‘is created according to God’. On the contrary, such a person wants to show the features of God. Has God stolen anything? This is a foolish question. God is a giver (*Jn 4:10*) and He gives gently. Such will also be the case with you.

You don’t have to be a former thief to learn how to reflect God in your life. Here it even goes further than what you read in *Romans 13:8*: “*Owe nothing to anyone.*” Okay, you don’t steal; you don’t

even owe anybody anything. But in the light of this letter that is not the peak of being a Christian. Here you are being addressed at the highest level: by working hard, honest and good, you will be able to give to others.

Paul himself has given the good example – with which he brought into practice the words of the Lord Jesus – when he said to the elders of the church in Ephesus: *“I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my [own] needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’”* (Acts 20:33-35).

V29. God neither steals anything nor says anything that is damaging or unedifying. Everything that God says, His whole Word, is good, edifies and gives grace. The world is full of filthy words and dirty expressions. Radio, television, the internet, books and magazines are mainly nothing else but channels of the old man. They pass their message to whoever wants to hear, watch and read. Listeners, viewers and readers are being provided with a jargon that is familiar to the old man. The discussions in the workplace and meeting rooms prove this. The language they use, are often not free from ‘filth’ in the sense of bad, perverse.

The expression *“unwholesome word”* doesn’t only refer to a wrong, dirty expression, but also to the whole content, the message that is being passed on. And whether someone uses vulgar or respectable words, his language usage is unclean or dirty when his message is ‘dirty’. No, also in the language usage God would love to recognize Himself.

Instead of a word that causes decay and destruction, our words should be an instrument *“that may impart grace to the hearers”*. Of the Lord Jesus it is testified: *“Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks”* (Jn 7:46). He spoke *“gracious words, comforting words”* (Zec 1:13). The words *“as is good for edification according to the need [of the moment]”* indicate that, not only what has been said is important, but also when and where it is said.

I heartily hope that in your and my speech the language of God is being heard.

Now read Ephesians 4:25-29 again.

Reflection: How do you put off the old man and how do you put on the new man?

Be Kind To One Another | *verses 30-32*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

V30. If you 'are created according to God' (verse 24), you are able to show to a sin perverted world, Who and how God is. You bring heaven onto earth. You have seen in the previous verses how to understand that practically. How you are able to practice that and to get the right motivation, you see in this verse. You see, you are sealed with "*the Holy Spirit of God*". Briefly, it means that you are God's property. What a great security! More of what sealing means you can read again in the explanation of *chapter 1:13-14*, where you have found this expression already.

The Holy Spirit gives you the power to show the features of God in your life. The Holy Spirit is mentioned here with emphasis on the *Spirit of God*. It is all about God. You 'are created according to God' and you have received the *Holy Spirit of God*, so that you, to say it with *chapter 5:1*, can be addressed as a follower of God. In the life of the Lord Jesus on earth you see that shown in a perfect way. In that way it happens in you also, as you have the same nature.

The Holy Spirit dwells in you "*for the day of redemption*". That indicates the redemption of your body and the redemption of the creation. Your body has not been redeemed yet. You can realize that by the pain you can have. Not only physical pain, but also pain in your soul when you have done something wrong, or when you look at the misery around you. *Romans 8:23* also speaks about "*the redemption of our body*", which will take place when the Lord comes to take us up to be with Him (*Phil 3:20-21*). You can eagerly wait for that; you can look forward to it; it shall happen.

After that happening the Lord Jesus shall redeem 'the purchased possession' (*Eph 1:14*), that is the whole creation. How that will happen is to be read in the book of *Revelation*, where it is comprehensively described. The definite outcome is that everything will be according to God, as 'God will be all in all' (*1Cor 15:28*). The Lord Jesus has the right to redeem everything, as He paid the whole price for the redemption. This prospect of the 'day of redemption' gives the believer a great drive to be a follower of God in the power of His Spirit.

Then you are also protected from grieving the Holy Spirit of God. So the appeal not to grieve the Spirit is written for a good reason. When you do something that is not according to God – especially in the light of the fact that you are created according to Him – you grieve Him with that. The Holy Spirit *is* God. That you can grieve Him proves that He is a Person and not just a power or an influence. It is also said that we can quench Him (*1Thes 5:19*) and that we can lie to Him (*Acts 5:3*).

V31. It is clear that all things that are mentioned in this verse do not belong to 'the truth in Jesus', neither to 'the new man', nor to what 'is created according to God'. The issue here is your personal behavior in the church ("*from you*"). And this is addressed to a church to which Paul told so many wonderful things.

So it is clear that being familiar with the highest blessings is not a guarantee not to turn aside to the lowest behavior. After all, can you imagine that the things Paul mentioned here could happen in a church like Ephesus? And yet that happened, not only then, but it also happens now among us. It is a list of evil feelings and expressions, where anger produces more anger.

It begins with "*bitterness*". Once a "*root of bitterness*" (*Heb 12:15*) is sprouted and which has not been judged, then "*wrath*" will follow. When suppressed wrath has not been put away by self-judgment, this will discharge in "*wrath and anger and clamor*". When there is no repentance, then wrath and anger and clamor will be followed by "*slander*". Wrath and anger and clamor will be poured out *over* the opponent. Slander always happens *behind* the

back of the opponent. When evil slander is not being confessed, the door has been opened for every kind of “malice”. This picture of the old man is most telling. Likewise most telling is the command (it’s not a request) to put this all away from the church.

V32. Against the anger of the old man is the totally different mind of the new man. After the obscure feelings and expressions of the old man, the bright light is shining here and you feel the warmth of the new man. Instead of cherishing the bitter feelings towards the other, you are expected to be tenderhearted towards the other. Instead of scolding the other and speaking evil of the other, you are expected to be kind and forgiving to the other.

You have the example before you. How did God treat you and how does He still treat you? He has forgiven you in Christ. The more you think about it, the more you will be able to show the forgiving mind of God in your dealing with others.

Indeed, that is a very high standard, but yet the only right standard. And you are able to meet this standard, because you ‘are created according to God’. God didn’t come to you with bitterness because of your guilt, but He came with forgiveness. He remitted your debt and took pity on you. There is room for showing kindness and forgiveness when the obstacles of the previous verse have been put away.

Now read Ephesians 4:30-32 again.

Reflection: Which characteristics of the old man and which of the new man do you see here?

Ephesians 5

A Walk In Love and In Light | *verses 1-8*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. 3 But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; 4 and [there must be no] filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light ...

V1. When we do what is said in the last verse of the previous chapter, we can be addressed as “*imitators of God*”. That means that we are able to do what God did in showing His kindness. It may even be expected from us. Anyway, in itself it is a huge thing to be addressed as ‘imitators of God’. Yet, that is not all: we are even called “*beloved children*” of God. God has not only forgiven us all our debts, but He also made us rich, as we became His children. You should realize this as well. You are a child of God and He loves you!

V2. Then you will not only show kindness and forgiveness in imitating God, but your whole conduct, your whole walk, will be “*in love*”. You show ‘kindness’ and forgiveness when you do not blame your brother or sister anymore for what he or she did

wrong. To show 'love' goes a step further. Love is not so much engaged in what the other has done, but is involved with the other himself. Love always seeks good for the other. The exhortation "*walk in love*" simply means that you show the Divine nature in daily practice.

How that is practiced, is seen in the life of the Lord Jesus. In Him the nature of God was shown perfectly. Love brought Him to a deed which we always will admire. That deed of love has been His full surrender to God – to death. His death is the absolute culmination of His love for God and for us. His life and death gave God such an inexpressible joy. There has never been anybody on earth who has served and honored God with all his love and so fully devoted. The Lord Jesus was the One who did.

The "*offering*" and the "*sacrifice*" speak of His whole life till His death on the cross. It was all a "*fragrant aroma*" to God, but His death on the cross was also for us. He died in our place. As a result of that we are saved and all hindrances for God to bless us have disappeared.

In that perfect surrender He is unique, therein we cannot imitate Him. Yet it is said: "*Walk in love, just as Christ also.*" Only then we shall walk in love in the same way as Christ when we also fully devote our lives to God and His interests. Then it would be, as if God will be reminded of the walk of His Son, and through our lives a fragrant aroma will rise up to Him.

V3. The admonitions here from Paul connect to a walk of life in the light. Everything that cannot bear the light of God must not have room among believers. Besides, it is against love. Love always seeks the good for the other, even at its own expense. The things that are mentioned here, are only looking for ways to fulfill their own desires. Those are sins wherein one enjoys himself at the expense of someone else.

Everything is measured by the standard of Who God is. The believer is created according to Him (*Eph 4:24*). God is light and love

(1Jn 1:5; 4:8,16). Believers walk as children of God in love (Eph 5:1-2) and as saints they walk in the light (Eph 5:3-21).

The things that are mentioned from *verse 3* do not fit with love and light. The believer should not do things, not even mention things, which “*are not fitting*” (*verse 4*), that means that do not fit with the nature of God. It is not so much about the deeds, but what is preceded by that. It is about what is in the heart and what flows from the mouth. “*For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart*” (Mt 12:34). Paul of course here condemns the way of speaking that reveals someone’s lust.

When he mentions things that should not even be named, he does not contradict his own admonitions. He certainly mentions them, but in a disapproving sense. This is the way to speak about these things when discipline must be practiced in the church, or when these things should be denounced somewhere else (*verse 11*). Do not be tempted to mention these things lightly or as a joke and do not even tolerate that.

By “*immorality*” is meant sexual offence in the broadest sense of the word. It regards all sexual contact outside marriage and that is more than adultery. By “*any impurity*” is meant, every kind of uncleanness, in words as well as in deeds or in thoughts. “*Greed*” is the desire to have more, and does not stop with money.

The absence of such talk is fitting with “*saints*”. Decent people watch out for what they say, so that they do not spoil their reputation, but ‘saints’ have a higher motive. They don’t belong to the world where these subjects are generally accepted, but to the new creation.

V4. Neither “*filthiness*” (i.e. obscene, indecent in words and attitude) shall belong to your common language. That includes all that is against cleanness. “*Silly talk*” is foolish talk and fool indicates somebody that does not regard God (Psa 14:1). “*Coarse jesting*” you hear in jokes with a double meaning. It is all ‘not fitting’; it does not fit with the standard of the saints of God.

Therefore you should not allow yourself to slide down to the level of talking rubbish and play the joker. He, who is known like that, is not a Christian, whatever his confession may be. It is not about general humor here. It is about people who seek to extend moral borders and to take down thresholds of decency by their foolish and ambiguous talk and their coarse jesting.

By ‘saints’ – people who received forgiveness – “*giving of thanks*” is fitting. That indicates an opened mouth out of which words of thanks flow (*1Thes 5:18; Col 1:12*) instead of debauchery.

V5. In *verse 3* the evil was mentioned, here we see the perpetrators of it. You know very well, and you also have acknowledged, that because of everything you were in in the past and wherein you partook, there was no connection with the area where Christ and God have all control. You confessed that at your conversion and you’ve seen that all that has disappeared in the judgment that came over Christ. Yet you can forget that and again start to live as you did in the past. Therefore your conscience is appealed to here to remind you of what you formerly confessed and have put away at the cross.

There is not only a reminder of what has been put away, however. There is also a prospect for “*an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God*”. This kingdom will be established in the fullness of times (*Eph 1:10*). It is ‘the kingdom of Christ’ because He is the Center of it, the One Who rules. It is the kingdom ‘of God’ because He is the Inventor of it, it is His counsel.

By “*inheritance*” you think about the future; you are an heir and the inheritance is yet to come. Your inheritance in the kingdom you will receive in the fullness of times at the revelation of Christ. The rights of God and His government will be established in the universe. It is mentioned here to indicate that you should see your life in the light of that time. The result will be that you give the control of your life in the hands of Christ and God now already.

V6. Then you will not be tempted to live unholy which can cause you to end up again in the company you were in in the past (*cf.*

Psa 1:1). You can be deceived by empty words, words that conflict with the Scriptures. Different forms of living together that the Scripture calls fornication, are being justified, as living together unmarried and the opening up of marriage between people of the same sex. These things are also defended in Christianity with nice, but empty words. But bear in mind: *“For because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”* ‘Sons of disobedience’ are people who are deliberately disobedient.

V7. Stay far away from them. Do not join them and do not behave like them. Just assure yourself that you will not be seen as a partaker of them (*see also verse 11*). Children of God and sons of disobedience have nothing in common spiritually. You should not only avoid sins, but also the connection with sinners.

V8. Do you know why you have to avoid those connections? Because of what you *were* in the past and what you *have become* now. It is put as a fact. And that change has been achieved through the work that God did on you. You were not only *in* the darkness, you *were* darkness. You were characterized by a nature that is in darkness and you found pleasure in everything that was against God. But now you are light in the Lord. Nothing is hidden, everything is visible and that is the way you should walk.

Now read Ephesians 5:1-8 again.

Reflection: What belongs to the light and what does not belong in the light?

Awake! | verses 9-16

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

... **9** (for the fruit of the Light [consists] in all goodness and righteousness and truth), **10** trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. **11** Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; **12** for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. **13** But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. **14** For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you." **15** Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, **16** making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

V9. A walk in light is not sterile and cold. In such a walk, life is developing that shows itself in the fruit it bears. This fruit is not because of your efforts and neither a result of some performance you delivered. No, bearing fruit is not what you do, but it is about what you are and where you stand. If you walk in light, you are in God's presence. He gives the increase (1Cor 3:7).

The Lord Jesus says: "He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). When you draw your 'life juices' from Him, your life will bear fruit. That fruit consists of the features of God, which were also visible in the life of the Lord Jesus. You will be a benefit to others when in your behavior "all goodness" is visible. You will give others what they deserve and in that way reveal "righteousness". Your whole behavior will not be hypocritical, but "truth", that is veritable.

V10. While you are 'producing' the fruit of light that way without your own efforts, you are active in finding out "what is pleasing to the Lord". "Trying to learn" is to examine whether something is good. The result of this examination is that you make choices that are a joy to the Lord.

V11. In *verse 7* Paul warns that you should not be a partaker of evildoers. You must not connect yourself with these *people*. In this verse you are reminded not to have anything to do with their *deeds*. Every form of fellowship with them should be cut off. Light and darkness have absolutely nothing in common (*cf. 2Cor 6:14b*).

Now you are in the light, it is absolutely unbearable to do “*unfruitful deeds*” because they belong to the “*darkness*”. Besides, have you noticed that there is mention of “*fruit (singular) of the Light*” (*verse 9*) and “*unfruitful deeds (plural) of darkness*” (*verse 11*)? This you also find in *Galatians 5*, where you read about “*the works of the flesh*” (*Gal 5:19*) and “*the fruit of the Spirit*” (*Gal 5:22*). What belongs to God and comes from Him, forms a wonderful unity. What comes from the flesh and belongs to darkness, is corruption in many ways.

What happens in darkness should be “*exposed*” – this means that it must be clearly indicated which sin it is about. The nature of the sin should be exposed. You don’t have to examine the way sin is practiced, but as soon as you become aware of it, you are to name sin as sin and not partake in defending it.

John the baptist did that well. He exposed Herod’s way of living by saying that he was living in sin (*Mt 14:3-4*). Exposure happens by what you say, but even more by the way you live. When you walk in the light, that light will also reveal the works of darkness.

V12. It is very clear that something that happens “*in secret*”, is deliberately done and not ignorantly. “*It is disgraceful even to speak*” of things which are done in secret. Should you have to say something about it, do it with disapproval. It can be necessary to talk about homosexuality. When somebody is struggling with homosexual feelings, we shall try to help such a person with compassion. However, when it is somebody who defends homosexual practice, we must take a clear stand against it.

V13. The special feature of light is that it reveals everything when its rays shine on it. Light exposes the true nature of something. He who does good things has nothing to hide. He stands fearless

in the spotlight. Everything he does may be seen. He who does evil, hates the light and avoids it (*Jn 3:20*).

V14. The work of light is made clear in the previous verses. It is also made clear that there is absolutely no fellowship between light and darkness. Of course the enemy doesn't like that. He doesn't succeed in mixing light and darkness. But what he does succeed in doing, is to turn both around and to present darkness as light and light as darkness. He is tirelessly busy to make people think backwards. In various media he has found a great way for his attempts.

The prophet Isaiah has spoken out the 'woe' regarding the exchange of light and darkness (*Isa 5:20*). And bear in mind: he indeed speaks to the people of God! This reversal of matters has also permeated Christianity. Christians have been deceived by the enemy and have fallen asleep. They are detached from the light of the glory of Christ. Therefore out of the glory comes a call from the glorified Christ to every Christian individually: "*Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.*"

Just imagine: You see a lot of people lying on the floor. They don't move. They all seem dead. There is no sign of life. The tragedy the apostle is painting here is the apparent similarity between the sleeper and the dead. Although the sleeper is alive, he is yet just as the dead and just as insensitive to the light. That is the application here. Somebody who sleeps doesn't hear or see anything. There is no communication with the living, for in fact he is in the condition of a dead man.

The Christian who is asleep, has been turned off to testify of the glorified Lord. In order to rejoice in Christ again, he must awake and arise. He has to open his eyes and realize that he has been deceived "*with empty words*" (*verse 6*), and therefore he became like the dead.

When you realize that your life is not a testimony anymore of the glorified Christ, then do something about it! It may be that you haven't sinned at all. Of itself that is wonderful, but it might be

the case that you have become blind to the glorified Christ and to your connection to Him. You went to live on the level of the world. You started to think horizontally. You're not aware anymore of the vertical relationship with the Lord. You do not reflect the new life anymore.

When you recognize this, you have been awakened. Confess to the Lord that you've failed and rejoice again in Christ, the Light source. In His Person everything that God is has been revealed in the midst of evil and darkness. If you rejoice in Him, God will be revealed in the midst of evil and darkness. After all, you have been created according to God. The section that deals with light and darkness in such a special way, closes so to say, with the call to rejoice in the light.

V15. After this digression about light and darkness Paul returns to the walk, about which he spoke in *verses 1-6*. By walk is meant the way of life we live. He exhorts us to watch carefully how we walk. It is, after all, about a walk in love and light (*verses 1,8*), a walk wherein the new life becomes visible (*Eph 4:22-24*), so a walk wherein Christ is being formed (*Gal 4:19*). That comprises our whole life.

After the contrast between light and darkness you see another contrast, that between unwise men and wise. Who is wise? Wise is he who knows how to apply God's Word in different situations. You are unwise when you live to your own ideas, as if you would not know anything of the very plans God has with you. You are wise when you ask yourself in all your decisions if it fits with your relation with the heavenly Christ, as that is the issue in this letter.

V16. Walking wisely becomes clear in how you use your time, how you use opportunities that God gives you to let your light shine. A wise man takes the greatest possible advantage to show the new man. "*Making the most*" means that you make the best use of what you have, not for yourself, but rather at your own expense.

That “*the days are evil*” or full of sin is another exhortation to make the most of your time. You won’t have that chance in heaven. Only in the time you are on earth you have chances to show Christ in the midst of sin. If you want to see these chances, you must be awake, your eyes must be open, and you should also watch out how you walk. There is always that danger of falling asleep.

Because you live in an evil, sinful world, you should watch yourself and your environment. This doesn’t frighten you or make you tremble. No, what you see makes you zealous to be fully and continuously committed to the Lord. You become aware that time is a gift from Him to serve Him with. When we do not see opportunities, it’s not the Lord’s fault, but ours.

Now read Ephesians 5:9-16 again.

Reflection: How do make the most of your time?

Be Filled With the Spirit | *verses 17-21*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; 21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

V17. We are in the middle of a section that strongly reminds us of 1 Corinthians 6:20 that reads: “For you have been bought with a price.” This means that you are not your own and so have no right or own time. You belong to the Lord for all the twenty four hours in a day. You also have received God’s nature: through this you can see things around you as He sees them. You are very aware that the days are evil and dark, but you may walk in the light of Christ. You see Who Christ is, the Man of God’s counsels, and you also see that this Man shall once reign in heaven and on earth.

That doesn’t make you careless and you will not wander around. No, when Christ enlightens you, you want to spend every minute to exhibit Him in this evil, dark world. What that means in practice for you, you should ask the Lord. If you don’t do that you are “foolish”. Understanding “the will of the Lord” is also in connection with the truth of this letter. God’s will is that you will show the features of His Being – love and light. You can be everywhere and do everything where the love and the light of God can shine.

V18. Within yourself you don’t have the power for that. Only when you are filled with the Spirit will you be able to do that. And again we see a contrast. Being filled with the Spirit is in contrast with being drunk with wine. He who is drunk is dictated by the wine. Such a person has no self-control anymore; in fact, he is totally out of control, whereby dissipation rules. He who is filled with the Spirit is thoughtful (2Tim 1:7). It is not a question of

switching from one 'vagueness' (which is the result of too much alcohol) to another (which could be the result of a sort of ecstasy).

The use of a glass of wine is not forbidden (*1Tim 5:23*), but the gushing use is. Believers should not be controlled by wine, but by the Holy Spirit. Being filled with the Spirit is related to the fact that you're totally open for His working so that He can use you.

In order to be filled, all obstacles should be dealt with and removed. You can fill a glass to the brim with water. That looks full, but however, when a layer of sand is on the bottom, the glass is not full of water. The glass is only full of water when the sand is removed and is replaced by water. Paul means by his call "*be filled with the Spirit*": 'Make sure that you are filled with the Spirit, so that He may totally control your life.' To "*be filled with*" is not something you have to wait for. Neither is it something which as a sovereign act from God that comes over you. It is an exhortation.

You are not to pray to be filled with the Spirit, but you are to examine what is hindering you to be filled with Him and you should put that away. Surely the Spirit dwells in you, but He must have all authority over everything: your thoughts, your relationships, your time and money spending. It is neither something that is achieved once and for all. It is something that has to be realized all the time. He who is filled with the Spirit doesn't think about himself, neither about the Spirit with Whom he is filled, but he is only focused on the Lord Jesus. That is, according to *John 16:14*, always the work of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus is saying there: "*He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose [it] to you.*"

V19. To be filled with the Spirit has a great effect on the life of the believer. In the following verses you see that it has to do with the common life. It is reflected in the speech (*verse 19*), in giving thanks (*verse 20*) and in submitting to one another (*verse 21*). The Spirit can do what He is delighted to do: to focus the eye – not on the Spirit, as He is the Servant, but – on the Lord Jesus (*verse 19*) and on the Father (*verse 20*).

He thereby doesn't bring us in ecstasy or to an outburst of incomprehensible words. The first sign to notice what somebody is filled with, is to be noticed in his speech. Listen to conversations and you will soon find out what fills someone's heart. In a company where the Spirit is filling the atmosphere, people will speak to one another "*in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*". The words "*to one another*" stresses the fact again that the believers are one body and therefore members of each other. Our dealing with each other should be that way so also the neighbor is being served by that.

The harmony among believers is especially lived through when they sing together. Through the songs they speak to one another. Think for example of the famous song: 'Onward Christian Soldiers'. Everyone who sings this song encourages the other as a Christian soldier to move forward, behind the Lord Jesus. At the same time we focus, also in our hearts, on the Lord Jesus and the Father.

By "*psalms*" here, is meant songs that give an expression of your experiences, trials and temptations and also of solutions the Lord gives. It is about compositions of God fearing men that arose from their experiences with God.

For at least three reasons it is not possible that here it is about the psalms from the Old Testament:

1. The psalmists did not know God as their Father in the Lord Jesus;
2. They didn't have the Spirit indwelling, because they didn't know anything about the once and for all fulfilled work of Christ for all sins;
3. The psalms often sing about revenge on their enemies, which is not fitting in the time of grace we live in.

By “*hymns*” is meant compositions by which someone honors God with a song. “*Spiritual songs*” are songs that are composed by a spiritual person.

I have tried to make a distinction between the used expressions. That doesn't mean that you can always draw a distinctive line. You will notice in Christian songs that they have aspects of each of the three definitions. A song can be derived from a spiritual experience, it is addressed to God and can also be sung. Speaking to one another in songs isn't limited to the gathering, but should be found among us generally.

V20. Also “*always giving thanks*” isn't limited to the gathering. Giving thanks is a real indication of the condition of your soul. To be really thankful “*for all things*” is only possible when you trust completely on the love of God, with the awareness that you receive everything from His hand. That awareness even makes you happy and grateful. In *Acts 16* we see and hear of people who realized that. Paul and Silas are there in prison with their backs bleeding. Are they grieving? No, they thank God in their circumstances and they praise Him in songs (*Acts 16:25*).

‘Giving thanks for all things’ is only possible when you accept everything from God's hand and you know that nothing bad can come from His hand. It is also about giving thanks “*in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father*”. God, Who is the source of everything and Who has blessed you in His Son in a special way, is also the Father Who loves His children. You can come to Him in the Name of His Son Who is mentioned here by His full name. He is ‘our’ Lord Jesus Christ.

V21. Also “*be subject to one another*” flows from being filled with the Spirit. Only by being filled with the Spirit, are you able to see your brother and sister in the light of God's counsels. When we see each other in that way, we can submit to one another. It is a general mind towards the other.

The addition “*in the fear of Christ*” again indicates that this exhortation must be seen in the light of the content of this letter: the

great glory of the Christ. We are connected *to one another* in the body of Christ, and also connected *with Him*.

When we understand that, we would not want to raise ourselves above the other. There will be a healthy 'fear' not to dishonor Him with a mind of pride and rebellion. Only when I totally surrender myself to the glory of Christ and when I live with reverence for Him, I will be able to submit myself to the other.

Now read Ephesians 5:17-21 again.

Reflection: How do you recognize the signs of being filled with the Spirit?

Wives and Husbands | *verses 22-25*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

22 Wives, [be subject] to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself [being] the Savior of the body. 24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives [ought to be] to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, ...

V22. Verse 21 is a connecting verse. On the one hand, this verse closes the previous section with the call to be submitted to one another. That regards the general relations in the church. Submission to one another is a wonderful feature of the new man. On the other hand, this verse is also introductory to the section that follows. From *verse 22* until *chapter 6:9* you will have to deal with different earthly relations, wherein submission plays an important role. You can see it as a practical effect of *verse 21*.

We shall deal with relations between:

- wife and husband in marriage (*Eph 5:22-33*),
- children and parents in the family (*Eph 6:1-4*) and
- slaves and masters in the society (*Eph 6:5-9*).

It is remarkable that in each relation the first party that is being addressed, is the part that is placed by God in the submission to the other. That is an expression of God's special interest for the ones who are placed by Him in this position. They especially get the chance to show the features of the Lord Jesus in their submissive position. Wasn't He the perfect submissive One in His life on earth? You will also notice that everyone is being addressed on the area in which he or she is weak.

Being submitted is not 'trendy'. In the world around us the woman is being told that she is equal to the man. She has to prove

herself, develop her opportunities and defend her rights. Thereby they miss the fact that she can only be happy and can develop at her best, when she is willing to be 'wife' for her husband.

For Christian women it is not easy to be free from the influence of this thinking. It is only possible when she always has the blueprint of God's Word set out clearly in her mind. She can thereby think that she may submit to her husband "*as to the Lord*". Behind her husband she may see the Lord. A woman will not only submit to her husband when he fulfills her desires or when she sees in him a man whom she can come up with. She will submit to him because he is her husband.

This exhortation of Paul to women is being made of no effect and even being explained away, also within Christianity. For that reason it is important to remind you that God's Word has not lost its effect or meaning regarding this. The woman, who in spite of all resistance obeys this, will experience the blessing of it.

V23. As so often, God also gives an explanation for this. He has ordained it that way, because of the picture that is shown of Christ and the church in the relation between the husband and his wife. You understand now also why satan does everything to turn this ordination of God in marriage upside down. Satan hates everything that is a reminder of God and Christ.

Everywhere where the husband functions as the head of his wife and the wife is submitted to him we see a living testimony of the relationship between Christ and the church. It is the privilege of the Christian to give this real substance in his marriage. That the man is head means that he has a leading position and that it happens in love. God gives that position to Christ towards the church.

To this position something more is added and that is that Christ is "*the Savior of the body*". Of the Head (Christ), the salvation, protection and nourishment of the body (the church) is dependent. It is against God's intention when a wife, in order to prove her

independence in society, earns her own salary and takes care of herself, apart from her 'caregiver'.

This is not about a believing woman who has to work due to poverty. Such a person must be appreciated. The point is: it is often about the desire for luxury and for her making her own decisions. Own money and own time lead to an own life. The unity, as it is presented by marriage also, is totally lacking in those cases or has even totally disappeared.

V24. Women are a picture of the church. The church is subject to Christ. As Christ is perfect in His relation to His wife, the church, it should not be that difficult for the church to be submitted to Him. But husbands, who are a picture of Christ, are not perfect. Therefore it is not easy for wives to be truly submissive. Yet the practice of husbands is not the standard for submission. The standard is: the church in relation to Christ, as it is seen by God. It can then be said that wives are submitted to their husbands "*in everything*". There is no room for 'yeah, but'.

Submission is an attitude, a state of mind. Even if the husbands make it difficult for their wives, or almost unbearable, then this remains: "*so also the wives [ought to be] to their husbands in everything*". That doesn't mean that they should consent to be forced to do things that are against the Scripture. In that case they should say 'no'. But even in saying 'no' they should not give up the attitude of submission.

V25. After he has addressed the wives in three verses, Paul now addresses the husbands in the following nine verses. The standard for their relation to their wives and their love for them is Christ and His love for the church. The husbands do not come off easier than the wives. On the contrary, their example is much higher. The love of the Lord Jesus and of God is a giving love. In order to get the right impression of such love, we are absolutely dependent on the Scripture and the Spirit. Otherwise we could mix or confuse the Divine love easily with our emotions and thoughts of love.

You can see the love of the Lord Jesus for His church in the example of the merchant who was looking for beautiful pearls (*Mt 13:45-46*). That merchant sells everything because of the value of that one pearl. We also find that in the Lord Jesus. He sold everything He had. Yet that does not reflect the whole value of the love of the Lord Jesus for His church. Even giving His life, which was perfect love and goes further than selling what He had, does not fully show the issue here. It goes even deeper. Here it is said that He gave "*Himself*" for the church. He went into death and through death. He arose and ascended to heaven.

He did that all in His full dedication to His bride. That is the way it is presented here and that is the example that is set out for the husbands. Then the husband is lovingly devoted in every part of his life to his wife with whom he is connected.

It is not about the love of Christ for sinners here. In sinners there was nothing attractive for Him, while here His love is exactly encouraged by the attractiveness of the church. From eternity He has loved the church as He looked upon her according to the purposes of God. He still looks upon her that way. Therefore He did not only give Himself on the cross, but He still gives Himself, also now in heaven. He is committed to her with a ceaseless dedication.

His dedication started when He came to earth and it continued when He went to the cross. And it still goes on, till the moment comes when He will present us to Himself in heaven. His love is this: He makes everything He is, available to us, His church. In this way the love of the husband for his wife should not be limited to the time when he has the chance for it. It should be shown, as the Lord Jesus did, *always*. That is the standard.

Now read Ephesians 5:22-25 again.

Reflection: What is expected from husbands as well as wives in their marriage – and why?

Christ and the Church | *verses 26-33*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

... **26** so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. **28** So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; **29** for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also [does] the church, **30** because we are members of His body. **31** FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. **32** This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. **33** Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must [see to it] that she respects her husband.

V26. Christ gave Himself for the church. That expression of His love is followed twice by the word “that”, with which both *verse 26* and *verse 27* begins. This word refers to the reason why He did that. As it has been made clear earlier, His dedication goes further than the cross. Even though He is now in heaven, He dedicates Himself fully by taking care of His church, His wife.

Christ has first made the church His possession; now He is busy in His perfect love to shape her the way He wants her to be. He wants to shape her that way in order to enable her to be with Him in due time. Therefore it is necessary that she is being sanctified and cleansed.

By sanctification she is being fully focused on Him: the church is there for Him. He cannot approve that she would develop any love for or even an interest in something that is not in connection with Him. He wants to focus all her love on Himself and the place where He is, in the heavenly places. He wants to have her interest for what she will be in connection to Him to eternity. He

always wants to impress His bride with her being connected to Him, Who is now already in glory.

The result of that will be that she is being sanctified, which means, to be set apart from the world in order to be totally for Him and Him alone. So there is nothing more present in the hearts than only interest and admiration for the glory of the Lord Jesus.

Besides sanctification the church needs also to be cleansed. She is still in the world and that automatically causes contamination. That contamination is cleansed by *“the washing of water by the word”*. By reading the Bible, the Word of God, you get cleansed; you get rid of the dirt that you’ve been polluted with through your life in the world.

Here it is not about sins you’ve done. It is about things you cannot help happening. For example you hear filthy language or cursing. That is what is polluting you. It can get stuck in your head. By washing yourself with the Word – by reading the Bible – you become clean again. You’re not able to enjoy fellowship with the Lord Jesus without this cleansing. In *John 13:1-10* the Lord Jesus also speaks about it in this way. Therefore it is necessary to read the Word of God every day.

V27. This verse also starts with *“that”*, after which we see a second reason of the dedication of the Lord Jesus. Here Paul points to the final result of His dedication and His sanctifying and cleansing work. In due time, He wants to present the church to Himself without her having even a slight spot or wrinkle or any such thing. But this is still about a negative feature. In fact, He wants to have her before Himself in all the glory, which He Himself had bestowed on her (*cf. Eze 16:14*). She will be clothed with His glory (*Rev 21:9-10*).

The church will be there *“having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing”*. Then there will be nothing anymore that will remind her of pollution or decay, from which we cannot escape on earth. No, she then will be perfectly holy, entirely focused on Him, Who gave Himself for her. She then will also be perfect without blame

through His perfectly cleansing work and she will never again suffer any spot.

This is how He will present the church – not before His Father, but – before Himself. She will then totally satisfy the desires of His heart. The moment this is fulfilled, the church will be complete. He will come to meet His own and take them with Him. First He will raise the dead and after that He will transform us who are alive. Together we shall meet the Lord in the air. There our encounter will take place and nobody else will be present. What a great moment that will be for the Lord Jesus!

V28. Here Paul repeats his remark of *verse 25*, but now this is actually founded with a very clear and lofty basis. When husband and wife behave like that in their marriage, it will make their marriage a source of an immense and increasing happiness. Should they suffer difficulties, then they will see in the model of Christ that love will find a way. They will see that difficulties are often a means to strengthen love. With this view of Christ there are no hopeless cases.

And another argument is added. The love of the husband for his wife is as natural as the love for himself. His wife is not a functional object within his environment and furthermore separate from him. On the contrary, his wife forms a unity with him.

V29. Paul is explaining that by continuing to paint the picture of the body. It is just as natural for a husband that he nourishes and nurtures his wife as he does that to his own body. Just as husbands make sure that their body is being nourished and kept warm (which means ‘nurtured’), in that way they are to make sure that their wives have enough food and feel pleasant.

This we can also apply spiritually. It is important that the husband nourishes himself spiritually, but no less important is it that he also knows the needs of his wife in this respect and provides for it. The same goes for giving warmth, nurturing. She experiences that especially when she feels secure with her husband, when he really spends time with her and really focuses his atten-

tion on her, when he makes her feel that she is 'special' to him. Christ also treats His church in this way.

V30. Then Paul, almost unnoticeably, replaces the one picture of the church: that of a wife, by another picture: that of a body. Actually he uses both pictures interchangeably. With the wife it is about love, with the body it is about unity. The church is also *the body* of Christ. The members are the believers individually, but yet they form *His* body together. As members of Christ's body we individually experience something of His tender care.

V31. The unity between a husband and a wife in marriage is not an invention of Paul. The first pages of the Bible mention it. Paul refers to *Genesis 2:24*. There we see that God has introduced marriage and that it originates from before the fall of man. From that quotation it appears that through a marriage a unity is accomplished, which

- a. is new (indicated by "*leave his father and mother*"),
- b. is irreversible (indicated by "*be joined to his wife*") and
- c. is total (indicated by "*become one flesh*").

V32. In this verse the more profound meaning of marriage is given: in marriage God has given a picture of Christ and the church. Formerly that was a mystery, unknown to men. But now Paul makes, directed by God's Spirit, this mystery known. In case he had not have done that, how would we have known of a perfect *unity* between Christ and the church and of the perfect *love* Christ has for His church? Also this truth has been from eternity hidden in God.

The relationship between Christ and the church is called "*great*". What is related to this, is not limited to one nation and only the earth, but extends from eternity to eternity and comprises heaven and earth. Besides, there is another mystery that is called 'great'. That you find in *1 Timothy 3:16*.

V33. After unfolding this Divine secret, Paul returns to the practice. He wishes that the heavenly reality is reflected in every marriage on earth.

There comes a closing address to the husband, who is being addressed very personally in "*each individual among you*". In this closing address is being repeated what is said in the *verses 25-27* about 'loving' and in the *verses 28-29* about 'as himself'. The closing address to the wives implies that they should honor their husbands by giving them the place that God has given them.

Now read Ephesians 5:26-33 again.

Reflection: Which pictures does Paul use for the relationship between husband and wife? What are the characteristics of those pictures?

Ephesians 6

Children and Parents | verses 1-4

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), 3 SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH. 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

V1. After he highlighted the relationship between husband and wife, Paul now draws attention to the relationship between parents and children. Also in this relationship we can realize a heavenly truth. In order to really enjoy the Christian blessings, we are to behave ourselves in this relationship as Paul indicates here.

Also now the apostle addresses those first who have a submissive position, the children. That they are addressed directly indicates how important they are. They are not just supplementary. No, they may contribute so that the new man becomes visible here, namely when they are obedient.

We live in a world that is permeated by a spirit of rebellion and selfishness. That spirit doesn't stop at the front door of the Christian families. After all, "*disobeying the parents*" is a sign of "*the last days*" (2Tim 3:1-2). The number of juveniles that have gotten off the track is increasing. Why? A reason is that the number of 'normal' families is decreasing. Another reason is that parents do not consider that the relationship 'child-parents' is created by God.

Parents do make mistakes, but children are to obey their parents. An upbringing without maintaining authority is against the will

of God. By teaching their children to be obedient, parents are doing a great favor to them. Children, who have not learnt to obey, also have difficulties to repent and to convert.

The fact that parents are not perfect, doesn't give the child the right to disobey. Therefore another motive is added, "*in the Lord*". A child doesn't obey because his parents do not make mistakes or does only obey when he *understands* what is asked, but he obeys because it is an order from the Lord.

There is not a single reason for a child to disobey, whether it is converted or not. This order goes for every child. Believing children should also obey unbelieving parents. This conduct, this behavior is right for God.

V2. By quoting the fifth commandment of the law, the apostle emphasizes the significance of obedience. He doesn't quote this commandment because we would still be under the law. Precisely this letter hasn't any connection with the law, which determines regulations concerning life on earth. This letter puts us specifically in heaven and from there our life is directed. But that doesn't lead us to act against the law. Through this commandment Paul shows that some particular principles of the law are also valid under grace.

In the commandment obeying is not mentioned, but it is about honoring. 'Honoring' is giving the place to someone he deserves and that also includes obeying. Honoring goes further than obeying. When children have reached a certain age and live independently or are married, to obey is out of order. But honoring remains as a commandment.

This is a special commandment, because to this fifth command no penalty is connected, but a promise. This makes clear that God attaches a great value to honoring father and mother.

V3. How God values obedience to this commandment, appears from the contents of the promise. From that promise it also becomes apparent that the commandment has not been quoted be-

cause we would still be under the law. The promise is not for us, actually. God is promising this to an earthly people, through which He is in connection with by the law. We have a totally different position. In contrast with Israel who would get blessings on the earth by obedience, we are blessed with all blessings in the heavenly places. The blessing of the Lord has nothing to do with earthly success. A poor, sick believer is not necessarily unfaithful and a rich healthy believer not necessarily faithful.

V4. After the commandment for the children and the blessing connected to it, follows a word addressed to “*fathers*”. Their task is to bring them up. That doesn’t mean that mothers have nothing to do with that. In practice it is often them who have everything to do with it, far more than the fathers (*cf. 1Tim 5:10*). The fathers, however, carry the main responsibilities for the education. They determine (when they are wise, in agreement and good cooperation with their wives) the standards for the upbringing. Yet, here it is not that much about the determination of the standards, but more about dealing with them in practice.

The weakness of the father is being exposed, as the warning “*do not provoke your children to anger*”, surely doesn’t come out of nowhere. A father can actually be very ardent at maintaining the authority that is given to him by God. When a child doesn’t do something right in answer to what he asks, or it doesn’t meet his desires otherwise, the father can be unreasonable or adopt an immature attitude. That can be by words and by deeds. He can humiliate the child with words, giving the child the feeling he is useless, doesn’t ever do anything right and that he will fail in life. If a child is mistreated that way he can be provoked to anger. He can revolt or, as said in *Colossians 3:21*, “*will ... lose heart*”.

In order to be a good father, that is a father who is like the heavenly Father, a father should walk and act in accordance with the teachings of this letter. When he doesn’t do that, the children will revolt. When this causes a wedge in the relationship between father and children, restoration is only possible when there is a change in the hearts of the fathers (*Mal 4:6*).

What then is the right way? He must “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”. Discipline implies a certain chastisement, which must be in accordance with the degree of the transgression. He who uses the ‘rod’, is following the instruction of the Scripture, so from God Himself (*Pro 13:24; 23:13; 29:15*).

The Bible is the book of pedagogy par excellence. It is foolish to think that the only way to let a child obey is by speaking to him, so using only words. It is important to emphasize that corporal punishment is an educational means commanded by God. That goes against the prevailing views of education, as more and more views are being adjusted in the direction of the mind of present-day people. Just think of the same-sex marriage, abortion and euthanasia, but also the introduction of making a crime of corporal punishment to children. As man has gone out of control and detached themselves from everything that has to do with God and with His Word in our days we don’t need to be surprised. Fathers, go back to the Word!

Beside discipline there should also be ‘instruction’. Discipline implies more an action to correct the child, instruction happens especially verbally. These two need to be maintained in the upbringing. Eli, the father of Hophni and Phinehas, is a prime and tragic example of a father who indeed instructed, but did not discipline (*1Sam 2:22-24*). Most important is that discipline and instruction happen in the realm of the love of the Lord. They must be practiced in the way God does that with His children. He does everything in love and to be a blessing.

It is clear that ‘provoking’ is not in the realm of love. Obedience outside the realm of love is also to be seen when the wind and the sea were obeying the Lord. That is an enforced obedience that can also be seen by demons.

Here discipline and instruction take place in the realm of love. Children in a Christian family are to be brought up according to the standards of God’s Word. They are sanctified in their parents (*1Cor 7:14*). In such families they have a special place ever since they were born. They are there where the Holy Spirit is working

through the parents and where they hear the Word of God every day. The education they receive also ought to be in the discipline and instruction “*of the Lord*” and not according to their own understanding or led by their moods.

Now read Ephesians 6:1-4 again.

Reflection: Why is it right to honor your parents?

Slaves and Masters | *verses 5-9*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; 6 not by way of eye service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. 7 With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, 8 knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. 9 And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

Introduction. Now Paul writes about a third circle in which the new man should be visible. After he has highlighted our conduct in the church (first circle, *Eph 4:25-5:21*) and in the marriage and family (second circle, *Eph 5:22-6:4*), our behavior in society is now the next thing to pay attention to. Instead of three circles you could also speak about three communities: the faith community, the family community and the work community.

V5. Again Paul starts with the subordinates and here he also has the most to say to them. You can imagine that of all three addressed groups, it must be most difficult for the bondservants to show the 'new man'. At the same time it must be most challenging for them too. Their position offers the most opportunities to let the heavenly light shine. After all, light shines the brightest where the circumstances are the darkest.

It is obvious that their circumstances, especially in the conditions of those days, were the most difficult. A bondservant was a serf, without having anything of his own, without any right to food, leisure time or entertainment. Even his own body was not his own. That means that we cannot apply all to our situation, regarding the relationship between employer and employee. Yet

we can learn a lot of what is said here to the slaves and masters, as much of that is certainly applicable to nowadays situations.

Slaves have of all people, the most unique opportunity to show what the value is of Christianity in practice. Slaves show the new man in their difficult circumstances and not in the meetings. They can show in their circumstances that the doctrine is not a theory. Through them the doctrine is being illustrated in practice. In *Titus 2:10* it is said that the faithful slaves “*adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every aspect*”. How wonderful that is!

It is true that Christendom is not a program for world improvement, in order to banish all consequences of sin. Slavery is not being dissolved; it is, and remains, a consequence of sin. If a slave gets the opportunity to become free, he may use it (*1Cor 7:21*). However, when he has to remain a slave, then he shall find instructions in the Scripture how to practice that.

Here also the starting point is obedience; that is expected from slaves. Obedience that is steered in the right direction is raised to a higher purpose in the Scripture. In this way the Christian slave is being motivated in his obedience. The first thing he may be aware of is that he is a servant of “*a master according to the flesh*”. His authority remains limited to his life on earth and to ‘only’ the body of the slave. Beyond that master ‘according to the flesh’ he may look upon his Master in heaven.

He will serve with “*fear and trembling*” because he doesn’t want to do anything inappropriate in fulfilling his duties. But if he only focuses on fulfilling his duties, he would be forcing himself. Therefore it is added that it will happen “*in sincerity of your heart*”, which is with sincere intentions and with integrity, not with deviousness. Sincerity of heart belongs to a ‘sincere eye’ (*Mat 6:22*), that is an eye that is only focused on Christ in glory. The slave who obeys “*as to Christ*” surrounds his service with heavenly brightness.

V6. There are more dangers. A slavet is surrounded by fellow slaves who do not regard God or any commandment. They do

their best as long as their master is watching. When he isn't looking, they don't work properly. Or they do their best just to charm their master for their own benefit. A Christian slave must not take part in that. He must bear in mind that he is a slave of Christ after all.

Christ is not a severe Master. How difficult the position may be, how heavy the work and how demanding the 'master according to the flesh' may be, the slave may look beyond all that, to heaven. He can consider that as God's will for his life, and God's will is always the best. That is sometimes hard to believe for us, but it is very true. By dealing with the armor of God later in this chapter, we shall come across parts with which you can arm yourself against doubting the goodness of God.

V7. When the slave has reached the point that he has accepted his position as God's will for his life, then there will be peace in his soul. His inner desire will be to fulfill the demands of his master as best as he possibly can. He will notice that with that attitude towards his 'master according to the flesh' he has more pleasure in his soul and he will do his work with more joy. He actually serves the Lord in heaven and not a man.

V8. In all of this he may know that the Lord is righteous. He does not forget what is done for Him. Although the earthly employer hasn't seen what the employee has done, although he values the achievements of the employee wrong, even if the earthly employer deducts some of the salary of the employee falsely, the Lord shall reward accordingly "*whatever good thing each one does*". That protects the employee from seeking his right through a labor union or a judge.

This attitude someone can only have when he lives by faith, with confidence on the Lord, that every job that has been done for Him, is not in vain (1Cor 15:58). This principle actually goes for everyone, "*whether slave or free*". What is really important is with which motive have we done or do we do something? And the Lord knows how to judge that perfectly (1Cor 4:5b). He will surely make no mistake when He will do the pay-off.

V9. Finally a word to the “masters”. They have authority over the slaves; that is the position they have. Yet there are certain rules that apply equally to them and the slaves. An admonition that was addressed to the slaves and which also applies to the masters is: “*Do the same things to them.*” That means that they should not show partiality to any of their subordinates and that they should do the will of God from the heart by sincerity of heart.

Like the slaves the masters are also servants of Christ. When they realize that, they better understand the conditions in which their slaves live. In the working relationship they are above their slaves, but in relation to their Lord, they stand equal to their slaves. When the master is a good servant of Christ he shall also be a good master to his slaves.

In every possible way and in all circumstances we have an excellent and perfect model in the Father and the Son. By looking upon Them we learn how to represent on earth the spiritual, eternal and heavenly order in all our relations. Are you a father? Fathers can find a model in the Father. Are you a child? Children can find a model in the Son. Are you an employee? An employee can find a model in the true Servant and learn how heavenly standards can be put to practice. Are you an employer? An employer can find a model in the heavenly Master and learn how to be a master in accordance with heavenly standards. He is not a Master from Whom comes a threat that He will punish every bad move of his servants.

In *Ruth 2* we have a beautiful example. There you see with Boaz a good relationship between a master and his servants. That appears from his greeting: “Boaz ... said to the reapers: “*May the LORD be with you.*” And they said to him, “*May the LORD bless you*”” (*Rth 2:4*) and also from what is said further. You do not see a boss there who approaches his workers with threats and whom the workers fear. Both master and servants consider the Lord in their greeting.

Boaz also shows that with him there is “*no partiality*”. He took pity on Ruth, the Moabitess, who belonged to a cursed nation

(Deu 23:3). By this he illustrates strikingly how the “*Master in heaven*” deals with such situations.

The addition ‘in heaven’ shows in a special way the majesty of that Master. How great the appearance of an earthly master can be, it pales completely compared to that!

Now read Ephesians 6:5-9 again.

Reflection: How can a slave let the heavenly light shine in his often pitiful circumstances?

Struggle In the Heavenly Places | verses 10-13

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. **11** Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. **12** For 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]. **13** Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

V10. The word “finally” indicates that we will get something more. A closing word follows and even more than that, for even a new item is now addressed that actually connects properly to the foregoing. In the previous chapters you have read about the marvelous truths of the heavenly blessings and about Christ and the church. You also saw that these truths should affect our lives in different areas.

The item that has not been dealt with yet is that there is also an enemy that continually tries to prevent you from enjoying the blessings. He also wants to prevent the effects of those blessings showing in your life. That causes a struggle. In view of this struggle Paul draws attention to three points. The first point is the source of power, the second is the character of the enemy against whom you are struggling and the third is the armor that is handed to you, so that you are able to resist the enemy when he attacks you.

The enemy is powerful and also cunning. You yourself have no power to stand firm against his *wiles*, for this is especially the issue of this section. But in the Lord you have an awesome source of power at your disposal. He is mightier than any enemy. On top of that, it is *His* battle. He wants to triumph through you.

Therefore the first call is: “*Be strong in the Lord.*” Seek your power in Him, Who is the almighty and eternal God. Also be aware that

He is your *Lord*, the One Who has authority over you. In Him everything is present to overcome. “*In the strength of His might*” indicates that He has the power to master every opposition against Him. “*His might*” means that He is able to practice His power in the right way.

V11. In this verse you read how you can enter the battle. Therefore God hands you an armor. We shall soon see which parts this armor consists of. Here it is already said that you should put on the “*full armor*”. You cannot afford to miss one part. The point is that you shall stand firm against the continual wiles of the devil.

A beautiful example of somebody who stands firm against the attacks of the enemy, you read in 2 *Samuel* 23:11-12. It is about Shammah, one of David’s heroes. Because of his firmness he could save a piece of land and its fruits for God’s people. That is also the case with our ‘land’, that is the heavenly places and the fruits of that land, that are the spiritual blessings.

The call to stand firm means that you shall not compromise any of the blessings you have received in Christ. The devil has a whole armory of tricks and feints to deceive you. By that I mean that he tries to keep you busy with things that are not meant for you. A very successful trick is that he gives Christians the idea that it is a good thing to get involved with the politics of this world. He who enters that area quickly loses the view of the heavenly blessings and the joy of them.

But he knows more strategies, like discouragement, disappointment, confusion, moral failures and doctrinal error. All of his wiles suit him as the father of lies (*Jn* 8:44). He will always twist the truth. The best proof of that you already come across in *Genesis* 3:1. There you read about the first words the devil spoke in the Bible. He pretends to quote what God said, but he does that in his own way. The outcome is the fall of man. This is how he always operates; you have been warned (*cf.* *2Cor* 2:11; 11:14)!

Very fortunately we have an armor that is indeed of God, that is the armor God gives us. That of man does no good at all against

the wiles of the devil. God has not put on the armor, but we have. God does not need a shield of faith and neither the other parts, but we do need them.

V12. The armor doesn't consist of a sword and a shield literally. The struggle is not against men, "*not against flesh and blood*", but that doesn't mean that the devil doesn't use men. He certainly does use them, both unbelievers and believers. An example of the latter is illustrated in *Matthew 16:23*. The battle is spiritual and is going on in heavenly places; it is against powers that rule over the darkness wherein the world is absorbed.

Darkness is not only the absence of light, but also the presence of evil. Every place that has influences of sin or gives room to sin is a place where the devil and his demons are in action. So powers are hidden behind the darkness. The darkness is still being extended more and more by people who sin. They are activated to sin by invisible powers of wickedness, called demons. Demons move as powers on a much higher level than ours.

V13. Therefore we are pointed again to "*the full armor*". After all, the continuous intention of the devil is to rob the believer from the joy of the blessings he has received and which he has learnt to know in this letter. Therefore the battle will really fire off at the end of the letter only. Now you have enjoyed everything God has given to you and since you have a desire to enjoy it even more, and adapt your life to it, you should be aware that you are the target of the devil.

He will not bother the children of God who are indifferent about their blessings. Those children of God are very occupied with their earthly and sometimes even worldly matters, as if their salvation depends on that. But for you "*the evil day*" has come, the day the enemy tends to target you especially. The whole empire of darkness has been stirred and mobilized to pull down your intention.

Practically, there may be days that everything seems to go wrong and that all could not be a coincidence. In turn, this will cause

you to come under pressure. But if you have put on the armor, you will stand firm against the pressure to give up. In this way you are able 'to withstand'. This expression you also come across in *James 4:7* and *1 Peter 5:9*. It is about not giving into – and not to run away from – the threat from the enemy who wants to wipe out every thought about heavenly matters. However, God wants a testimony on earth exactly of that.

In other places in Scripture you read about 'flee' (*1Cor 6:18; 10:14; 1Tim 6:11; 2Tim 2:22*). There you see that you must flee from situations that are connected with the sinful desires of your heart.

Have you withstood them when it was necessary, then you have conquered. But watch out! It is not enough to counter the enemy. After the victory we should withstand. The attack itself is not the most dangerous, but the rest afterwards. When it seems that the battle has been fought, then precisely at that moment the greatest attack often happens. An example of that you see in the history of Elijah. After his spiritual success on Mount Carmel in *1 Kings 18* he flees in fear in the next chapter because of the threats of queen Jezebel.

In closing this part, I still want to point out that the battle that is being described here, is not a striving against the sin that dwells in us. To such a striving we are not called anywhere in the Bible. Regarding the indwelling power of sin, it is said in *Romans 6:11*: "*Consider yourselves to be dead to sin.*" Why then continue striving? But, you might say, don't we read in *Hebrews 12:4* about striving against sin? Yes, sure. But the point there is not the sin that dwells in you, but the sin that surrounds you and wants to intrude.

Now read *Ephesians 6:10-13* again.

Reflection: What is the reason that this letter ends with speaking about struggling?

The Armor | verses 14-17

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

14 Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, **15** and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; **16** in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil [one]. **17** And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

V14. We shall take a closer look at the whole armor now. We shall see what to put on (*verse 11*) and what to take up (*verse 13*) and whether you indeed have done that. When some parts aren't set right, you can still put them right.

The first part, "truth", serves as a protection of the loins. In the Bible the loins picture the strength to walk. In *Exodus 12:11* the people are told that they should eat the Passover with their "loins girded", that means: ready to leave Egypt and go to the promised land. "The loins girded with truth" means your walk is in accordance with the truth. That is a fact when you apply God's Word really to yourself. In that way you will see the reality of everything you encounter.

As "the truth in Jesus" (*Eph 4:22*) was seen in His walk, in that way it should be the power for your walk. The truth must become a part of your being, in everything you say or do. Your whole thinking, speaking and acting must be directed by the truth, by what is true, as how God sees everything. In keeping everything as how God has revealed them in His Word lies the strength for your walk in a world where satan is still lord and master.

When your feelings for the world are girded with the truth, it will save you from loving something of the world. The truth makes clear to you that the world lies under the sway of the wicked one

and that all that is in the world, is not of the Father (1Jn 5:19; 2:15-17).

To be girded with the truth doesn't mean that you have to know the whole Bible by heart. The real important thing is that you will measure everything you come into contact with, in the light of the truth. When something appears to be in accordance with the truth, it is good, but when it is against the truth, it is condemnable.

This part of the armor is also important in pastoral sense. We all have to deal with people. That can be family members, friends, colleagues, neighbors, acquaintances, a brother or sister. All of our relationships and all activities must be looked at in the light of the truth. Then only the real character of that person or activity will become clear and in that way we can take the right position. When we don't do that, you and I have a great risk that our life will be regulated by other people or by things that happen to us.

When you judge people and incidents in the light of the truth, you can give them the right place and by doing that they cannot manipulate you anymore. Only in this way you are armed with the right view and therefore you can defeat the attacks. In this way you have the strength ('loins') to live for God and show Him in the world. That is not something intuitional, but something you should seize with your mind. Peter says: *"Therefore gird up the loins of your mind"* (1Pet 1:13 NKJV).

The second part, *"righteousness"*, serves as a protection of your breast. Righteousness indicates that you give everyone his or her due. It is about dealing and acting righteously according to God's will. The *"breastplate"* protects the heart. Out of the heart *"spring the issues of life"* (Pro 4:23). Are the rights of God being recognized in everything that comes out of our hearts, so that we act like God wants us to? Paul disciplined himself always to have *"a blameless conscience [both] before God and before men"* (Acts 24:16). With him 'the breastplate of righteousness' was set right. When our conscience is not clean, we are subjected to the wiles of the devil and we are powerless in the struggle against him.

V15. The third part has to do with your feet: *“Having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.”* This is not about being prepared to proclaim the gospel; neither that you live in the security of peace *with* God (*Rom 5:1*). Peace here is the peace between Jew and Gentile in one new man (*Eph 2:14,17*). This peace is heavenly; it is the peace of God (*Phil 4:7*).

It should be visible in our walk that we live from peace. Then we bring to God everything that is in our heart. Consequently we rest in every circumstance God leads us. The Lord Jesus is our model in this (*Mt 11:25-30*). The peace of God is being characterized by the rest of God on His throne, unaffected by all the rush on earth.

When the devil cannot deceive us on the first two parts, he will try to take away our peace. Just as with Job he will use all kinds of (less than comfortable) circumstances to succeed. In heaven there is nothing that can make us restless and take away our peace. The testimony of heavenly reality will be seen on earth especially in the peace we radiate amidst all the rush.

V16. After three military garments, now three means of protection are handed to us. First: the *“shield of faith”*. So faith is presented as a shield. That is a wonderful picture. Imagine a long shield behind which the body is hidden, so you are unreachable for all fiery darts. When your faith, that means your confidence, is really focused on God, when you believe that He has control of everything and that nothing surprises Him, the attempts of the wicked one to discourage you will be in vain. Through faith you see the glorified Christ, to Whom God will soon subject all powers.

The devil whispers in your ear: ‘If God loves you, then would’ The devil feeds the thoughts of unbelief and suspicion. Those are *“the flaming arrows”* he fires off, which causes a fire in your soul that spreads fast. A dart that hits the mark causes a hole, but a fiery dart causes much more misery than a hole. The devil wants you to doubt God’s love and goodness for you. In such case you should take the shield of faith, so that all the fiery darts are resisted and quenched. Job also quenched a fiery dart that was fired on him by the devil through his wife (*Job 2:9-10*). Bear in mind

that all things are controlled by the Father and the Son. God loves you and He makes all things work together for good to those who love Him (*Rom 8:28*).

V17. To protect your head, the seat of the thoughts, God equips you with “*the helmet of salvation*”. You know that you are “*saved by grace*” (*Eph 2:5*). That salvation is a gift from God (*Eph 2:8*) and therefore depends not on men. For that reason salvation is a fixed fact, so you can resist the enemy with your head held high.

The sixth means is “*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*”. The sword is the Word of God that is used in the power of the Spirit. The Lord shows how to use it at the temptation in the desert (*Mt 4:1-11*). Again and again He defeats the devil with a quote from the Word of God, which He starts with “*it is written*”.

You handle the sword when you quote statements of God’s Word in specific situations. For an effective use of the sword of the Spirit, you should practice with it. That doesn’t only mean that you learn to know God’s Word better, but that you also know how and when to use it. Of the sixty heroes that surrounded Solomon’s carriage, it is said: “*All of them are wielders of the sword, expert in war*” (*Song 3:7-8*).

Evil powers can only be resisted with the Word of God. With the ‘*weapon of discussion*’ you will not succeed, even if you have a ready tongue.

Now read Ephesians 6:14-17 again.

Reflection: Examine how the parts of the armor work in your life.

Prayer and Love | verses 18-24

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, 19 and [pray] on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in [proclaiming] it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. 21 But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. 22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts. 23 Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible [love].

V18. There! The soldier is splendidly dressed and protected on the battlefield, ready to resist the attack. But what do you see then? He is kneeling down, without even watching out for the enemy. But that attitude makes him yet more vulnerable, doesn't it? Nothing could be further from the truth. To fall down on your knees and start praying is the final piece of the armor.

You may have set everything right, but if you omit the prayer, you will surely lose the battle. Through praying you don't check in to the enemy, but to God Who has all power in heaven and on earth. By prayer you rise above the battleground and enter God's holy place to see there the might of the Lord Jesus Who fights for you. He is the Commander; it is also His fight. He oversees the whole battleground and gives His orders.

It is striking that there is no symbol for prayer. Which symbol would be satisfying to reflect a prayer life? After all, it is important that you are continuously, "always", in connection with God in your life. A good comparison is that prayer presents, as it were,

the breathing of the soul. Without prayer your spiritual life suffocates.

The Holy Spirit Who you have received (*Eph 1:13*), wants to work this in you. He is the only One Who is able to. He knows exactly the feelings of the Lord Jesus and He also wants to work them in your heart. He leads you in your prayer and supplication. Then you do not rush a prayer out of habit, but you urgently pray for what is needed.

While praying, the risk is that your thoughts are wandering off or that you fall asleep. Therefore prayer goes together with being watchful and with perseverance (*Mk 13:33; Acts 2:42*). Through prayer the soldier is continually in connection with the Commander. Without that connection everything goes wrong. You will then act in self will and that will surely cause damage to the unity within the army. That would jeopardize the safety of others.

Acting in this way shows that you don't consider "*all the saints*" you are connected with. It is important to always consider 'all saints' (*Eph 1:15; 3:18*) for no saint is free from needs. We can pray for groups of believers, but let us also specifically name every saint in our prayers.

V19. With the words "*and [pray] on my behalf*" Paul makes clear how much he appreciates the prayers for him personally and for his ministry. He doesn't put himself above that, as if he wouldn't need prayers. We see in this a clear indication to pray for each believer personally and for his or her ministry for the Lord. In this way Paul makes the believers become co-workers in passing on blessings which he presented to them in this letter. Because of their prayer support he can also make known to others "*the mystery of the gospel*". He was convinced of the power of prayer.

V20. He doesn't ask whether they want to pray for his release from imprisonment. To him the most important thing was the proclamation of what God had entrusted to him and which was the cause of his imprisonment (*Eph 3:1; 4:1*). Therefore he asks

them to pray that he might speak in such a way that is fully in accordance with the mystery of the gospel.

It was important to him that his message would be well understood by the hearers. A preacher should always consider the level of his hearers. Not that the content of the message has to be adjusted to them, but the way that message should be brought. Every situation is different. Therefore dependence on the Lord and supplication of believers are necessary to see what ought to be spoken in any situation.

V21. The final words of Paul follow from this verse. We can say that *love* is the key issue of the final verses. In *verses 21-22* he speaks about love for one another; in *verses 23-24* it is about the love of and for God and the Lord Jesus.

Paul was interested in all the believers, but he was also convinced that all the believers were interested in him. The idea that his situation was also of concern to others, is a great proof of love which filled his heart. He wants them to know how he is doing. Therefore he sends Tychicus to them. It is very likely that Tychicus has taken the letter, which Paul is now finalizing, with him. It is possible that Tychicus also had the letter for the church in Colossae (*Col 4:7*) with him.

Paul calls him "*the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord*". That is a nice testimony. He functions as a link between Paul in prison and the believers elsewhere. Such people are scarce unfortunately. I hope that you want to be like Tychicus, that you want to be a 'transmitter' of the truth that you have learnt from Paul about the Lord Jesus. Your fellow believers shall appreciate you as a 'beloved brother'. But you are not to tell them what they like to hear, as 'a faithful servant in the Lord' doesn't do that. 'A faithful servant in the Lord' speaks of both pleasant and unpleasant truths; he reports "*everything*" that is entrusted to him.

V22. Tychicus didn't transmit cool statistic data. He was somebody who was fully involved with Paul and the other believers. In him also the feelings of Paul became visible for the believers.

The Ephesians loved Paul, so they were also sad about his circumstances. Therefore they needed some consolation. Tychicus knew how Paul felt, how he was doing. He was the right man for this mission. Paul sent him because Tychicus was able to give solace to the hearts of the Ephesians. To be able to do this you have to be in sympathy with them.

Although the Ephesians probably didn't know Tychicus, they wouldn't need time to get acquainted first. The love of Tychicus for Paul and the love of the Ephesians for the same Paul would have been felt mutually. As soon as you or I talk with somebody, we also notice that that person loves the Lord Jesus when he loves the truths that are made known to us through the ministry of Paul. Thereby I especially think about the truths that are in connection with the heavenly blessings of the Christian and the unity between Christ and His church, which are wonderfully highlighted here.

V23. His desire is that the *"brethren"* (the sisters are included) will experience the *"peace ... from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"* and also *"love with faith"*. In this time of so many divisions and confusion, pain and rejection, we heartily join in this desire. Let us pray that that desire may be fulfilled.

Love goes together with the confidence of faith here that He is above all circumstances and will fulfill His counsel and that there is nothing out of His control. The awareness of His love for us will strengthen our confidence in Him. In His love He will keep us.

V24. To his previous wishes *"grace"* is now added. Grace is the basis of all life. If we stand in grace, then the awareness of the love from God the Father and the Lord Jesus for us will increase. And can our reaction be otherwise than a burning, unquenchable mutual love for the Lord Jesus Christ? We shall love Him more and more, together *"with all"* who also do.

What a joy such a reaction must be for Him, Who *"loved the church and gave Himself for her"*!

Now read Ephesians 6:18-24 again.

Reflection: How can other believers notice that you are interested in them?

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