

- Studying a New Testament letter can feel a little like taking a college course
 - The epistles are usually stuffed with deep, theological explanations of Christ and our salvation
 - They are like onions that have to be unpeeled one layer at a time
 - We encounter challenging words that require explanation, words like propitiation, predestination, grace
 - We may find references to obscure Old Testament passages or some new spiritual mystery
 - So if you've ever found yourself reading a single verse from one of Paul's letters over and over again trying to make sense of it, you're not alone
 - But other times studying an epistle can feel like you've intercepted someone else's mail
 - Paul, Peter, John, James addressed believers from long ago and in unfamiliar circumstances
 - Sometimes the situations they cover will be familiar to us, like marriage or children
 - Other times we're left scratching our heads trying to find relevance in eating meat sacrificed to idols or slaves returning to their masters
 - But apart from the unique subject matter and style of each epistle, we generally find a common pattern in most every New Testament letter
 - You will find teaching on doctrine followed by exhortation for practical application of that doctrine
 - The writer tells us something about the Person of Christ or the work of Christ or the future of the Church
 - And then the writer turns to his readers and urges us to act in accordance with that knowledge
 - And of course this makes perfect sense, that we should first need to understand God's ways and expectations before we can seek to please Him
 - Moreover, if we appreciate what God has in store for us, we're less likely to live in a shortsighted fashion
- And we certainly find this pattern in Paul's letters
 - Perhaps more than anyone else, Paul uses teaching on Christian doctrine as a springboard into exhortation for how to live
 - He gives us the "what" so he can then give us the "so what"
 - Near the end of his life Paul declared he was innocent before men for having declared the whole counsel of God
 - He understood that believers need both doctrine and exhortation to achieve their full measure of spiritual maturity
 - I once heard someone foolishly suggest that the church needed *less* teaching on doctrine and *more* calls to action

- That's a clear denial of what we find in the New Testament letters
- That's like the captain of a cruise ship ordering more propeller but less rudder
- It merely results in going nowhere faster
- But we can see in the epistles themselves evidence that the Lord expected us to understand the doctrines of our faith so we may live by them, as Jesus said:

Luke 8:21 But He answered and said to them, “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.”

- Jesus wants followers to hear His word (which means to understand it) and then to put into action what we've learned
 - It's possible for a person to understand God's word yet fail to put it into action
 - Sadly, believers do this all the time
 - But it's impossible to act on something you've never taken time to understand
- Therefore, the Church must endeavor to know the mind of God as revealed in scripture as a prerequisite to living according to the word
 - We study epistles to learn doctrine
 - Then we dare to put into action what we learn, even against the rebellion of our flesh and the resistance of the world
 - That's why the Lord gave us the epistles and that's why we study them
- Today we begin our study in a letter written to a major city of the Roman Province of Asia Minor, called Ephesus
 - But we aren't starting in the letter Paul wrote to that city
 - Instead, we begin this morning in a letter Jesus wrote to Ephesus some 30 years later
 - From Revelation 2:

Rev. 2:1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

Rev. 2:2 ‘I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;

Rev. 2:3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

Rev. 2:4 ‘But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

Rev. 2:5 ‘Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place — unless you repent.

Rev. 2:6 ‘Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Rev. 2:7 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.’

- Obviously, we’re not starting a study of Revelation, but we’re looking at Revelation 2 today because Jesus’ letter to Ephesus directly relates to Paul’s letter
 - The Apostle John records Jesus’ commendation to the church in Ephesus for standing strong against false teachers
 - Certainly, standing up to false teachers is a commendable thing
 - Other churches in their day were not so diligent
 - False teachers, particularly Judiazers, were making inroads into churches in the empire at that time
 - But Ephesus remained devoted to proclaiming and preserving the true doctrines of the apostles
 - Ephesus’ resistance to false teaching probably came from their close association with early church leaders
 - Paul lived and taught in Ephesus for about three years during his second missionary journey
 - The Apostle John himself ministered inside the city for some years
 - And Paul’s protege Timothy ministered there as well
 - There are even some who suggest Peter may have spent time in Ephesus after fleeing Jerusalem
- With so many strong teachers guarding the flock in Ephesus, it’s not surprising that the church held the high ground on doctrine
 - But what is a little surprising, however, is that this church failed to put that doctrine into action
 - Jesus told this church that He had one thing against them: they had left their first love
 - What is the “first love” of the church?
 - One possible answer (and perhaps the first one that comes to our minds) would be Christ Himself
 - But I don’t think that’s what Jesus is talking about here
 - I don’t think Jesus is saying the church abandoned Him personally, as if to suggest they were no longer believing in Jesus
 - The word in Greek for “first” is *protos*, which means most prominence, before all else
 - He’s not speaking of chronological order, that is the first kind of love

- He's speaking of most important, the highest priority
- Notice in v.5 the Lord gave the church the recipe for returning to their first love
 - He told the church to do the deeds they did at first
 - Once again, the word is *protos* meaning most important
 - So apparently, the first or highest priority love of the church is serving the Lord through our deeds
- We're talking about worship, study, prayer, meeting the needs in the body
 - Witnessing concerning their new-found faith to the citizens of Ephesus
 - Enduring persecution even as they rejoiced in miracles of the Spirit
 - In short, living by the Spirit in light of the salvation they have received
- Ephesus had great respect for doctrine, great intolerance for false teaching, and at one point they did deeds in keeping with the doctrine they knew
 - But at some point, things changed in Ephesus
 - They left their first love, Jesus said
 - They set aside the more important work of the Church, of serving Christ and God's people
 - Instead, they returned to the lower priority of pursuing worldly things, earthly accomplishments, earthly wealth, earthly recognition
 - Because they knew so much and did so little, Jesus declared it was to their condemnation in the end
 - Jesus warned the church in Ephesus they could lose their lampstand
 - In other words, if they would not fulfill their mission to be light in the world, then they forfeit their place as a church
 - This is a sobering thought we shouldn't run past too quickly
 - Jesus says that putting our faith and our knowledge of doctrine into action is so important to Him, that if we fail in that mission, we no longer have reason to exist as a church
 - James famously says that faith without works is dead, is useless, because it exists by itself (James 2:17)
 - In other words, the Lord never intended for our faith to exist "by itself"
 - Faith was always intended to lead to action
- We should ask what distracted the church in Ephesus away from the deeds they did at first?
 - False teaching is often the cause for a church wandering, but we know it wasn't false teaching in the case of Ephesus
 - Jesus praised them for their adherence to sound doctrine
 - No, in this case it must have been something else
 - The most likely cause was the culture of Ephesus itself

- Ephesus was a very wealthy, very exciting, metropolis but it was also a very corrupting place to do ministry
 - It was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia Minor, famous for its temple to the goddess Diana and for its Roman stadium
 - The temple drew worshippers from around the empire and featured thousands of prostitutes who participated in the pagan ceremonies
 - The city's stadium was the largest of its kind in the world, seating 50,000 people for gladiator games
- And the city was alive with commerce and food and drink, fueled historically by its major port, but also by trade, banking and temple visitors
 - In short, Ephesus was a “happening” place
 - So if you wanted to chase the world's riches or perhaps obtain a name for yourself or power in an earthly institution, Ephesus was a good place to do it
- And it seemed the church in Ephesus began doing just that
 - History records that Jesus did, in fact, follow through on his warning to remove the church's lampstand
 - He withdrew His hand of blessing causing the church to disappear
 - By the second century, the city was in decline, the port having silted up over the years, and the church having died out
 - Eventually, the city itself became a ruin
 - This sad outcome is even more surprising when you remember the church's beginnings
 - Not only did Paul and other apostles live and teach in the city for several years
 - But Paul made special effort to meet with the church elders and exhort them concerning this very threat while on his way to Jerusalem for the final time
 - Listen to Paul's words of advice to the church leadership

Acts 20:17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

Acts 20:18 And when they had come to him, he said to them, “You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time,

Acts 20:19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;

Acts 20:20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house,

Acts 20:21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 20:22 “And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there,

Acts 20:23 except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

Acts 20:24 “But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

Acts 20:25 “And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face.

Acts 20:26 “Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men.

Acts 20:27 “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

Acts 20:28 “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Acts 20:29 “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

Acts 20:30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Acts 20:31 “Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

Acts 20:32 “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Acts 20:33 “I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes.

Acts 20:34 “You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me.

Acts 20:35 “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 20:36 When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

- These were Paul’s parting words to the elders at Ephesus
 - For our purposes this morning, I want us to focus on the last part of that passage
 - Paul ends his comments by asking the leaders to remember Paul’s example as he lived among them for several years
 - Specifically, he says in Acts 20:31 that he admonished them day and night with tears while he lived in Ephesus
 - Paul speaks like a man who was burdened by what he experienced in Ephesus and he dearly wanted better things for the church
 - What burdened Paul?
 - We get a clue by what Paul says next in v.32

- Paul commends them to the word of God, which he says can build them up and deliver an inheritance to the sanctified
- Paul's mention of an "inheritance" is key here, because it turns out that the church's key weakness was pursuit of riches in all forms
- As I said, this was a wealthy city, a city that not only possessed great wealth but also inspired its citizens to seek for more of it
 - We all know this feeling to some extent, the feeling that we wish we could have what others around us possess
 - It's human nature to see wealth on display and to covet for it
 - If we are dishonest, then we will seek to obtain it in illegitimate ways
 - But even if we are upright and honest, we may still become distracted working for it at the expense of serving God
- Next, Paul exhorts the church to remember his example while he lived among them
 - In v.33 Paul says, remember that he coveted no one's silver and gold
 - Paul was not defending himself against accusations that he was a thief
 - He was pointing out by way of example that he never set his sights on obtaining the wealth of Ephesus
 - He didn't desire their silver and gold, it didn't distract him and he didn't work to obtain it from them
 - Instead, Paul says he worked to support his basic needs, enough to ensure he wasn't a burden on others, but that's where it ended
 - Paul says in v.35 that he did this so that he had time remaining to work on more important matters, on spiritual concerns
 - Specifically, he says he worked to help the weak in the church
 - Paul meant he spent time working to assist the poor financially, perhaps those too sick or old to work themselves
 - But I think Paul also meant he invested time in the spiritual needs of the church, teaching and praying and encouraging
- These things Paul told the church to remember, as a model for their own behavior, because back in v.32 he told them they had an eternal inheritance
 - Paul is talking about riches in Heaven, riches awaiting those who are sanctified
 - Which explains his concluding comment in v.35 where Paul says it is more blessed to give than receive
 - When we give (e.g., time, talent, treasure) to the needs of the body, we are investing in our own spiritual future
 - We are serving Christ sacrificially, and by doing so we are storing up treasure in Heaven, as Jesus said
 - Our giving will be blessed later in Heaven, and the result will be far greater riches than anything we could have obtained here

- On the other hand, when we structure our earthly lives to “receive,” that is to receive wealth or spend time on ourselves or gain attention for ourselves instead of for Christ, we may be forgoing heavenly things
 - Certainly, we can say we are blessed by what we obtain here
 - A rich man on earth is blessed
 - A man who received great power or honor on earth might say he’s blessed
 - But those blessings are always less than the heavenly one reserved for those who serve Christ
- Paul said he made sacrifices to model what serving Christ looks like to a church that lived in a rich city with many distractions
 - And as Paul lived among them, he was burdened by the sight of their struggles with temptation
 - And he must have pleaded them with tears to not get caught up in chasing the world
- Paul maintained his first love and he admonished the church in Ephesus to do the same
 - To seek for the inheritance found by hearing and doing the word of God
 - And not to covet the gold and silver that will perish
- So you might be asking how this background relates to our study of the book of Ephesians?
 - First, it’s clear that Paul and Jesus had concerns for this church
 - In Paul’s final instructions in Acts, he was concerned the church might succumb to the temptations of the city to serve self instead of Christ
 - And just a few decades later, we hear Jesus telling this church they did, indeed, leave the highest priority, which suggests they went after other things
 - Secondly, it’s safe to say Ephesus was a church whose affections were divided
 - On the one hand, they knew and respected the doctrines of their faith
 - On the other hand, they desired the wealth and prominence their city offered to those willing to chase after it
 - The Church had known a period of success, early in their walk, when their faith prompted a love for serving God and His people
 - They served the mission of the church, setting aside the pursuit of earthly things and setting their eyes on Jesus and His concerns
 - But eventually, they fell to the temptations of earthly things, they left their first love and they lost their way and eventually their place
 - This is how the story of Ephesus ended
 - It’s an unhappy ending
 - But it didn’t have to be this way
- The circumstances surrounding the Church of Ephesus have much in common with the

Church today in many places in the world

- We are blessed to be living in the wealthiest time in all human history
 - Most developed nations enjoy a standard of living far beyond what was possible in past generations
 - While we still have places of poverty and war and disease, in general those things impact less people to a lesser degree than in times past
 - In many places today the church is surrounded by a culture of materialistic, attention hogging, power grabbing, experience seeking pagans
 - Just like the church in Ephesus
- So the question arises, are we in danger of leaving our first love?
 - Are we all doctrine and no action?
 - Do we guard the teaching yet allow our hearts to be tempted by the world around us?
 - Do we acknowledge we have been approved by God through our faith in Christ yet still covet the praises of men?
 - Are we all hat and no cattle, as the phrase goes?
- I'd like to suggest that the story of Ephesus we studied this morning is like the Ghost of Christmas Future from Dickens' Christmas Carol
 - It's a story of how one Church ended, and it could be the story of how other churches will go too...but it doesn't have to be our story
 - We may live in a similar materialistic, pagan culture as the church in Ephesus did
 - But we don't have to succumb to the same temptations
 - Because we have Paul's letter written to Ephesus
 - Paul's letter is one of the notable ironies of the New Testament
 - He wrote the letter precisely to encourage the church not to fall to the very temptations that eventually did them in
 - Having lived among them for years, he knew the culture well
 - And naturally he worried for the church's future, as we heard in his parting comments in Acts
 - So Paul wrote a letter that is 50% doctrine, 50% exhortation hoping to prevent the church's downfall
 - He will explain the true riches that accompany salvation and sanctification for every believer
 - So that the church might have reason to set aside their desires for Ephesus to pursue Christ instead
 - And he calls for the church to live a sanctified life, one that witnesses to Christ in a daily way
 - History records that the church didn't heed the instruction they received

- They may have guarded the letter, they may even have understood it
- But they certainly didn't put it into action
- Their faith stood by itself, being useless, dead
- And ultimately that became the fate of the church itself
- That doesn't have to be our future, if only we would hear the word of God and do it
 - Starting next week, we dive into Paul's letter seeking to hear it and do it...

- After our long introduction last week, we're ready to dive into Paul's letter
 - And since we spent an entire lesson on the letter's background, I think we'll just go directly to the text beginning with Paul's salutation

Eph. 1:1 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:

Eph. 1:2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Paul introduces himself in his customary fashion, identifying himself to his readers as an apostle by the will of God
 - You'll almost always find Paul beginning his letters in this way
 - First, he identifies himself to his Greek audience by his Greek name
 - His Jewish name was Saul, which when translated into the Greek becomes Paul
 - Paul was the Jewish apostle sent by Christ to the Gentile world and Paul embraced his calling wholeheartedly
 - So he identified with his Greek audience by calling himself Paul
 - Next Paul reminds his audience that he possessed the authority of an apostle
 - An apostle is a special member of the body of Christ
 - He is a man commissioned by Christ personally, though a personal appearing of the Lord
 - Apostles had unique authority and power to bring the Gospel to unreached areas
 - They authored New Testament scripture and they could perform supernatural acts of healing as proof of their special calling
 - The first apostles were those who followed Jesus before He died, and then there were a few more who were commissioned by the risen Lord
 - Paul was one of those apostles commissioned by the risen Lord
 - Before Paul was commissioned and began to serve the Lord, he persecuted the church
 - And it was Paul's history as a persecutor of the church that gave his critics opportunity to accuse him of being illegitimate
 - So Paul frequently defended his position of authority
- Furthermore, Paul adds that he is an apostle "by the will of God"
 - Remember how Paul was traveling to arrest Christians in Damascus when the Lord appeared before him
 - Jesus blinded Saul and sent him to a believer in Damascus
 - That believer, a man named Ananias, expressed concern to Jesus about coming face-to-face with the man known to kill Christians

- And to this Jesus replied:

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

Acts 9:16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

- So Paul didn’t volunteer for his job...God thrust it upon him
 - Jesus says Paul was a “chosen instrument”
 - Paul wasn’t a volunteer, Paul was recruited, Paul was chosen
- What’s more, Paul became a believer in Jesus Christ in this same way
 - Paul didn’t get a chance to choose to be a disciple of Christ
 - I imagine had someone asked Saul if he was interested in becoming a disciple of Jesus and suffering for the benefit of Gentiles, he would have spit in their face
 - God didn’t put the question to Saul because Saul would have refused
 - And so the Lord arrested Saul on the road, God gave Saul a debilitating condition and then sent Ananias to explain the situation
- Consequently, Paul often opened his letters by explaining his role and authority as something God has willed, not something Paul willed
 - It silenced those who claimed Paul wasn’t to be trusted since his ministry began after the other apostles and he was a persecutor of the church
 - Paul doesn’t defend himself on the basis of self-worth or merit
 - He doesn’t give excuse for his persecution of the church
 - Rather, he says the Lord selected him for the role and therefore the Lord was responsible for the timing of his conversion
 - This was an especially important point in light of Paul’s purpose for writing to Ephesus
 - He’s going to explain the Lord’s sovereign hand in our relationship with Christ
 - And what better way to prepare them to hear about God’s sovereignty than to remind them of how he himself entered into that relationship according to God’s choice
- At the end of v.1 Paul addresses the letter to those in Ephesus who are faithful and in Christ Jesus
 - They were “in Christ” which means they were a part of the family of God by faith
 - This was their true identity
 - Before they were Roman citizens or residents of Ephesus, their identity was found in Christ
 - And beyond their identity in Christ, they were faithful in Christ
 - To be faithful doesn’t mean to merely have faith

- A Christian can fail to be faithful to the Lord
- But those in Ephesus were faithful, as we learned last week
- They remained faithful to the truth and to the apostles' teaching
- Paul greets this church in v.2 with grace and peace from the Father and the Son
 - This is the classic greeting from Paul
 - He never failed to remind his readers that they were recipients of God's grace and at eternal peace with God
 - Before faith they were due judgment, and so they knew the fear of death and what came afterward
 - But God's favor, His grace, leads us to eternal peace
 - Of course, the church had grace and peace spiritually, but that doesn't mean they experienced grace and peace in their lives
 - We've received God's grace, but do we live knowing we are forgiven?
 - We have been reconciled to God in peace, but do we trouble ourselves with unnecessary fears and worries and struggles of this life?
 - Many Christians do by allowing the things of this world to determine our happiness, security, contentment and fulfillment
 - But we should seek all those things through our relationship with Christ
 - As I mentioned last week, this church was especially troubled by worldly temptations and distractions
 - They were leaning too heavily on earthly concerns for validation, for satisfaction
 - And they were overlooking the surpassing riches of God's mercy which was already theirs by faith
 - So for them, Paul wishes they would experience the grace and peace they have received
- Paul then launches into one of the most powerful theological declarations in all the New Testament, intended to remind the church of all they received in Christ
 - The doctrine Paul will teach is found in Chapters 1-3
 - Remember, we study doctrine so we can know how to live in response to these truths
 - So in these chapters, we get a steady stream of truth by which we may live
 - Later in Chapters 4-6 we'll receive the application of these truths
 - The chapters of doctrine take a unique form in Paul's letters, reading almost like a prayer or a praise letter to God Himself
 - The teaching opens with a single Greek sentence running from Chapter 1:3-14
 - This sentence is a continuous praise to the Lord for all He's given to the believer by His grace
 - So imagine you receive a letter informing you that you've been invited to join the

- most exclusive country club in town
 - You never applied, and you certainly didn't pay the membership fee
 - Neither do you meet the qualifications for membership
 - Nevertheless, you received the acceptance letter, so you go to the club office to receive your welcome initiation
 - When you arrive, the club owner presents you with a list of the privileges enjoyed by club members
 - Imagine being overwhelmed by the many, many benefits that come from membership at this exclusive club
 - That's one way to understand vs.3-14
 - Paul knows he's writing to a group of status-conscious, wealth-seeking sophisticates living in worldly circumstances
 - They are Christians, and they are faithful to the true teachings of the church, but their affections are divided
 - So Paul is reminding them that membership in the family of God has privileges that far outweigh what they seek in Ephesus
- We'll study these benefits one at a time, but since these verses (3-14) are one long sentence, we will have to divide it up as we go through it
 - By the way, I think Paul's choice to write only one sentence is not an accident
 - It think it's a result of Paul's being carried forward quickly by the Spirit from one thought to another
 - As Paul considered one spiritual benefit, it led him to contemplate another and then another
 - Producing a chain of connected ideas
 - So we begin with v.3, which is an overview

Eph. 1:3 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,

- Paul begins where all things begin: God the Father
 - Paul says the Father is "blessed," and he uses the word in the sense of "speak well of"
 - So Paul says speak well of the Father
- And do so because He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
 - Jesus is a member of the Godhead, and His coming to dwell among men was the plan of the Father
 - In the mystery of the Trinity, we know the Lord Jesus Christ was not "created" by the Father

- Nevertheless Jesus Christ came forth from the Father, taking the form of man
- In that sense Paul is saying speak well of the Father for sending us our Lord Jesus Christ
- And furthermore, our Father has blessed His children by faith with “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places”
 - Paul begins his list of privileges for those in the body of Christ with this general statement
 - There are three parts to the statement, so let’s look at them one at a time starting with the final thing Paul says
 - What we have we receive because we’re “in Christ”
 - Our opportunity for blessing is a result of our relationship with Christ by faith
 - Truly, nothing we’re going to discuss in this letter will make any sense for a person unless he or she is in Christ
 - Because Christ Himself is the Blessed One of God
 - You and I aren’t “blessing-worthy” based on our own merits
 - Our opportunity for blessing from the Father is entirely based on Christ’s work on our behalf
 - So whatever we receive from the Father comes because the Son deserves it, not because we do
 - It’s because the Father blessed the Son that we too are blessed
 - And that should give us great comfort
 - Knowing that your blessings are the result of Christ’s goodness and His work, not your own, gives us confidence in that future
- Also notice that v.3 is written in the past tense
 - The Father has *already* determined to bless us because of Christ
 - Yes, the Bible teaches of heavenly rewards based on our service to Christ
 - But it also teaches that our relationship with Christ alone assures us of unimaginable blessing apart from anything we do
 - Therefore great and eternal blessing will be ours as a result of our faith in Christ, and this is without question
 - We’ll talk more about these blessings as we go further in the letter
 - For now it’s enough to know that the Lord has plans to bless all his children because of Christ
 - On the other hand, if you have not yet placed your faith in Christ as your Savior, then nothing Paul’s talking about applies to you
 - These are things the Father has reserved for those who are in Christ, because Christ alone deserves them
 - Yet He shares them with those who are His by faith

- Which leads me to the second part of Paul's statement:
 - We have received *spiritual blessings*
 - It's become vogue in the church these days to talk about blessings, to claim blessings, to name blessings, etc.
 - Preachers and their congregations throw the word around frequently and casually these days
 - A new car is a blessing, a new job is a blessing, a tax refund is a blessing
 - A good hair day is a blessing
 - And the Lord certainly grants us earthly blessings in various forms, but Paul has spiritual things in mind
 - The kind of spiritual blessings we can experience today are benefits for our spiritual well-being
 - Things like peace, contentment, holiness, patience, sacrifice, courage, boldness, joy, compassion, humility and the like
 - The Bible calls spiritual blessings the fruit of the Spirit, and they are the manifestation of God's love in our hearts
- Some Christians are so focused on gaining material blessings that they're overlooking the superiority of the spiritual blessings found in Christ
 - Perhaps that's you
 - Perhaps you have trouble understanding how spiritual blessings are of much value when you're struggling just to pay the bills
 - Or you're trying to survive the next layoff or repair a broken relationship, or fight an illness
 - If that's you, then let me encourage you to talk to a Christian who has learned to value spiritual blessing in a fallen world
 - Talk to the one who knows true contentment in a world of keeping up with the Joneses
 - To someone who has learned to forgive in a world of hatred and vengeance
 - Talk to the Christian who has found peace in knowing Christ and waiting for the Kingdom
 - They'll all tell you...they've gained something much more valuable by walking in the Spirit than anything they sought in this world
 - And remember Paul started the verse saying that we have received *every* spiritual blessing in Christ
 - In other words, you can't find these blessings anywhere else
 - You may pursue peace on earth, but you won't find it...you already have it available in Christ
 - You may seek contentment or security or love or joy or solace any number of ways, but none of those ways will work in the end

- Whatever they give will be temporary at best
 - But true lasting spiritual blessing is found in walking with Christ by His Spirit
- Finally, Paul says these blessings are in the heavenly places
 - Beyond the spiritual benefits that we derive here on earth as a result of walking in Christ, there is even greater blessing awaiting in the heavenly realm
 - This will be a central tenet in Paul's teaching to Ephesus
 - He's going to tell them they are richer than they could possibly know
 - They possess more than their unbelieving neighbors ever will
 - While they were distracted trying to earn the wealth of Ephesus, the Father had reserved heavenly blessings for them like nothing else
 - The sooner you realize how rich you truly are in heaven, the sooner you relinquish the thought of gaining the wealth here
 - It reminds me of Aesop's fable of the dog holding a bone in its mouth
 - It looks at its reflection in the river and thinks it sees another dog with another bone
 - It snaps at the other bone it sees in the reflection, only to lose the bone it was holding in its mouth
 - Likewise, Christians trying to grasp for this world are forgetting that they already hold heaven in their mouth, so to speak
- So in just v.3 Paul has established the thesis for the doctrine of his letter
 - That spiritual riches are assured for all who are in Christ, and these riches surpass all that the world holds
 - But this is merely Paul's opening salvo
 - It's not a recipe for Christian living, nor does Paul expect us to simply rest in this statement without support
 - Think of v.3 as Paul's thesis statement, his overview
 - But we've just begun a sentence that runs for 11 more verses, so there's much more coming
 - Next Paul begins to explain how each member of the Godhead worked to secure these blessings for us
 - Beginning with the Father

Eph. 1:4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love

Eph. 1:5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

Eph. 1:6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

- The opening word in v.4 is translated “just as” in English, but that doesn’t really convey the Greek meaning well
 - The word in Greek is *kathos*, which is better translated “in as much as” or “accordingly”
 - The word means, here’s how we gained these heavenly blessings
 - So in vs.4-6 Paul explains the Father’s role
 - The Father’s role in assuring us heavenly blessing was choosing and predestining us to our relationship with Christ
 - Paul says the Father chose us in Him
 - The “Him” in this phrase is Christ, so Paul is saying the Father chose us to be in Christ
 - We know the term “in Christ” is a uniquely Pauline way of describing someone who is saved, a Christian
 - So without a doubt, Paul says the Father chose us to be saved by our faith in Christ
 - Paul says the same thing in numerous places including 1 Corinthians

1Cor. 1:30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,

- Paul says we are in Christ Jesus by the Father’s doing
- Because the Father chose us, we were found in Christ
- For many believers, the word “chose” causes us to pause
 - We ask what does it mean that the Father chose us?
 - Does it mean he chose us over someone else?
 - Does He choose everyone? Does He not choose some? Why?
 - I won’t try to address these questions here today, not now
 - But the Bible does answer these questions, patiently and specifically
 - And we will find our answers as we move through this study
- Meanwhile, we can’t let our questions lead us to change the basic meaning of words or ignore them altogether
 - Paul says plainly that the Father chose us to be in Christ
 - The words mean exactly what it seems to mean...God selected us to be followers of Jesus Christ
 - Just as He chose Paul to believe and follow Jesus
 - Just as Jesus chose His first disciples

John 6:66 As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.

John 6:67 So Jesus said to the twelve, “You do not want to go away also, do you?”

John 6:68 Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.

John 6:69 “We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.”

John 6:70 Jesus answered them, “Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?”

- While you may not yet understand all the implications of this statement
 - Don’t let your questions become reason to dismiss God’s words out of hand
 - You can accept the truth of what God’s word says even before you understand all it implies
- For example, can you understand that God is One and yet is also Three?
 - No one this side of Heaven can understand it adequately
 - Even as we try to explain it with analogies or other comparisons, our words inevitably fall short
 - But we can accept it as true
- Can you explain how God could exist from eternity? Or how God can become born of a woman?
 - Explanations of these things fail us, yet we still accept these things as true
 - Likewise, we accept the fact that the Father chose us even if this truth raises difficult questions
- If you’re tempted to think that God’s choice was for something less than our salvation, then Paul’s words at the end of v.4 end the argument
 - Paul says the Father made this choice on our behalf so that we would become holy, and blameless before Him
 - To be holy and blameless means to be without judgment for sin
 - To be justified by the atonement of Christ on our behalf
 - This detail eliminates any other interpretation of Paul’s words
 - If the result of the Father’s choosing us was that we would become holy and blameless, then we must say that the result of the Father’s choice was that we would be saved
 - We can’t conclude Paul is saying the Father merely chose to offer us the Gospel
 - Offering someone the Gospel doesn’t result in that person becoming holy and blameless
 - Many people are offered the Gospel in human terms, but most of them die in their sins

- No, the only conclusion we can make is that the Father's choice directly resulted in us being made holy and blameless in Christ
- The Father chose us in Christ because this is the only way we could stand before a holy and just God
- And as it turns out, the timing of the Father's decision is all-important
 - Did He choose us at some point during our life?
 - Was it the moment before we confessed Christ?
 - Was it the moment we confessed, or perhaps the moment immediately after?
 - Perhaps we did something extraordinarily good
 - Or perhaps those who God does not choose forfeited their opportunity to be in Christ because of some terrible sin
 - If He chose us at some point in our lifetime, then we might rightly conclude that His choice was a response to something that happened during our life
 - And the Lord didn't want us to misunderstand how we found ourselves in Christ
 - It wasn't something we did, whether good or bad, it was God's choice alone
- So in v.4 Paul says the Father chose us before the foundations of the world
 - The foundations of the world refers to the start of God's creative work in forming the universe
 - Paul imagines God's creative work as a massive construction project
 - Before the superstructure of our skyscraper can begin to rise from the pit, a foundation must be laid
 - And even before that foundation is poured, an architect has drawn up the plans for every step of the construction
 - Those plans show in detail how the final work will appear, yet the plans themselves are not the work itself
 - They represent the mind of the architect prepared in advance of the construction project
 - But as time moves forward, the plans in that drawing will take shape as a building, beginning with a foundation
 - So Paul says that the Father had you and me in His architectural drawings for salvation in Christ
 - And He drew up these plans even before the Lord began the creation of the world
 - Go back to Genesis 1:1, read that verse, and then consider that the Lord had you on His mind even before that verse took place
 - Before the foundations of the earth were laid, the Lord had already placed a check mark next to your name: "Chosen for salvation"
 - Then on a day, in the course of time, God's plan unfolded and you were born and then you were born again

- Why did the Lord make His choice before Creation itself?
 - So that we couldn't attribute His choice to anything inside His creation
 - It wasn't a result of your family line
 - It wasn't the result of your parents
 - It wasn't the result of your choices or decisions
 - You didn't earn it, you didn't even know it was coming
 - Just as Paul wrote when he explained why God blessed one twin of Rebecca and not the other

Rom. 9:10 And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac;

Rom. 9:11 for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls,

Rom. 9:12 it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger."

Rom. 9:13 Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, But Esau I hated."

- God announced His choice of the younger son in Isaac's family above the older son
 - And He announced it before either had been born to ensure that we couldn't say it was the result of what they did
 - It wasn't based on merit; it was based solely on God's purposes in choosing
- It's no different for us as believers in Jesus Christ
 - We were chosen by the Father and His decision came long before we were born
 - And though we've only just begun to understand this important point, we can already see why this point is important to Paul's argument
 - We can be assured that we have spiritual blessings in the heavenly realm, because God has chosen us to have them
 - If God's plan to bless us began even before the Creation itself was formed, then what could possibly deny us our blessings?
 - What *inside* Creation can challenge a decision God made *before* Creation?
 - So the fact that we were chosen by the Father is immense comfort to every believer who has come to understand and rest in this truth
 - In coming weeks we'll explore the concept of God choosing us in greater depth
 - But even now let the power of this truth begin to comfort you
 - As Paul says:

Rom. 8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

- It's our third week in this study, and we're barely four verses into Paul's letter to Ephesus
 - There are 155 verses in this letter, so I'm 2.5% done
 - At this rate, we would finish the letter in Spring 2018
 - While some of you aren't surprised to hear me say that, to the rest of you, let me assure you my intention is to pick up the pace eventually
 - But some parts of this letter require extra attention, so we'll go slower than usual at times
 - Then in other places the material will permit a faster pace
 - As it turns out, the first three chapters, where the doctrine of the letter resides, will go more slowly
 - Doctrine can be tough to chew on, and there are few places in the New Testament with deeper doctrine than in Ephesians 1-3
 - We'll speed up in later chapters where we'll study Paul's instructions for living in the light of this doctrine
 - So if you're wondering whether you will live to see the end of this study, don't worry
 - You will...probably
- Last week I ended our study at the beginning of a controversial passage, on the topic of God the Father choosing us for salvation
 - Let's reread that passage

Eph. 1:4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love

Eph. 1:5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

Eph. 1:6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

- There is hardly a topic more hotly debated in the church than the doctrine of predestination
 - Did God choose us to believe or did we choose to believe in the Gospel? Or is it some combination of the two?
 - Practically anyone whose been a Christian longer than about a day is at least aware of this debate
 - And most believers have planted their flag on one side of this divide or the other
- But this isn't a sporting event, and we're not rooting for a winning team
 - This is a question of truth, of knowing what the word of God truly says on important matters of faith
 - And clearly, one side of this debate is wrong

- So let's return to our study determined to hear from the Spirit and to set aside pride and preconceived ideas
- Last week Paul explained that we can be confident in our riches in Heaven because the Father has chosen us to receive them
 - He chose us to be in Christ, that is to be a born-again child of God
 - Today as we move forward to the next verse, v.5, we find Paul doubling-down on his statement that we were chosen
 - In v.4 he said we were chosen before the foundations of the earth
 - And now in v.5 he adds we were predestined to become a child of God
 - I wonder if there is any word in the Bible that causes more discontent, disagreement and dispute than the word predestined (or predestination)
 - It's such a shame, because there is no more beautiful nor comforting word in all scripture
 - And the meaning of the Greek word is easy to define
 - The word in Greek is *proorizo*
 - The definition of *proorizo* – its only definition – is “to determine an outcome beforehand”
- So on the matter of our salvation, Paul says (twice now) that the Father determined beforehand, before the foundations of the earth, that we would be saved
 - That decision was specific to you...God chose you personally
 - And it was for the purpose of bringing you to salvation
 - Paul says you were predestined to adoption as sons and daughters of God
 - The Bible frequently uses the concept of adoption to explain our salvation
 - Adopting a child means taking someone who was not born naturally into your family and making them family
 - Before the adoption, they were strangers
 - After the adoption, they are equal in every way with natural children
 - This picture fits our situation perfectly
 - Later in Chapter 2 Paul will explain this idea further, reminding his readers that they were strangers to God and children of His wrath
 - Likewise, Peter says we were once not in the family of God

1Pet. 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

1Pet. 2:10 for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

- But then the Lord adopted us into His family
 - Like all adoptions, the child doesn't choose the parent
 - The parent chooses the child personally, just as the Father chose you personally to become His child by faith
 - And His choice of you had nothing to do with merit...children don't audition for their adoptive parents
 - The child is simply the beneficiary of a decision made by the parent
- This is exactly what the Bible teaches happened to you and me
 - We were originally born into the family of Adam
 - But the Lord determined before the world began that in a day to come we would be adopted into His family by faith in Jesus Christ
 - And when that day came, the Father sent His Spirit to carry out that plan
- Still struggling with this concept? Then consider what Paul says in Romans:

Rom. 8:29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

- In that verse, Paul introduces another controversial term: foreknew
 - In Greek it's the word *proginosko*, which means to know beforehand
 - So the Lord had us on His mind before the first day of Creation
 - Having us in mind, He then determined that we should become His children
- Some Christians, who reject the idea that God chooses us for salvation, have tried to confuse the meaning of these two words
 - Some would tell you the word predestination means God *knew* beforehand that *we* would choose to believe in Christ
 - So then they say God simply confirmed our choice by predestining us
- As you can probably tell, this is circular logic
 - If God is merely confirming our own choice in advance, then He isn't choosing us at all
 - Under that interpretation, the word predestination no longer means determining an outcome beforehand
 - They redefine the word predestination to mean the same thing as foreknowing... God knowing something we would do before we did it and then confirming it in some sense
 - It's like taking the word "cat" and deciding it means "dog" instead
- In reality, to predestine means something different than to foreknow
 - And we can see these words mean different things by looking at Roman 8:29

- Paul uses both words in the same verse to represent completely different yet complimentary ideas
- Predestination means to decide the future in advance, to determine an outcome before it comes to pass
- While foreknowing means to have a thought in advance of an action
- So God had us on His mind before He acted to choose us
- More importantly, as a result of God's choice to adopt us, we now have the promise of sharing in the riches of Christ's inheritance
 - Notice Paul said in Romans 8:29 that we are predestined to follow in Christ's footsteps, Who was the firstborn of many brethren
 - Jesus was the firstborn of Creation, meaning he was the first to resurrect into an eternal body
 - As children of God, we share this same future, to receive a new, eternal body that can never die
 - But more than that, as children of God we will share in God's inheritance
 - The Bible says that Christ as the Son of God received an inheritance on the occasion of His own death
 - An inheritance is something a person receives on the occasion of a death
 - A person's wealth is transferred to someone else at the moment they die
 - When your rich uncle dies, he leaves his inheritance to his heirs
 - That transfer of wealth couldn't happen until he died
 - Normally when a person dies, his Last Will and Testament dictates that his wealth be transferred to a living relative
 - But in the case of Christ, He died but then He lived again
 - So at His resurrection, He received His own inheritance back
 - The irony is Christ's own death produced His inheritance
- Paul says Christ is the firstborn of the Father, and we are likewise children of God by faith
 - So Christ's inheritance will be shared among all the children of God
 - Because we are all children of God by faith, then we are also heirs who share in the inheritance of God
 - As Paul says in Galatians

Gal. 4:6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

Gal. 4:7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

- Notice, Paul says because you were already predestined to be a son or daughter of God, He sent His Spirit into our hearts leading us to confess Christ
 - And then as we confess, we realized God's plan for our life
 - We ceased being a slave to sin and became an adopted son or daughter of God
 - And if we are a child of God, Paul says we are also an heir
- Hebrews explains how we can share in Christ's inheritance

Heb. 9:15 For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Heb. 9:16 For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it.

- The writer of Hebrews says that those who have been called (again, those chosen of God for salvation) receive the promise of an eternal inheritance
 - That inheritance is the consequence of a covenant
 - The word covenant in Greek can also be translated "testament" as in a Last Will and Testament
- When someone makes a Last Will and Testament, they specify who receives their wealth when they die
 - That's why the writer of Hebrews says a covenant always necessitates a death
 - You can't gain the inheritance of a covenant (or testament) until the one who made it dies
 - Jesus established His covenant (or we could say His Last Will and Testament) at the cross
- Jesus' covenant comes with an inheritance to pass along to His heirs
 - God owns everything in Creation
 - So when God dies, the estate He passes along to His children is the Earth and all it contains
- Then God (Jesus) rose from the dead, and claimed the right to receive His own inheritance back
 - Since God's children are also heirs with Christ, then we too share in the inheritance Christ gained by His death
 - So Hebrews says Jesus shares His inheritance with those who have been called to be like Christ, to be God's children...you and me
- Now you see the significance of the Father choosing us before the foundations of the earth
 - Paul says we were chosen to receive a portion of God's Creation as our inheritance

in the coming Kingdom

- When God died on the cross in the Person of Christ, God's riches were inherited by all God's children
 - But you and I weren't alive on the day Christ died, so does that mean we aren't eligible to receive our portion?
 - We qualify to receive a portion of an inheritance only if we are specifically listed in deceased's Last Will and Testament, in their covenant
- That's why Paul emphasizes that God foreknew and predestined us to be His child and heir before the foundations of the world
 - Paul is saying that Christ's Last Will and Testament, His covenant, was written before the world began
 - So that covenant had the names of everyone predestined to become an heir from the very beginning
 - Even as Christ was dying on the cross, your name was already included in the covenant as an heir of Christ
 - You were chosen from the beginning to become a child of God so that your inheritance would be assured
 - Therefore, Paul says confidently we have already been blessed with spiritual blessings in heavenly places
- And finally, just in case there is still someone resisting the idea that God brought us into the family of God by His choice and not our own, Paul adds this plan was the kind intention of God's will
 - In Greek, that phrase could be literally translated God's good pleasure or desire
 - This entire plan is God's desire for us, and it's a good plan
 - Don't let someone tell you that a "good" God wouldn't dictate the outcome of salvation
 - That it would be "wrong" of God to determine to decide for us
 - That a loving God respects our right to choose or reject salvation
 - It's a bizarre and nonsensical statement
 - Would you rather be assured of salvation by the kind intention of God's will?
 - Or would you prefer to take your chances with your own fickle, sinful will?
 - I define a loving God the way the Bible does:

Col. 2:13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,

- A merciful God chose me before I knew I needed a Savior
 - Before I was even alive, before I had even sinned, He knew I would need the

salvation He was prepared to grant me

- Finally in v.6, Paul says this predetermined plan of the Father was designed to ensure He would be praised for the glory of His grace
 - Now we come to the biblical definition of “grace”
 - I’m sure most of us already know the definition of the word itself: unmerited favor
 - But have you ever heard someone describe God’s grace as something that comes in the form of an offer?
 - They tell you God offers His grace to mankind in the form of the Gospel message
 - Like a wrapped present, you have to accept the gift, you have to receive God’s grace
 - That notion certainly seems to fit with our perception of how we came to believe in the Gospel of Christ
 - Someone delivered the Gospel message to us
 - We heard it, considered what it said and then accepted it
 - So to us it may seem that God’s grace comes as an offer, one we have to choose in order for His grace to manifest in our life
 - But now, by the word of God, we come to see that this is not the definition of grace
 - Grace is not an offer or an opportunity
 - God’s grace is the predestined and finished work of God choosing us for salvation
 - We didn’t merit God’s choice; we receive it purely as a matter of the kind intention of His will
 - Grace is not the offer...grace is God choosing us in Christ
- So as we come to understand the Father’s role in choosing us for salvation, we will find ourselves praising Him for His grace
 - Anyone who truly understands the sovereignty of God in our salvation will naturally feel even more desire to praise the Lord for His grace
 - God looked down the corridors of history and chose you from among the billions of people who walked the earth
 - He chose you, not because you deserved it, but because he determined to do it
 - Paul says the Father freely bestowed His grace upon us
 - He didn’t owe it to us
 - It wasn’t His obligation to grant us salvation because we said the sinner’s prayer
 - Or walked the aisle or got baptized
 - Nothing forces God’s hand or obligates Him to save anyone
 - He says those He predetermined to save, He does so freely by His grace
 - Understanding this truth rocks your theological world like nothing else

- It turns everything upside down
- It puts God where He deserves to be: in control of all things
- And it puts us back where we always were: completely dependent on God's mercy
- I wonder how these truths impacted that materialistic culture in Ephesus?
 - They were so busy at work to maintain their status in a status-conscious society
 - They were taken with doing work to earn the praise of their employer or neighbor
 - They left their first love, serving Christ
 - And they succumbed to the pressure of the rat race
 - But now they hear that they have a portion of the earth reserved for them
 - Without working for it, without deserving it
 - They have been saved from the penalty of their sin
 - And beyond that, the Father has reserved for them a share of the eternal inheritance
 - So then why work for things that perish? Why not redirect that effort to things that are eternal?
 - When you were a child, did you get excited for Christmas?
 - To see what presents your parents gave you?
 - You knew they would find a way to get you something special
 - Well then, can you imagine what the Father has in store for you in the Creation to come?
 - What part of this beautiful earth, what kind of home, of farm or hillside?
 - Maybe you'll get an island all to yourself
 - Maybe a mountain top
 - Obviously, we don't know what exactly the Lord has in store for His children, but do we expect it will be disappointing?
- As Jesus says:

Luke 11:11 “Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he?”

Luke 11:12 “Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he?”

Luke 11:13 “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”

- Our Father in Heaven is perfectly good

- And by the kind intentions of His will, He has predestined you to share in the inheritance of Christ as a child of God
- Knowing this gives us cause to praise Him for the incomparable glory of His grace
- This grace was bestowed upon us in the Beloved, Paul says at the end of v.6
 - The plan of the Father to extend us grace centers on the Person and work of Christ
 - So next week we move forward to the Second Person of the Godhead
- Each Person of God played a role in securing an inheritance for us
 - The Father chose us to be included in His plan
 - But without the obedience of the Son, the plan of the Father could never have come to pass
 - So it required Christ enact the plan for our behalf
 - That's what we study next week

- For the last two weeks I addressed Paul's comments on God choosing us
 - And I knew it was (pre)destined to be controversial
 - But the focus on that word also caused us to step away from the big picture of Paul's teaching in Chapter 1
 - So today, we're going to set that subject matter aside for a time
 - Because we need to consider other, equally important concepts that Paul raises next
 - So let's remember where we've been going in this chapter
 - Paul is explaining how God has prepared a glorious future for believers
 - He has blessed us with spiritual blessings in heavenly places
 - These blessings are far greater than those to be found here in this life
 - Furthermore, the Lord has obtained them for us
 - We don't earn them, we don't secure them, we simply receive them
 - Then I said Paul goes forward to explain how each member of the Godhead works to assure us of these blessings
 - Over the past two weeks, we've been studying the role of the Father specifically
 - And in summary, Paul taught that the Father's role in assuring us a place in the Son's inheritance was by choosing us
 - The Father chose to adopt us, predestining us to our place in the family of God
 - Obviously, the Father's role was pretty significant
 - Because without His decision in our favor, nothing else in the plan could work for us
 - So our assurance of heavenly glory, heavenly blessings, heavenly inheritance began with the Father's choice
 - But it didn't end there...

Eph. 1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace

Eph. 1:8 which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight

Eph. 1:9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him

Eph. 1:10 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

Eph. 1:11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

Eph. 1:12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.

- Paul begins v.7 with “in Him”
 - Since we’re dropping into the middle of this passage, we have to glance back up the page to determine who the “Him” is in this case
 - Notice the final word at the end of v.6 is “the Beloved,” which clearly refers to the Son
 - The Son is the One beloved by the Father, therefore, “in Him” is a reference to Christ
 - That tells us that Paul is now moving on to explain Jesus’ role in securing our eternal future
 - Of course, any discussion of Christ’s work on our behalf must begin with His work in dying in our place on the cross to cleanse us from our sins
 - And that’s exactly where Paul starts
 - Paul says in Christ we have redemption through His blood
 - The Greek word Paul uses translated redemption is *apolytroisis*, which means to buy back a slave and set him free
 - We were slaves, but Jesus paid the ransom to set us free
- Redemption, or to be ransomed, is a common way the New Testament describes our salvation
 - Because in truth, we each began our life as slaves, in bondage to a master

Heb. 2:14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, Heb. 2:15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

- Hebrews tells us every human being enters life a slave to sin and to sin’s penalty, eternal death
 - We live with that sentence hanging over our head because Adam chose to sin
 - Adam was humanity’s representative, and when he fell he cast humanity’s lot in with Satan’s
 - Spiritually-speaking, he traded innocence for slavery
- Hebrews says the devil became our master, controlling us through a fear of death
 - Imagine you were in a gang of thieves and murderers
 - You were guilty of many crimes and you knew that if you sought mercy from the police, you would be condemned for your crimes
 - The only friend you have is the gang leader
- But he’s no friend at all

- He seeks only to cause more death, destruction and chaos
- So he controls you through fear, knowing you can't escape your circumstances since you're a criminal just like him
- You're stuck...you're a slave to the gang leader, living in fear of the law and without hope of a rescue
- Into those circumstances Christ stepped, and paid your ransom and set you free from the fear of death that allowed the enemy to enslave you
 - Paul says in v.7 that the price Christ paid for you was His blood
 - Since your crimes (i.e., your sin) deserved death, the only payment that Christ could make was a death
 - He couldn't bargain the price lower, for the Father set the price in the Garden
 - He had to spill His lifeblood to pay the price for your sin
 - That payment bought you out of slavery permitting the Father to be just, as He forgave your sins on the cross
 - We know the Father chose us to be adopted as a child, but that decision by itself would have been unjust without a payment for sin
 - If you and your gang were arrested and taken to court for judgment of your crimes, a righteous judge couldn't let you go free without just cause
 - The judge would need just cause for acquitting you
 - Similarly, the Father needs just cause to acquit you and bring you into the family of God
 - Paul says that in Christ was the One Who gave the Father just cause to forgive us of our crimes, our transgressions
 - Jesus' ransom payment was an acceptable substitute for your debt

Rom. 5:15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.

Rom. 5:16 The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification.

- Paul compares Christ's act on the cross to Adam's act in the Garden
 - Adam's decision plunged many into sin and judgment
 - But Christ's poured out His life as a gift, so by that gift of grace many can be ransomed
- So now we extend our understanding of the word grace in scripture
 - Last week we said that grace is not an offer of salvation but is the decision of the

Father to include us in His plan of adoption

- Grace is the finished work of God to save us while we were yet sinners and enemies of God
- Before we knew we needed a Savior He had already chosen us for salvation
- But now Paul says God's grace (i.e., His unmerited favor toward us) goes even farther
 - God's favor is evident in that He would put His own Son on the cross
 - It's one thing to say God's grace chose to grant us mercy and rescue us from our predicament
 - But it's another thing to say that God's choosing us required His Son die for us
 - God's grace is the Father choosing us, and God's grace is the Son dying for us
- But the grace of God in the Son doesn't end there even
 - Paul says the grace of God in the Son is lavished upon us in yet another way
 - Remember, vs.3-14 is a single sentence in the Greek language, so we have to cut it into digestible pieces
 - Let's cut the next piece from the middle of v.8 through to the middle of v.10
 - That section reads...

Eph. 1:8 ...In all wisdom and insight

Eph. 1:9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him

Eph. 1:10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times...

- Here we have the second way in which we receive grace in Jesus Christ
 - Jesus Christ is our source for all wisdom and insight
 - As you can probably tell, Paul is referring to Jesus Christ as the revealed word of God
 - God's grace goes a step further in providing all spiritual wisdom to the believer through the Word
 - And the Lord's grace brings us all spiritual insight, which is different than wisdom
- The wisdom God grants us through His word is spiritual truth, spiritual realities of who God is, Who we are and what the future holds
 - It's knowledge we can know only if God chooses to reveal it to us
 - We're talking about spiritual truth that lies outside the ability of human beings to discover on their own
 - No amount of searching, philosophizing, study or observation could ever discover God truly much less understand all that He has planned for Creation
- Notice in v.9 Paul says Christ makes known to us the mystery of His will

- Truly, God's will is a mystery to fallen mankind
- As Paul says in 1 Corinthians

1Cor. 1:20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

1Cor. 1:21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

- Since mankind can't find spiritual wisdom, God must reveal Himself to us
 - Only by the kind intention, which the Father purposed to achieve in Christ, can we understand God
 - By His grace extended to believers, He gives us His word in His Son
 - Jesus Christ taught the disciples who then taught us
 - But even before that, Christ was speaking to men through the prophets
 - He is the Word, Who gives us an understanding of the Father
 - Notice also this understanding is *only* for the believer, as a matter of God's grace
 - Those who aren't chosen to receive grace do not receive the wisdom of God either
 - In fact, the ability to understand and appreciate the word of God is a sign of a person's salvation

1Cor. 1:18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1Cor. 1:19 For it is written,

**“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.”**

- Paul says the word of God is utter foolishness to the unbeliever
 - It's literally impossible for the unbeliever to grasp what the Bible says in spiritual terms
 - Certainly, an unbeliever can read the words and pick up a degree of understanding
 - They can understand the story of Noah or Abraham or even Jesus to a degree, in a human sense
 - In the same way they can read Moby Dick or Tom Sawyer
- But the spiritual meaning of the text lies beyond their grasp
 - They can't see it for themselves no matter how long they search
 - And even if someone were to explain it to them, they will still reject it

- This is exactly what happened when the Word Himself spoke scripture to the Pharisees who were not believing

John 5:38 “You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent.

John 5:39 “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me;

John 5:40 and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.

John 5:41 “I do not receive glory from men;

John 5:42 but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves.

- Only those who are being saved by God can recognize the word of God as the power of God in our lives
 - And we hear it *because* the Son has given us the grace to do so
 - In the Bible, believers are often called the sheep of God
 - And Christ is our Good Shepherd
 - Using this analogy, Jesus explained why the Pharisees couldn't grasp the meaning of His words

John 10:24 The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

John 10:25 Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me.

John 10:26 “But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep.

- So understanding the word of God is something uniquely available for God's sheep, those chosen of the Father for salvation
 - Which makes it all the more surprising how few believers take advantage of this grace made available in Christ
 - So many believers today and over the centuries have turned a blind eye to the scriptures
- Consider that these words we hold in our hands are the manifestation of the unmerited favor of a Holy God to His children
 - How much attention do these words deserve in our daily life?
 - Peter says:

2Pet. 1:2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord;

2Pet. 1:3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to

life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

- Peter says that *everything* that pertains to our life on earth and to our godliness is found in the true knowledge of Him Who called us
- Certainly, there are other sources of human knowledge, that is knowledge of the world we've constructed, of our history, science and the like
 - Peter isn't denying those sources
 - He's speaking of spiritual truths about life and pleasing God
 - For the believer, the word of God is sufficient to bring us to where God wants us to be
- And yet so few Christians are placing the proper priority on the pursuit of that wisdom
 - Even those who give some time to Bible study do so sporadically
 - And only when that pursuit is convenient
 - I'm a firm believer you can't spend too much time in the word of God
- So I challenge you to up your game in this area of your life
 - God has extended His grace to you in the form of His word
 - Drink it in, take as much of it as you can get
 - As much as you value His grace in choosing you and in dying for you, then appreciate His grace in teaching you
 - Knowing that learning the word of God brings its own rewards
- Secondly, Paul says we have the grace of all insight from Christ
 - Insight refers to our appreciation of God's will for our life
 - It refers to knowing what Christ is calling us to do, how He wants us to live to please Him
 - Insight builds on wisdom, of course
 - As we come to understand spiritual truth we will be in a better position to understand Christ's will for us
 - When He asks us to sacrifice some pleasure in our life, the word of God explains why
 - When He calls us to endure persecution or trial, the word of God explain why it's important to persevere
 - If you don't study scripture, you can still hear from the Lord for that is grace by itself
 - But without the counsel of His word, you may not understand why you should listen and obey
- And just like spiritual wisdom, spiritual insight is a foreign notion to an unbeliever
 - Have you ever told a person you knew was an unbeliever that Jesus told you

something or is leading you to do something?

- Doesn't that person give you the RCA Victor dog look? (Head tilted, eyebrow raised)
- They wonder if you're making it up, or maybe you're a little too zealous about your religion
- That's another example of how the Lord distinguishes His children by His grace
 - He speaks to us by Christ and we hear Him
 - His voice won't be audible necessarily, and we won't always obey what we hear
 - But we do know what He says, as Jesus says

John 10:27 “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;

- That's insight, and it's another outpouring of God's grace
- In vs.8-9 Paul adds that having wisdom and insight are evidence that the Lord has lavished even more grace upon us
 - These things didn't have to be a part of God's plan in saving us
 - It's easy to take them for granted, as if they were inevitable
 - But Paul says our opportunity to understand spiritual truth and to know God's will in our life is grace upon grace
 - He could have just sent His Son and paid our ransom and left it at that
 - Eventually, we would have gone home to be with Christ
 - And in that moment we would have been given full spiritual wisdom and insight in a moment

1Cor. 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

- But God's grace to us is greater than that, it overflows, it abounds, it is lavished upon us
 - He wants to teach us about Himself by His word to help us understand His ways
 - Because the Lord knows the more we know Him, the more we will want to be like Him
 - So that as we live according to His word, he will lead us into godliness
 - And godliness will yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness
- Finally, Paul say in v.10 that this grace is intended to be an administration suitable until the fullness of the times
 - The Greek word translated administration means under management
 - That is to say the grace of God in His word and in the revelation of His will are His appointed tools to manage us for a time

- For as long as we live in these earthly bodies and await the riches of our inheritance, we live under management of God's word
- This administration will continue until the fullness or fulfillment of these times or until this age is closed
- So God has extended grace upon grace to His adopted children
 - Even after He chose us and after His Son died for us, He gave us His word and the counsel of His will to manage our lives for this time
 - We're managed until we receive new bodies and our heavenly inheritance
- And Paul says the wisdom and insight of Christ are suitable until the age concludes
 - The word suitable doesn't appear in the original Greek
 - A better way to phrase Paul's meaning would be "for the purpose of managing until the age's fulfillment"
- Today we studied two ways in which Jesus extends His grace to the believer
 - His death paid a ransom to free you from your slavery to sin and granted you forgiveness for your sins
 - And His word gives you a knowledge of the God Who saved you
 - His grace allows you to know God's will for your life so that you may walk in a manner that pleases Him
 - There are yet two more ways in which God has poured out His grace to us in His Son
 - We'll study those next week
 - Followed by the grace of God given in the word of the Third Person of the Godhead, the Spirit of God
 - As we said, it's grace upon grace from God
 - One Bible scholar took time to count the many ways in which the Lord bestows His grace upon His children
 - He stopped counting at 33 ways
 - Certainly, 33 ways is a lot, but I don't know if his count was accurate or complete
 - It wouldn't surprise me if that count is actually infinite
 - And we've only begun to scratch the surface in knowing what God has done for us
- Are you taking advantage of all the grace God has extended to you?
 - Have you received Christ as Savior?
 - If so, have you taken His word to heart?
 - Do read it daily, study it intently, meditate on it earnestly and obey faithfully?
 - And do you consult His will prayerfully?
 - Do you seek His counsel? Do you slow down enough to give Him time to direct your steps? Are you sensitive to His leading?

- Let's make our goal be soaking in all the grace God has offered to His children, not wishing to miss any of it

- We throw the word “grace” around frequently, and so we should
 - God’s undeserved favor for us is a miracle that makes all other blessings possible
 - Truly, we can’t talk about grace enough
 - Because we will never comprehend all that God’s grace has accomplished for us, not until we’re with Christ
 - So in the meantime, it’s good to spend time studying what the Bible says about His grace
 - The key to wrapping your head around God’s grace is to separate His grace on the cross in saving us from sin from the other blessings of His grace we’ve received
 - For example, last week we moved to studying Christ’s work on our behalf, and we found what we expected to find
 - That Christ’s part in God’s plan of grace centered on His sacrifice for our sin
 - His atonement ransomed us out of slavery and set us free to serve God without fear of death
 - But earlier in Chapter 1 of Ephesians we discovered that God’s grace began long before we were even born
 - The Father chose to save us even before our sin had been conceived, before the foundations of the earth
 - That’s a different form of God’s grace
- Then we saw how God’s grace in Christ move forward from there
 - The believer’s ability to understand the word of God is evidence of grace in our lives
 - God grants to His children the capacity to comprehend the wisdom of Christ found in the word of God
 - And by the grace of Christ, Christ directs our steps in life so we may live according to the counsel of His will
 - Both of these experiences are evidence of the grace of Christ in our lives, Paul said
 - If you’ve seen the arm bands that ask “What Would Jesus Do?”, then you need not wonder anymore
 - If you read His word and listen to His counsel, then you will know what Jesus would do
 - So the grace of Christ moves beyond saving us through His death to grant us the means to live a life that pleases Him
 - So today let’s continue forward looking at more of God’s work in bestowing grace upon God’s children
 - We pick up in the middle of Paul’s impossibly long sentence in vs.3-14
 - We’re at the end of v.10 as Paul is giving a new work of grace found in Christ
 - Let’s reread that verse and continue forward to v.12

Eph. 1:10 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

Eph. 1:11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, Eph. 1:12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.

- We discussed the first part of v.10 last week, as you remember
 - We learned that the word of God is God's grace to us in Christ for the purpose of God's administration of our lives
 - The word administration can also be translated management or dispensation
 - So we could say that the Lord provided us with the Bible so He could dispense His grace into our daily lives
 - That by His word, He could manage us during the time we live in a sinful body in a fallen world
 - The enemy and the world and even our own flesh are trying to pull us away from God and against His will
 - But the word of God is the spiritual manager in our life to defend us against those enemies and guide us into righteousness
 - Paul goes to say that management carries the Church forward until the fullness or completion of this age
 - The word of God manages us for a time
 - Once we escape this earth and enter into the presence of Christ, we leave this sinful body behind
 - In the process, we will gain a complete understanding of God's will and His Kingdom
 - At that point, we won't need management in the same way, since our sin nature will be completely gone
 - We will always have the word of God, but we won't be fighting against it in that future day
 - Of course, as I said last week, in order to gain the benefits of this administration, we must endeavor to read the word and obey what it says
 - Just like a human manager in our workplace, the word of God can only help us if we listen to what it says and commit to following its orders
 - Many believers fail to attend to the word of God
 - And many more fail to heed what they read
 - As James warns, we must be doers of the word, not merely hearers
- And so now we move into the next half of v.10 to see the next way in which Christ offers us His grace

- Christ is at work to show us grace in summing up all things in Himself
 - To understand what Paul is saying, we need to take a closer look at the words he's using
 - The Greek word for summing up is *anakephalaioo*, which means to bring together
- Paul says Christ will ultimately bring together everything in God's creation, both in heaven and on earth
 - This is another manifestation of God's grace to us in Christ's work
 - But what does it mean that Christ is bringing all things together
- First, we need to remember how all things became divided in a sense
 - When Adam sinned in the Garden, he brought about the consequences for sin, which the Lord explained to Adam beforehand

Gen. 2:16 The Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely;

Gen. 2:17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."

- The Lord told Adam that the consequence of eating the forbidden fruit would be death
 - Specifically, the Lord meant that Adam's spirit would experience spiritual death, meaning his spirit would become separated from God
 - This was the moment that humanity's nature became fallen and separated from fellowship in peace with God
- Moreover, when the Lord came to Adam in the Garden, the Lord responded to Adam's sin with a second act of judgment: a curse

Gen. 3:17 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it';

Cursed is the ground because of you;

In toil you will eat of it

All the days of your life.

Gen. 3:18 "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you;

And you will eat the plants of the field;

Gen. 3:19 **By the sweat of your face**

You will eat bread,

Till you return to the ground,

Because from it you were taken;

For you are dust,

And to dust you shall return."

- Because of Adam's sin, the Lord pronounced a curse upon the physical earth
 - A curse means to condemn to destruction
 - This curse impacted the planet and all that comes from it
 - Therefore the ground (i.e., the earth itself) and all that comes from it was doomed to undergo destruction
- When we look back at the Creation account in Genesis 1 & 2 we discover that plants, animals and the human body find their origins in the ground
 - Since these things come out of the ground, they too are cursed
 - Plants wither and die, animals kill one another or grow old and die
 - And of course, the human body dies eventually as well
 - One day, even the earth itself will be destroyed as the curse requires

2Pet. 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

- Meanwhile, the earth and all that it contains bears up under the weight of the curse
 - The entire creation is longing to be restored, to be brought back together with God
 - It's as if nature itself recognizes that it's in need of godly repair by the grace of Christ

Rom. 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Rom. 8:19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.

Rom. 8:20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope

Rom. 8:21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

- So as a result of Adam's disobedience to the word of God, the spirit of mankind and the physical creation fell under judgment, separation from God
 - We were cast into darkness and became enslaved to the enemy who had conspired to bring us down
 - But as we learned last week, the grace of God in Christ has freed us from slavery to that enemy
 - His blood on the cross purchased us back from the enemy and set us free from condemnation
 - So now by faith our spirit has been restored to the Father in peace, because His wrath against our sin was poured out on Christ instead

- But Paul says God's grace in Christ accomplishes even more for our sake by summing up or bringing together all things on earth and heaven
 - Now that we understand what was divided as a result of Adam's sin, we can understand what Christ reconciles by His grace
 - First, He has reconciled us to the Father by giving us a new spirit by His grace
- Furthermore, Christ will one day reunite the spirit of every believer with a new, glorified body, as Paul says

Phil. 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

Phil. 3:21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

- The Bible calls this day the resurrection, the day we receive a glorified, sinless body in which we will live forever
- That day will be the summing up of our spirit with a new body
- Later in the Kingdom on earth, the Lord will return the animal kingdom to the way it once existed

Is. 65:17 “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.

Is. 65:18 “But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing And her people for gladness.

Is. 65:25 “The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox; and dust will be the serpent's food. They will do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain,” says the Lord.

- According to Isaiah, the coming Kingdom will include animals just as our current world does
 - But in that coming day, the animal kingdom will be restored back to its original state before the curse
 - They will not hunt each other or harm mankind
 - By the grace of God in Christ, they will return to an existence of harmony and peace
- Even more, the Lord will by His grace reconcile the fallen earth to Himself by eliminating the burden of the curse
 - In Revelation 21-22 the Bible describes this future world

Rev. 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the

first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.

Rev. 22:3 There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him;

Rev. 22:4 they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.

- John wrote that in this future world, there will no longer be a curse
 - The curse John mentions is the same one God pronounced in the Garden after the Fall
 - The Creation is restored by Christ, brought back to its intended state by the grace of Christ
- How did Christ accomplish this work of grace for us?
 - The Bible says that as Christ hung on the cross, he took the curse upon Himself

Gal. 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us — for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” —

Gal. 3:14 in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

- Jesus was hung on a tree, referring to the wood of the cross
 - And in doing so, He took upon Himself the curse for all Creation
 - Having paid the price of the curse, Christ restores the earth from the effects of the curse
- Finally, there is yet one more way the Lord sums up everything by His grace
 - The Bible says Christ will put an end to sin through judgment
 - When we talk about sin, the concept of summing up means to bring sin to its proper end
 - Beginning with the author of sin, the devil himself, and the death that the devil produces
 - In a day to come, the Lord will sum up Satan

Rev. 20:10 And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

1Cor. 15:25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

1Cor. 15:26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

- The Lord has no plan to redeem Satan, since the Bible says that the Lord doesn't give help to fallen angels (Hebrews 2:16)
- Instead, the Lord brings Satan together with the judgment He justly deserves
- So Christ sums up things on earth and in heaven by judging Satan
 - The enemy's fall began in Heaven, according to Ezekiel 28, when Satan defiled the heavenly tabernacle with his rebellion
 - He was cast to the earth where he brought sin into the Garden according to Genesis 3
- Christ addressed both through His sacrifice on the cross
 - After His resurrection, Hebrews says Christ entered the Heavenly tabernacle where He spilled His own blood to cleanse it from Satan's rebellion

Heb. 9:11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation;

Heb. 9:12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

- In this way, Christ's blood summed up (or reconciled) things in heaven
- And in a day to come Christ will do away with Satan entirely, thereby reconciling Satan to judgment
- Finally, Christ sums up those who belong to the enemy, those who die in unbelief

Rev. 20:12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

Rev. 20:13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.

Rev. 20:14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

Rev. 20:15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

- After the Kingdom age, the Lord will serve as Judge at a trial of unbelieving humanity
 - Humanity's sins will convict them before this holy court
 - And like their father, the devil, these will receive the just penalty for sin...eternal separation from God

- So this is what Paul means when he says that Christ's grace toward us results in a summing up of all things on heaven and on earth
 - First, He brought us together with the Father
 - Then He brings our spirit together with a new body
 - Then He restores the animal kingdom to peace and harmony with man and with each other
 - Finally He restores all Creation with a new, peaceful planet freed from the burden of a curse yielding death, corruption and suffering
 - Likewise, Christ reconciles the guilty to their just end
 - The enemy is judged and sent away forever
 - And the unbeliever is justly condemned and sent from God's presence forever

Rev. 21:7 “He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.

Rev. 21:8 “But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

- These acts are also grace to you and I
- They result in the destructive power of sin being removed from us forever
- Then in vs. 11-12 Paul gives us one more way Christ's grace is summing up things on earth
 - By Christ's obedience to the Law and His death on the cross, Christ reconciled or summed up the Jews and the Gentiles
 - Notice in vs.11-12, Paul says “we” have also obtained our inheritance in Christ
 - I trust you remember our lesson on the Father's choosing us for an eternal inheritance
 - And how that inheritance was made possible in Christ's death
 - For we were chosen to be part of Christ's Last Will and Testament so we may receive a part of His inheritance
 - But Paul's use of the pronoun “we” in these verses is meaningful
 - He's speaking of a group of which he was a part but which his readers in Ephesus were not
 - Notice how in vs.13-14 Paul switches to speaking of “you”
 - We're going to study vs.13-14 next time
 - But for now it's enough for us to notice the shift Paul makes
 - Paul is comparing the grace Christ poured out on Jews (we) in the past to the grace He grants to the largely Gentile Church (you)

- Paul says the Jews were predestined by the Father to be God's chosen people
 - By His promises to Abraham, the Lord granted the Jewish people a special inheritance in the Promised Land in the future Kingdom
- The creation of the Jewish people and the covenants given to them was a special manifestation of Christ's grace
 - God promised His people they would have a Messiah
 - He promised them He would dwell among them
 - He promised them they would live forever in a special inheritance, the Promised Land
 - This outpouring of grace upon Israel separated that nation from the rest of humanity
 - They were called out to be special and distinct among all nations
 - Paul says later in this letter that Israel's predestination as God's people meant that Gentiles were strangers to these promises
 - Gentiles were outside the grace of God for a time, divided from the Jewish people
 - That's why Paul says in v.12 that the Jewish people were the first to hope in Christ
 - They were hoping in Messiah long before any Gentiles knew what a Messiah was or why someone would need a Messiah
 - Therefore, the Old Testament Jewish saints were those predestined by God to be the first to give praise to the Lord's glory
 - Christ's grace made this possible
- Yet Christ has summed up this divide as well, having brought Jews and Gentiles together in the faith
 - John says in his Gospel that Jesus' death would bring together all His children from across the earth

John 11:51 Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation,
John 11:52 and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

- The grace of Christ resulted in the divide between Jew and Gentile dissolving in the plan of salvation
- Now all could be saved according to God's grace
- In that way, the Lord has summed up Jew and Gentile into one body in the Church
- This summing up has some interesting parallels
 - The Jewish people were promised a special inheritance where they would enjoy the presence of God tabernacling among them forever

- This promised inheritance is fully realized in the Kingdom
- Yet in the meantime, the Old Testament saint in Israel received a downpayment on that inheritance
- They were permitted to live in Canaan and they had the blessing of the glory of God living in the tabernacle
- These blessings were down payments on the full inheritance promised for the Kingdom
- Likewise, we will learn next week that the Gentile believer in the Church also receives these blessings in a new and better way
 - God once again dwells among His children
 - And we receive a law written on our hearts and a promised inheritance
 - These blessings are down payments on our full inheritance to come in the Kingdom
- So Christ's grace sums up the experience of the Old Testament Jewish saint and the New Testament Gentile saint
 - We both were predestined to receive grace
 - We both received a downpayment now in the form of God dwelling among us and the promise of an inheritance in the Kingdom
 - Even now, we have both been brought together into one body in the Church
 - Christ, summing up everything in heaven and on earth
- Are you beginning to appreciate the magnitude of God's grace to you in Christ?
 - Christ's grace goes far beyond the cross
 - Yes, the cross is all-important in this discussion
 - But He has a plan of restoration and reconciliation that boggles the mind
 - He addresses your sinful spirit, your corrupt body, your fallen world and your needs into eternity
 - He has a plan to make all things new
 - And He has moved in your life to bring these things about for no reason except His unmerited favor toward you, a sinner
 - Truly His grace is amazing

- Today we finally finish Paul's 270 word sentence in Ephesians 1
 - From vs.3-14 Paul has been explaining the ways in which the believer is spiritually blessed as a result of God's grace
 - This section is merely Paul's introduction to the topic of grace
 - Yet he pours it on in this passage, running from point to point as if carried away by his amazement of all God is doing for us
 - We've been studying this passage according to the outline Paul provides
 - Paul begins by explaining the role of the Father in bestowing grace upon the believer
 - Then Paul moves to the role of the Second Person of the Godhead, Jesus Christ
 - And then finally, Paul ends explaining the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing us God's grace
 - So far, we've studied the grace found in the Father and the grace given us through the Son
 - So today we move to work of the third Person, the Spirit of God, Who plays a distinct role in bringing us God's unmerited favor
 - Last week I touched on the Spirit's work as I explained the work of Christ summing up all things
 - I said Christ sums up (or brings together) the work of God among the Jewish people with His work within the Gentile Church
 - And the Spirit of God plays a part in that reconciliation
- Let's go back into this passage, beginning in v.13, which starts Paul's explanation of the Spirit's work

Eph. 1:13 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,

Eph. 1:14 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.

- In v.13 Paul describes a process of sorts
 - He is explaining how by God's grace we moved out of unbelief and into the family of God
 - As I look at my English Bible, I see three steps in the process preceding in a certain order
 - The final step in this process is the sealing of the Holy Spirit, which is Paul's main emphasis in this verse
 - But as we read v.13, we may find our English translation of the original Greek is misrepresenting what Paul is saying

- I say that because the list of steps in v.13 is not sequential but rather simultaneous
 - These steps do not happen one at a time
 - They happen exactly at the same time
 - Notice how this verse begins with the phrase “In Him”
 - Remember, we learned what this phrase meant in an earlier week
 - We said the phrase “In Him” means someone who is in Christ, that is someone who is already saved
 - So every step in v.13 refers to someone who is “in Christ”
- Keeping that in mind, we then understand that the three steps described in v.13 are collectively one moment happening instantaneously
 - We simply cannot separate them, spiritually speaking
 - While we experience it in a linear fashion (i.e., one event followed by another)
 - Scripture says all three of the steps in v.13 happened to us because we were “in Christ”
 - So the process of salvation is not one but three steps all happening together in the same moment to place us in Christ
 - The first step is “after listening to the message of the truth”
 - The word “after” doesn’t appear in the original Greek language
 - And the Greek word for listen is *akouo*, which means to heed, to give attention to
 - And the word message is the Greek word *logos*, which means word
 - Notice Paul clarifies what word he’s talking about
 - He says this word of truth is the Gospel of our salvation
 - So clearly, Paul is referring to the testimony that Jesus is our Messiah
 - The Gospel message is a two-part truth
 - First, it declares that Jesus died on a cross as a payment for our sin to save us from God’s wrath
 - Secondly, it testifies that He rose from the dead to prove He is God and He has the power to grant us eternal life
 - That in a nutshell is the Gospel message that brings salvation
- So this phrase would be better translated “having heeded the word of truth”
 - Our transformation from death to life, from unsaved to saved, requires we heed the Gospel message found in the word of Christ
 - The Gospel message commands all people to repent of the sin of unbelief and turn to Christ in faith
 - Many people hear this message, in the sense that they encounter it

- But not all give their attention to it, to heed it
- We might ask ourselves, how many times did you hear the Gospel before you seriously gave attention to it?
 - Ironically, you probably have no idea how often you heard it, because you weren't paying attention
 - You weren't heeding it, so you were completely uninterested in what the word was saying
- I can remember the day I first gave my attention to the Gospel message as I was sitting in a Bible-teaching church in my late 20s
 - I had spent hundreds if not thousands of hours in churches of one kind or another over the earlier years of my life
 - Had I ever been exposed to the Gospel message during that time?
 - I don't remember hearing it, but perhaps I heard it yet simply wasn't heeding it
- I'm sure you have been on the other side of this situation as a Christian witnessing to an unbeliever, perhaps in your family or workplace or school
 - You patiently explain the Gospel or perhaps just make mention of Christ hoping to see a response
 - And it's as if the person is asleep or suddenly is deaf
 - I remember times I've begun to explain the Gospel when almost immediately something interrupts the moment
 - The person gets a phone call or another person joins our conversation and changes the topic
 - When that happens, the person has failed to heed the message
 - This reminds us of Jesus' teaching in Luke 8 in the parable of the seeds

Luke 8:11 “Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God.

Luke 8:12 “Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved.

- Jesus says that the enemy is working behind the scenes at all times to prevent the unbeliever from heeding the word
 - Notice Jesus says they have heard the word merely in the sense that the sound of the words hit their ears
 - Or the light from a page of text went into their eyeballs
 - Physically, the message was delivered but the enemy prevented those words from making an impact
 - So the person could not heed it
- But for the person who is in Christ, the Gospel message will always be heeded

- The Lord was already working in the person's heart to prepare them to heed the truth
 - He removes those barriers that earlier prevented them from heeding the message
 - For the person who is "in Christ" the enemy cannot steal away the seed
 - For the one who is "in Christ" the conversation will not be interrupted, the phone will not ring, the heart will not be hard
- For that person, the Lord is already working to prepare eyes and ears and hearts to heed the word of the truth
 - For such a person, step 2 of v.13 will also happen
 - Paul says "having also believed"
 - The word for believe in Greek can also be translated "trusted"
 - So Paul says "we having also trusted in this message"
- If we read the first part of this verse together with the second part, it sounds like this:
 - "You, having heeded the word of truth...and having also believed in that word..."
 - Once again, Paul isn't describing a series of successive steps
 - He's describing all the things that happened in a single moment for the one who is in Christ
 - For believers, the moment we truly heeded or heard the Gospel was the same moment we trusted what we heard
- To help you understand what Paul is saying, imagine a 5-year old child, Tommy, playing at the park playground
 - He's surrounded by other children also playing in the park
 - Kids are riding the carousel, swinging from the monkey bars, playing in the sand, etc.
 - And around the edge of the playground sit all the mothers and fathers diligently watching over their children
 - Periodically, a parent yells out a child's name, getting their attention to beckon them home or correct their behavior
 - Tommy's ears hear those names being called, but the call never registers in his mind
 - He never looks up nor stops playing
 - He never heeds it
 - It's as if he never heard it at all though he did hear it
 - So it is for the unbeliever when the call of the Gospel finds its way to the unbeliever's ears
 - Their ears hear, but they do not heed

- It's as if they never heard it at all
 - The voice speaking can be very persuasive, even insistent
 - But like Tommy, the voice isn't familiar and so it makes no impression
- Then suddenly Tommy's father calls out his name
 - His father's voice isn't louder than the other parents, nor does he use fancy words
 - He simply says "Tommy, let's go"
 - But this time when the sound waves hit Tommy's ears, he heeds the voice
 - And more than heeding it, he trusts what it says
 - The two moments are inseparable for Tommy
 - And so it is for the one who is "in Christ"
 - When the Gospel comes calling, the person hears, heeds it and trusts in it – all in the same moment
 - The Lord prepares the heart to ensure that when His word comes it finds a receptive audience
 - Just as Jesus said, His sheep know His voice and follow
- Finally, Paul says the one who is in Christ will be sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise
 - Now we've come to the first mention of the Holy Spirit, yet He's been the One in view throughout this verse
 - The Spirit is the One bringing the word of God to the ears and hearts of those in Christ
 - He is the One giving us the ability to heed and trust in what we hear
 - He is the Servant working in the world to find a Bride for the Son and the word of God is His sword
 - Consider what Paul says in 1 Corinthians

1Cor. 2:6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 1Cor. 2:7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 1Cor. 2:8 the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;

1Cor. 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, 1Cor. 2:13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 1Cor. 2:14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are

spiritually appraised.

1Cor. 2:15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.

1Cor. 2:16 For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

- Paul explains that the Gospel Paul shared is a mystery that the world didn't embrace in its natural state
 - Why doesn't the whole world embrace the message of grace and salvation?
 - Because the message is a spiritual mystery which has been prepared for the glory of His chosen children
 - We were predestined to receive it
 - Which is why we were given the Spirit of God so that we might understand the message as it came to us
 - Paul says the Spirit alone understands the thoughts of God
 - So Paul says we received the indwelling of the Spirit of God so that we can understand spiritual truths
 - The Spirit in us works like a supernatural translator revealing the truths of the Gospel message so we can receive it
 - It's not that the Gospel message is so complicated
 - Paul says it's foolishness to the unsaved world
 - They can understand the words, in the same way that Tommy could understand what the other parents were saying
 - But he didn't heed those words nor trust in them because they were not familiar to him
 - That's why Paul says that without the Spirit of God, a natural man (i.e., an unbeliever) cannot understand nor accept the things of God
- God gives us His Spirit so that when He speaks to us with His message of salvation, we will find it familiar and compelling
 - Before that moment, the message was a mystery which we ignored even when we heard it
 - Now we heed it, believe it
 - All because the Spirit in us confirms the truth of what we're hearing, leading us to agree with it
 - Therefore, all the steps listed in Ephesians 1:13 must happen in one and the same moment, all done by the working of the Spirit in us
 - Because the Father chose us, the Spirit came to dwell with us to give us understanding of the message

2Th. 2:13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

- The Spirit delivered the word of salvation to our ears and gave our hearts the ability to heed it

Rom. 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

- And the Spirit lead us to confess our belief in what we heard

Gal. 4:6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

1Cor. 12:3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is accursed”; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

- So the Spirit’s role in the grace of God is not insignificant
 - When we think of God’s grace toward us, we usually think of the Father and the Son first
 - But the Spirit is the One who brought these saving truths to our hearts
- We could compare the Father to a factory making grace available to us
 - And the Son is like our credit card, purchasing that grace for us
 - Then the Spirit is like the UPS man delivering that grace to our hearts
 - You’ll never look at your UPS man the same way again
- What’s more, Paul says we were sealed by the Spirit of promise
 - The term “sealed” refers to the way legal contracts or agreements were secured shut by wax seals
 - Sealing protected the documents from alteration
 - It also signified that the document would be enforced by the magistrate
 - And what is God’s agreement with us, His promise to us in Christ?
 - That as Christ lived again, so shall we
 - That death will not be the end of us – He will raise us into a new body never to die again
 - How can you be sure you will be raised? How can you be sure that the Lord will keep His promise?
 - Because He has placed His Spirit in you and me, Paul says

- If we have been sealed by the Spirit, it means God's promise to us is unalterable and will be carried out by God's power
 - We could say that the Spirit of promise has sealed the deal
- Most importantly, this assurance comes from God, who never changes His mind and cannot lie, scripture says
 - This is the surest promise that ever existed
 - God never goes back on His word, and this is true no matter what may happen to us or even what we may do or say
 - As Paul says

2Tim. 2:13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

- God cannot deny Himself in the sense that He cannot turn His back on His own Spirit
- President Kennedy once told a story about an Irishman on a journey through the countryside when he came upon a high wall blocking his way
 - The wall seemed too high to climb and the man thought of turning back
 - But instead, the man took off his cap and tossed it over the wall
 - And he thought to himself, now that my cap is on the other side, I have no choice but to find a way to follow after it
- In a sense, that's how I think of the Spirit – as a pledge from the Lord
 - The Lord has thrown His cap over the wall, so to speak
 - He has committed His own Spirit to going the distance with us
 - We may have bad days, days that cause us even to question whether the Lord still loves us or even if we still love Him
 - But there is no turning back, not for Him and not for us
- But the grace of the Spirit goes even further, as Paul explains in v.14
 - The Spirit is a pledge toward our inheritance, he says
 - We've already looked at our inheritance in an earlier lesson
 - We learned then that our inheritance in the Kingdom will be a portion of Christ's inheritance which He grants to each of God's children
 - Our inheritance is a glorious thing awaiting each of us simply because we are fellow heirs
 - And the Spirit living in us is God's pledge to us toward that future inheritance
 - The word pledge could be translated payment, as in a down payment
 - The Lord wants us looking forward to our inheritance with anticipation
 - He doesn't want us distracted seeking the wealth that perishes
 - To give us a taste of how good things will be in the Kingdom, the Lord gives us a

down payment on that coming inheritance

- Therefore, the Spirit of God comes into our life to bring us to faith, and then the Spirit remains even after as a guarantee toward our inheritance
 - Now for some of us, the Spirit of God living in us may not seem like a down payment on heavenly riches
 - Speaking as a guy, “If you can’t drive it, eat it, shoot it or date it, what good is it?”
 - But if that’s how you see the gift of the Holy Spirit, then you haven’t scratched the surface of what God has given you
 - And maybe that’s why you’re not very excited about what God has in store for you in the Kingdom
 - The gift of the Spirit working in us is nothing short of miraculous
 - He causes us to think, act and live in completely new and better ways
 - He equips us to serve others with strength and insight beyond anything we could do on our own
 - He gives us the power to pray with another, and see God respond
 - To share words of wisdom with someone hurting, and see them healed
 - To speak the truth of the Gospel and watch a new life enter into eternal life
 - Paul says that these little miracles the Spirit does in us day-to-day are merely a down payment of what God has in store for us in the Kingdom
 - Consider what Paul says in 1 Corinthians

1Cor. 2:9 but just as it is written,

**“Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard,
And which have not entered the heart of man,
All that God has prepared for those who love Him.”**

- If God’s own Spirit living in us is just the beginning of what we will know in the Kingdom, can you imagine what more is coming?
- Actually, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2 that no you can’t imagine
 - The life God has planned for us in the Kingdom is so beyond our experience here, that we literally can’t imagine it
 - So that even the marvels done by the Spirit can’t fully prepare us for what marvels await us in the Kingdom
- Friends, that’s grace
 - God created humanity and placed Adam and Woman in a perfect Garden
 - But then Adam repudiated the Lord’s good work
 - He refused to trust in God’s word and he plunged God’s perfect Creation into ruin

- God could have left it there...leaving humanity in its sin and judging us all rightly for that sin
 - But by grace He elected to save us and bring us into a new life with Him
 - By grace He sent His Son Who lived life without sin yet willingly took the penalty for our sin
- And yet His grace just keeps on going
 - He reconciles all things, giving us a new body, a new Creation and a new world someday
 - Meanwhile, in His grace He gives us His word so we can know Him and follow His ways
 - By His grace He has pledged us future riches in a promised Kingdom
 - And all these things He delivers to us by His Spirit Who stays with us until all these things have been completed
- When you hear of God's grace, I hope you'll think back to Ephesians 1 remembering all the ways the Lord has blessed us with His grace

- For the past month, we've been in the weeds of Chapter 1 following along in Paul's outline of grace
 - His outline took us through vs.3-14 as he explained the ways each Person of the Godhead has granted us favor
 - Father, Son and Holy Spirit worked together to bring a plan of salvation and glory to fruition in each our lives
 - We didn't stumble upon the path to salvation
 - God prepared salvation for us, brought it to us, confirmed it in us and now He is living within us to guarantee the conclusion
 - Now as we move forward in Paul's letter to believers in Ephesus, let's remember why Paul launched into his conversation on grace
 - As we learned earlier, Paul is teaching to a church living in a city preoccupied with wealth, success, power, and pagan worship
 - So the temptations for believers to chase the world are everywhere
 - And so is the tendency to boast, to glorify self
 - For in this culture power, wealth and prestige were considered noble pursuits
 - But the pursuit of these things conflicts with a Christian's duty
 - They distract us from our pursuit of Christ
 - They conflict with our witness and with our opportunities to build the Kingdom
 - And they compete with our pursuit of our inheritance in Heaven
 - That's why Paul went to such effort to explain how far the Lord has already gone in bestowing grace upon each of us
 - God has secured our place in the Kingdom, He's assured us of Heavenly riches far beyond what can be found here
 - And He's done it for us not because we had achieved greatness, but because He showed us unmerited favor
 - Simply put, you don't earn what God gives by grace, and you can't lose what you didn't deserve in the first place
- So Paul wants the believer in Ephesus to give greater appreciation to what they have received in Christ
 - In fact, every student of scripture, having reached v.14 of Ephesians 1, should fall to his or her knees in praise and thanks for God's wisdom and mercy
 - God's grace is an overwhelming, awe-inspiring truth for any believer who fully grasps it
 - In fact, notice how Paul ends the passage in v.14
 - He says God's entire plan of grace for His Church is to the praise of His glory
 - The whole plan was designed to inspire praise from us
 - And that all our praise would be to His glory, not to our own nor anyone else's

- The plan of our redemption and our future glory in the Kingdom began and ended with His grace poured out on us
- And next Paul says he also thanks the Lord for His grace granted to Ephesus

Eph. 1:15 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,

Eph. 1:16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers;

Eph. 1:17 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.

- Paul didn't just thank the Lord for the grace God had given him personally
 - Paul also thanked the Lord for His grace given to others, particularly Ephesus
 - In His prayers he specifically told the Lord thank you for bringing the church in Ephesus into existence
 - And he thanked the Lord for making Ephesus a loving church, a place that expressed love for all saints
 - Paul says he went a step further...he never ceased to give thanks to God for this miracle in such a pagan, lost place
 - He made specific mention of the believers in Ephesus regularly in his prayers
 - And not only Ephesus, but Paul testified he did the same for others as well
 - Paul said similar things to the churches in Rome, Colossae, Philippi, and Thessalonica
 - Think about that for a moment
 - How long do you think Paul's prayer request list was?
 - How many prayer needs do we suppose Paul had personally?
 - Paul says elsewhere that he was often hungry, cold, beaten, opposed by the devil, and imprisoned
 - And then there were his ministry challenges
 - And the need to raise up leaders and to contend with opposition
 - His list must have been a mile long
 - And how many other people do we suppose sought Paul's intercession on their own behalf?
 - Can you imagine the list he maintained for others
 - I bet it took Paul hours of prayer time to get through it all
 - And I expect Paul devoted the necessary time knowing how important that time was to his own relationship with Christ
- Nevertheless, how amazing that on top of all that Paul never ceased to include a thanks

to the Lord for the believers the Lord allowed Paul to plant

- He thanked the Lord for His grace to make Paul's preaching fruitful
 - He gave God glory for the results
 - And he thanked the Lord for communities of loving, faithful believers
- Do we think about prayer in this way? Do we think about thanking the Lord for His grace, both in our own life and the life of others?
 - When you think about it, that's the most important thing we could thank God for
 - Because grace is the start of every good work of God
 - Thank Him for your church, for having extended His grace to this corner of the city
 - And for having brought together a loving community
- Thankfulness in your prayers will translate into contentment in your life
 - Here again, this may have been missing in the church in Ephesus
 - Failing to recognize the magnitude of what they had already received in God's grace left them seeking for the world's rewards
 - And failing to thank the Lord for His grace resulted in a lack of contentment
- Notice Paul says in v.17 that he also prayed for the Lord to give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him
 - When Paul uses the word spirit in v.17, he means an attitude, not the Holy Spirit
 - The believers in Ephesus already possessed the Spirit as Paul said earlier in v.13
 - Paul is asking that the Lord open their eyes to understand the spiritual realities of their situation
 - They needed an attitude of wisdom
 - And they needed God to reveal spiritual truth to them so they could gain that attitude
 - This is the first indication in the letter that Paul knew that not all was right in this place
 - Despite their love for one another in the body, they were moving away from a reliance on Christ and His promises
 - They were departing from their first love, as Jesus later identifies
 - But at this point, Paul is still working to save the church body from that fate
 - But it's important to notice that Paul didn't start his counsel by focusing on their behaviors
 - Certainly, the church was engaged in some bad behaviors
 - Later in the letter Paul will call out some of the church's bad practices
 - But Paul knew the church couldn't put godliness into action if they didn't understand what godliness requires

- As our thinking goes, so goes our acting
- What you understand about the Lord through His word will determine how you behave and whether you mature as a Christian
 - Bible study isn't sufficient to ensure obedient living
 - Plenty of mature Christians still struggle with sin, as even Paul said of himself in Romans 7
 - But study of God's word is absolutely necessary if we hope to have any opportunity to resist sin and walk in peace with Christ
- So Paul was praying for a revelation of knowledge from God
 - When Paul wrote this letter, very few works of New Testament scripture had yet to be written
 - So the church didn't have the benefit of the whole counsel of God's word
 - Certainly they had Old Testament scripture, but Paul knew the knowledge they needed had yet to be revealed in scripture
 - So Paul prayed for the Lord to reveal new truth to Ephesus, and in fact that revelation eventually came through Paul's letters
 - But for us today, we wouldn't pray for new revelation
 - We don't need to make that our prayer, because we already have the full revelation of God in His word
 - Peter says that scripture has all that we need for life and for godliness
 - So when we seek help moving away from sin, we need not petition God for new revelations
 - We just open our Bibles
- Nevertheless, we should echo one part of Paul's prayer
 - Paul asked the Lord to give Ephesus an attitude of wisdom
 - A spirit or attitude of wisdom is the key to sanctification
 - If a believer doesn't value spiritual wisdom, then they have no hope to mature much less experience sanctified living
 - If your attitude is that Bible knowledge isn't important or it's only for the pastor, then you're going nowhere fast, spiritually speaking
 - In reality, our entire walk with Christ is about knowing Him
 - Warren Wiersbe once wrote that to know God personally is salvation
 - To know Him increasingly is sanctification
 - To know Him is glorification
 - In the end, it's about knowing Him
 - It seems Ephesus was a church that didn't value spiritual wisdom
 - Perhaps they valued earthly wisdom

- Perhaps it was about money, sex, power, achievement
- Whatever got them excited, it wasn't pursuit of spiritual wisdom
- Their eyes were blinded by the shiny objects of their culture, and it worried Paul, so his prayer continues in v.18

Eph. 1:18 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,

Eph. 1:19 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

Eph. 1:20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,

Eph. 1:21 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.

Eph. 1:22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,

Eph. 1:23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

- Paul says he wants to see the eyes of their heart enlightened
 - Obviously, Paul is speaking euphemistically, since hearts don't have eyes
 - To see with the heart is to have a spiritual understanding
 - So to have the eyes of our heart enlightened means to have our spiritual understanding illuminated or increased
 - Just as our physical eyes see better when there is plenty of light, so does our spiritual understanding grow when God brings illumination
 - Specifically, he wants the church to have a better understanding of two core spiritual truths
 - First, he wanted the church to understand the hope of their calling
 - The calling refers to salvation itself
 - Every believer is called into faith by the Lord Who called us by His Spirit
 - And our calling brings to us a special hope, but we must appreciate that hope if we are to allow that hope to drive our life even now
 - Remember, a hope is a trust in something that has not yet come to pass
 - As Paul says elsewhere:

Rom. 8:24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?

Rom. 8:25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

- So what is the hope that we await eagerly, the thing Paul says this church needs to understand and appreciate better?
 - Paul explains in the next part of v.18
 - He says it's the riches of the glory of Christ's inheritance in the saints
 - Simply put, it's our life in the coming Kingdom
 - It's our resurrected body to replace this one
 - It's our heavenly wealth in the Kingdom to replace the wealth of unrighteousness that perished with this world
 - It's the glory of sinless life spent serving Christ
 - It's the whole package wrapped up in a single hope of our eternal future made possible by our faith in Christ
 - This is the hope of our faith
 - It's a hope that looks forward to our future
 - While inoculating us from the excesses of today
 - To the degree we remain focused on the eternal, we'll care that much less for the temporal
- And the second thing Paul wants the church to understand is the surpassing greatness of Christ's power to His children, those who believe
 - Paul is urging the believer to contrast the here and now with the eternity to come
 - The riches of this world are temporary
 - We can possess them for a time, but eventually we must let them go
 - Our houses deteriorate, our cars get dents and wear out, our bobbles fall apart and lose their luster
 - And even if we keep something for a lifetime, we still relinquish it at death
 - And even then we work our entire life to obtain these things, but we rarely actually obtain them anyway, at least not what we really want
 - There is always something out of our reach, something better
 - We get the regular, but we wished we could afford the deluxe
 - We get the deluxe and our neighbor gets the limited edition
 - We get the latest edition, and Apple releases a newer one tomorrow
 - In other words, if we make our life's goal to chase what the world offers, it's like chasing our tail
 - We don't possess the power to get what we really want
 - And even what we do possess won't last
 - And in the end we die anyway
 - Sure, we all must possess things, the necessities of life and perhaps a few special things

- But are your nice things working for you in service to Christ?
- Or are they barriers to spiritual wisdom and sanctified living?
- Is the pursuit or possessing of such things competing with your first love?
- That was the problem in Ephesus
- So Paul contrasts the worldly life with a life of living with eyes for eternity
 - Paul declares that the hope of every Christian should lie in our eternal inheritance and in the surpassing greatness of God's power to secure it for us
 - Paul explains in vs.20-23 that our hope is not a foolish hope
 - The Father has already demonstrated His power to keep His promises
 - He raised Jesus from the dead
 - He delivered Christ to His right hand in the heavenly places
 - And He has put all things in subjection to Christ, including the Church body
 - In other words, if you need proof of the Father's promise to you of a coming inheritance in a coming kingdom, then consider what He has already done for your fellow Heir, Christ
 - Jesus has already received the very things promised to every heir
 - Paul says Jesus was the first fruits of the resurrection, which means Jesus is merely the first to receive the fruit of His obedience
 - We too are heirs and therefore the Father will grant similar things to us
 - Are you tired of that weak, dying body?
 - Don't spend too much time trying to make it last forever
 - Put your hope in the Father's power to raise you one day into a new, perfect, eternal body
 - Because He did it for Christ already
 - Are you tired of everything you own wearing out, breaking down, being stolen or rusting away?
 - Don't spend your life trying to preserve them unnecessarily
 - Don't put in overtime to afford the upgrade, the replacement, or next year's model
 - Put your hope in the Father's power to grant you beautiful things that can never wear out and that nothing here can equal
 - Because He gave Christ dominion over the entire Creation
 - Are you growing weary of enemies of one kind or another persecuting you, taking advantage of you, abusing you, disappointing you?
 - Don't waste time on conflict or revenge
 - Don't grow angry or fearful
 - Put your hope in the Father who will one day place you in His government in the

Kingdom, ruling over all who might oppose Him

- Because He has already placed Christ in authority over all enemies and over all the church
- You see how your future and Christ's future are tied together because we are fellow heirs with Him
 - This is our hope as Christians, our confidence that better things are coming one day
 - But it is possible for a believer to neglect to live in the light of that hope
 - We can have these things given to us, yet not understand that they are coming and therefore not live in light of that wisdom
 - The writer of Hebrews says it this way

Heb. 6:17 In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, **Heb. 6:18** so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.

Heb. 6:19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil,

- God desired to show His heirs, that is you and me, that His promises are unchangeable
 - So even as God declared to Abraham that He would have an inheritance in the Promised Land in the Kingdom
 - Later God swore an oath to Abraham that He would keep this promise
 - And the writer says that though God cannot lie, nevertheless the Lord swore His oath to give Abraham that much greater confidence to rest in this promise
 - Simply put, God wanted Abraham to take hold of this hope, to never doubt in it
 - Notice in v.18 the writer says this hope is a refuge for us
 - It's a refuge against the temptations of the world
 - A refuge from fear and anxiety
 - A refuge from disappointment and depression
 - A refuge from excess and greed
 - But you have to take hold of it
 - You have to understand that it's coming, that it's real and that it's assured
 - Every believer has this hope, because it is theirs by grace
 - But not every believer grabs hold of it
 - Not everyone understands it
 - So Paul prayed for the church in Ephesus to be enlightened

- To have an attitude seeking spiritual wisdom
- So that they might finally experience the hope that was already theirs in Christ
- Christian, have you taken hold of your hope? Is it your refuge in this life?
 - Pray for an attitude of wisdom in understanding the word of God
 - And let that knowledge drive you into the hope set before you
 - So you might find it a refuge in this world

- The word “Christian” was first used to describe followers of Jesus in Antioch
 - Shortly after the martyrdom of Stephen in Jerusalem, some men from Cyprus escaped the persecution in Jerusalem by traveling to Antioch
 - Once there, they began preaching about Jesus to the Greeks there
 - And among these Greeks, a new following of Jesus emerged, the first outside Jerusalem
 - And this new Greek follower of Jesus began calling themselves Christians
 - It’s a uniquely Greek word meaning follower of Jesus
 - And the Greek idea of follower is imitator
 - For the Greeks, a follower is one who is like the one he follows
 - We might say Christian means “a little Christ”
 - Of course, we all say we want to be like Christ, because we know that is the goal Christ has for us
 - And we also know that many days we are not at all like Christ
 - Despite trying to following His commandments, we fall short of His perfection
 - And sometimes we aren’t even trying
- But here’s the good news...a Christian is going to follow in Jesus’ footsteps in the end
 - As Paul was teaching at the end of Ephesians 1 last week, Christ’s future will be our future too
 - Christ died, and then the Father raised Him
 - Christ entered into the Father’s presence and received a position of honor
 - Christ has an inheritance and all authority over Creation
 - And since we are fellow heirs with Christ, we have a similar future
 - We too will be raised
 - We too will share in Christ’s honor and inheritance
 - We too will have authority and inheritance in the Kingdom
 - Why do we expect these things? Simply because we have been made fellow heirs in the New Covenant by God’s grace
 - Paul said in v2.19-20 that these things were secured for us by the Father’s might
 - The Father’s might accomplished these things for His only begotten Son
 - And the Father’s might will likewise do these same things for all His children by faith
 - Isn’t it a wonderful thing knowing that your eternal future has been secured for you by God Himself
 - God isn’t waiting for you to do something to secure that future
 - He already secured it

- You are just waiting to see it come to pass
 - And surely, it will come to pass for all those who are in Christ by faith
- So now as we enter Chapter 2, Paul wants us to see this clearly, so at the beginning of Chapter 2 Paul traces the Christian's path as we walk in Christ's steps
 - As a "little Christ" we will do all that Christ did in a spiritual sense
 - But once again, Paul wants you and me to understand we take this path in God's power, not in our own
 - This explanation begins in vs.1-7
 - Today we look at the first step of that comparison moving diligently, if slowly, as we have been
 - Paul begins the chapter talking about our death

**Eph. 2:1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,
Eph. 2:2 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.**

- In Chapter 1 Paul said the path Christ took as the first fruits of the children of God began with a death
 - Christ's death was on the cross for our sins
 - And now Paul says our path as a Christian (i.e., a "little Christ" following after Jesus) also begins with death
 - But in our case, death refers to our existence before we came to faith in Jesus Christ
 - Paul says that before we knew Christ, we were "dead" in our trespasses and sins
 - Certainly, we were alive, at least in a sense
 - Our heart was beating and our spirit was alive
 - But in terms of our relationship with God, we were dead, spiritually speaking
 - Had we never come to faith in Jesus, then the moment our heart stopped beating, our eternal future would have been determined
 - We would have been forever separated from God for our sin
 - We would have experienced the second death
 - Like a convict on death row, we were alive, but only temporarily and we had no hope for rescue
 - You could say we were as good as dead
 - But being "dead" goes even deeper than just our spiritual future
 - Being dead also describes our spiritual inability to rescue ourselves from our predicament

- To understand why this is true, we need to look more carefully at Paul's explanation of our "deadness"
- Paul specifically says we were dead in our "trespasses and sins," and these two words are not synonyms
 - The Greek word for trespasses means literally "false steps"
 - We could say going the wrong direction, as in walking somewhere we shouldn't go
 - Like trespassing on someone else's property
 - Trespasses are offenses against law, against standards of righteousness
 - So anytime we do something different than what God wants, we trespass
 - But also, when we violate the laws of our country, we trespass
 - When we disobey a parent or teacher or boss, we trespass
 - When we break the rules and norms of society, we trespass
 - Even when we just fail to show common courtesy, when we say mean things or think unkind thoughts, we trespass
 - Simply put, when we do the wrong thing in any way, under any circumstances and for any reason, we are trespassing
 - Even one trespass makes us lawbreakers
 - And all lawbreakers receive the penalty of the law
 - And the penalty for trespassing God's law is eternal death
 - So Paul says we were dead in our trespasses
 - We may have been alive and walking around, but we were the walking dead
- But then Paul adds that we were also dead in our sins
 - The Greek word for sin means to miss the mark
 - It's an interesting idea because it implies trying to do the right thing yet still coming up short in the end
 - Imagine a university student who was trying to pass a very difficult college course
 - The student studies diligently and takes the tests carefully, but in the end the student fails the exams and flunks the course
 - The student was trying to succeed yet still missed the mark in the end
 - The result was no better than if the student had never tried in the first place
 - This is exactly the situation of every unbeliever who is dead in their sins
 - They may be trying to do the right thing from time to time
 - Nevertheless, they always come up short in the end
 - What they thought was good turns out to be a mistake
 - Speaking as a man, I think this is an idea every husband understands instinctively

- We know what it's like to set out to do the right thing for our wives
- But somehow, in the end we miss the mark anyway
- Like the time we bought our wife a weed whacker for Mother's Day
 - It seemed like such a good idea at the time
 - She had often complained about the appearance of the yard
 - So surely a new yard tool would be an obvious demonstration of our love
 - It was only after she started unwrapping it and we saw the expression on her face that we began to reconsider our decision
 - We had tried to the right thing, but we missed the mark
- The Lord describes the dilemma of unbelievers (and husbands) this way in Isaiah:

**Is. 64:6 For all of us have become like one who is unclean,
And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment;
And all of us wither like a leaf,
And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.**

- The Lord says that the unbeliever is unclean before God
 - The Bible uses the image of wearing a clean, white robe as a picture of being innocent, righteous before God
 - Conversely, the Bible pictures a sinful person under condemnation as being unclean, as if dressed in dirty clothing
 - This is the state of everyone who has not accepted Jesus as Lord
 - The world of unbelievers are unclean, standing before God clothed in dirty clothing, so to speak
 - Isaiah says the good works done by unbelievers does change their standing before God
 - Unbelievers may do good works of various kinds
 - Maybe they give donations to worthy causes, or volunteer to build houses for the poor
 - Maybe they send greeting cards to soldiers on Christmas
 - Or they volunteer to cut their neighbor's lawn after he's forced to return his weed whacker
 - And though they don't know the Lord, they still have many reasons for doing these good works
 - Perhaps they think they are buying their way into heaven
 - Or maybe they just want to absolve their guilty conscience for past mistakes
 - Maybe they hope it makes them look favorable before friends and family
 - Or maybe they just like how they feel when they help someone

- Whatever good works they do and for whatever reasons they do them, the Lord says these works are like another filthy garment
 - They may have been seeking to be clean before God, but they came out just as dirty as ever
 - Their righteous deeds were worthless in the sight of God
 - Which is ironic since religious people expect their good deeds to impress God
 - Yet God Himself says such works have no value to Him
 - And when the world thinks they are doing another good work for God, it is simply sin on top of sin
 - Scripture says you cannot please God by your works
 - They don't come out of a holy motive
 - They are not aligned with God
- Pauls says we were dead in two ways
 - Our trespasses left us in jeopardy of the second death
 - And our efforts to reverse the situation were fruitless because even our good works missed the mark
 - We were dead because we were spiritually incapable of correcting our problem
- And when you find yourself in a hole you created, you have to find a way to stop digging
- In Chapter 2:1 the Greek word for dead is *nekros* literally refers to a dead body
 - Imagine a corpse laying in a casket at a funeral
 - That body has zero potential to correct its situation
 - It's already dead and it can't bring itself back to life
 - Even if someone held out a magic pill with the power to restore life, the dead body couldn't reach out and take it
 - It's condition was a barrier to participating in a plan of resurrection
 - So it is with the unbeliever who is dead in his trespasses and sins
 - The unbeliever is already as good as dead waiting for judgment day
 - And the unbeliever's desire to please God through good works can only produce more sin
- Paul uses this as the starting point of his comparison with Christ, because this is the very reason Christ died for us
 - Christ is our fellow heir so He walked this path first
 - He endured spiritual death on our behalf because we deserved that penalty
 - He died on a cross
 - Likewise, we follow in this step, but unlike Christ we were born into our condition of death
 - Notice in v.2 Paul says we were formally walking according to the course of the

world

- The normal state of every person on earth from birth onward is to be dead in the ways Paul described in v.1
- Everyone from Day 1 is under the penalty of sin
- Even a 1-day old child is already a sinner by nature, and therefore he or she is already under condemnation for sin
- Elsewhere in Romans Paul says:

Rom. 3:9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

Rom. 3:10 as it is written,

“There is none righteous, not even one;

- If we could freeze time and inspect each person on the earth, we would not find anyone who is good
 - It’s not about age, lifestyle, background etc.
 - It doesn’t change the fundamental state that we are all born sinners

**Rom. 3:11 There is none who understands,
There is none who seeks for God;**

- We’ve already determined there is none who is good, now Paul goes on to say we would not find any who seek for God
 - They simply do not exist
 - Not for lack of desire or someone preventing them
 - It is the nature of human beings that makes them dead, incapable of participating in their own solution – unable to raise themselves off that slab in the morgue
- Scripture never shrinks back from this truth, and neither should we
 - There is simply no such thing as an innocent person born of the family of Adam
 - No one starts innocent and becomes bad
 - We all start bad, and by faith some become justified
- This is the course of the world, Paul says in v.2
 - It’s not something specific to an individual
 - It’s common to everyone
 - And therefore, we all must contend with it
 - All humanity is fallen and all humanity is incapable of correcting their problem
 - Furthermore, Paul says this course had a starting point in the prince of the power of

the air

- The term prince generally refers to a spiritual authority
 - The ultimate spiritual authority in all Creation is God Himself, of course
 - He is the Prince of Heaven and Earth
- But Paul isn't talking about that spiritual authority
 - He's talking about Satan, which Paul calls the prince of the power of the air, that is the prince of this fallen world
 - Satan is the spiritual authority on earth among the unbelievers, at least for a time
 - He's the head coach of Team Unbelievers
 - He leads the world into furthering his purposes
- Paul says Satan is working in the sons of disobedience at the end of v.2
 - He means that Satan uses unbelievers as pawns in his game of opposing God and God's people
 - The unbelieving world are collectively the sons of disobedience
 - They are sons, as in children, of a spirit that seeks to disobey God
 - Paul's drawing on an Eastern principle that as the father goes, so goes the children
 - So the enemy is the father of lies, the source of all sin and rebellion
 - And through his influence in the Garden, he brought all humanity into the same state of rebellion by nature
 - So every person is born into this family and into this state of heart
 - Think of it as spiritual DNA, which we inherit from Satan and which programs us for disobedience
- This is the death we all know
 - It's a death made necessary by the spiritual nature we inherited from Adam
 - And it's a death made worse by our feeble efforts to reverse our condition
 - It's a death that separated us from God
 - And it's a death we all knew before we knew Christ
 - We were all dead, which is exactly why Christ had to die in our place
 - There simply was no other option available
 - We couldn't rescue ourselves
 - We were as powerless as a dead body
 - So Jesus walked our path into the grave so that we could follow His path into Heaven
 - And that was just step one of our likeness in Christ

- Then Paul adds, our nature drove our behavior

Eph. 2:3 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.

- Though today we have the grace of God in Christ and have come to know Him and are becoming like Him, we don't start that way
 - On the contrary, we all started just as everyone in the world starts
 - Paul said that we too were formally like the world
 - It's important to remember where we began
 - We never want to begin living as if we have always been Christian
 - As if we had no need for grace in the first place
 - No one is born a Christian
 - Even if we sprinkle water on a baby's forehead and call it a baptism, the child is not magically made a Christian
 - To be born again requires the movement of the Holy Spirit in the heart to raise a dead person into new life
 - That moment comes as a matter of faith in Jesus Christ, the scripture says
 - And until that moment happened in our life, we were as dead as the rest of the world
 - Paul says that deadness is a nature we had, since we were children of wrath
 - There's a saying I often use – we are not sinners because we sin, we sin because we are sinners
 - By our nature we were deserving of the penalty of sin
- But the nature of a person also brings with it a certain outcome
 - That is you act according to your nature
 - If we have a nature to breath air, we cannot act contrary to this nature
 - As much as we may want to, we cannot breathe underwater in the same way
 - Our will is not enough to give us what we want – there are limits to what our will can do
 - We may want to fly or have superpowers, but we can't do it just because we want to
 - Paul says our dead nature limited our ability to resurrect ourself
 - Therefore there is no one who seeks for God (Romans 3:11)
 - But as we hear all the time about churches who appeal to “seekers”, doesn't that mean said group exists?

- While some might seek for more religion, scripture says there is none who truly want to find Jesus
- Our walk with Christ starts in a similar starting point
 - Christ died to pay for the sins that we incurred in our life
 - He had to go the path we would have gone
 - Our sins put Him in death, just as our sins made us dead as well (spiritually speaking)
- So while Jesus walked the path of the grave, He then moved into the heavenly realm
 - We will follow that same path and have already moved from death to life as believers
 - But knowing where we started is critically to understanding what we now gain
 - We have come out of a state where we were 100% opposed to God
 - And 100% unable to correct our own problem
 - By the power of God He has moved us forward in this process to a point we were are now spiritually alive

- We're moving through some of the most important doctrine in all the New Testament
 - And when we started this journey a couple of months ago, I warned that we would be challenged at times by what we learned
 - After all, you can't wade into matters like predestination or election without feeling challenged
 - And the reason these things are so challenging is because what the Bible teaches about spiritual matters is often different than what we experienced personally
 - For example, we remember choosing to place our faith in Jesus at a certain moment in our life
 - But we learned in Chapter 1 that the Father chose us for salvation from before the world began
 - And perhaps we remember doing good works for other people before we became a Christian, thinking God would be pleased by them
 - But we learned at the beginning of Chapter 2 that our good works were merely selfish products of a sinful heart so they could not please the Lord
 - That's why we have to study scripture, because through His word God reveals truths to us that we never could have discovered on our own
- Last week we discovered another of these world-rocking truths
 - We learned that prior to faith, we were dead in our trespasses and sins
 - We dead in the sense that we were under judgment for our transgressions
 - But more than that, Paul said we were incapable of doing anything spiritually good, including seeking for God
 - We were like a corpse...absent spiritual life and so incapacitated by our condition so that we could do nothing to correct our problem
 - Paul's been explaining how we're on a spiritual journey that follows in Jesus' footsteps
 - Like Jesus, our spiritual journey begins with a death
 - But in our case, Paul says we were born "dead" in keeping with the way everyone enters the world
 - Then Paul added in v.3 that this "dead" nature also dictated our behavior

Eph. 2:3 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.

- Paul said that we too were formerly like the world is still today
 - We were once unbelievers and lived as they do
 - It's important to remember where we began in our journey as Christians

- We never want to begin thinking we have always been saved
- As if we had no need for God's grace in the first place
- In other words, no one is born a Christian
 - Even when someone sprinkles water on a baby's forehead and calls it a baptism, that child is not magically made a Christian
 - To be born again spiritually requires the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a person to give that person a new spirit
- As God Himself describes, speaking of how the New Covenant comes to a person

Ezek. 11:19 “And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,
Ezek. 11:20 that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God.

- That moment of salvation comes only as a result of a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, the scripture says
- Until that moment came for us, we were as dead as the rest of the unsaved world
- Then Paul says in v.3 that as a result of our dead condition, we acted in accordance with our nature
 - Now our “dead” nature was given to us at birth
 - We inherited it, which is why Paul calls us children of wrath
 - Adam brought God's wrath upon humanity, and his condition has been passed down to every generation since
 - The Bible teaches that a person's nature controls a person's actions and thoughts
 - You could think of a person's spiritual nature like their computer software
 - Our nature was hardcoded into us like software in a computer at birth, and it determines how we think and live
- At the moment Adam disobeyed the word of God in the Garden and sinned, his nature changed
 - Before the fall, Adam's nature was programmed by God and was innocent and without rebellion or sin
 - But when he fell, we could say he was reprogrammed
 - His new “source code” was written by the devil himself
 - By Satan's influence, the human race fell into sin and became like him, spiritually
 - That's why scripture says unbelievers are children of the devil, because he is the father of fallen humanity
 - Therefore we share Satan's condemnation, which is why Paul calls unbelievers children of wrath

- From that point onward, Adam and all who descend from Adam act according to this new, sinful nature
 - That new programming directs the behavior of unbelievers, which leads to them obeying the lusts of the flesh
 - Before we knew Christ, we too “indulged” the desires of our flesh, allowing them to dictate our thinking and acting
 - We submitted to the base impulses of our nature routinely and without forethought
 - We fell to the temptations of the enemy without even knowing he existed
 - That’s what a fallen, sinful nature produces automatically
- If you think back to your life prior to Christ, I doubt you perceived yourself to be a bad person – much less a person controlled by the devil
 - But that’s not surprising...because our human experience can’t prepare us to understand the spiritual realities of our condition
 - Simply put, spiritually dead people can’t know spiritual truths
 - As unbelievers, we had no idea how far we were from God nor how to find Him
 - An unbeliever’s nature blinds them to their own condition
 - It would be like trying to explain to a fish what it means to be “wet”
 - The fish is completely wet all the time, so we might assume it would understand its own condition
 - But because it’s never *not* been wet, it has no way to appreciate what being wet means
 - Similarly, an unbeliever can’t understand what it means to be spiritually dead or to need to be born again, because such insight requires being spiritually alive first
 - As Paul said

1Cor. 2:14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

- Only those who are spiritually alive can understand spiritual truth
- Yet as long as a person is spiritually dead, they cannot accept spiritual truths, Paul says
- So we find a Catch-22:
 - The Gospel message is spiritual truth which is the only way someone may be born again spiritually
 - But unbelievers are dead spiritually and therefore they cannot receive spiritual truth
 - Only those who are already spiritually alive can understand spiritual truth

- So how can a spiritually dead person receive the Gospel so as to be saved if they must be spiritually alive first in order to accept it?
- Now you see why Isaiah said that even the “good works” of an unbeliever are filthy garments to God
 - An unbeliever’s nature prevents them from knowing and obeying spiritual truth
 - Even worse, unbelievers are incapable of finding their way out of their own dilemma
 - So without faith, it’s impossible to please God
- Yet that was our “former” life, before we had faith in Jesus Christ
 - But how exactly did we move from death to life in Christ?
 - We know that all humanity enters the world dead in trespasses and sins, so how did we overcome that barrier and accept the Gospel?
 - How did we gain the ability to receive spiritual truth so as to be saved?
 - Somehow, we left our state of spiritual deadness and became alive spiritually so we could accept Christ in faith
 - And Paul says that power was not our own
 - Just as the Father raised Christ from the grave, we likewise had to be raised spiritually before we could come to faith
- Paul explains how that happened in the next part of Chapter 2

Eph. 2:4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

Eph. 2:5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Eph. 2:6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

Eph. 2:7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

- Paul explains how we moved from death to life, that is how we came to having faith in the Gospel even though we were spiritually dead
 - Since we didn’t possess the power to respond to spiritual truth, Paul says our salvation once again began with God (v.4)
 - Paul says God *made* us alive together with Christ
 - The phrase “made us alive together with” is a single Greek word
 - It occurs only one other time in the New Testament in Colossians, where Paul uses it to describe the same concept

Col. 2:13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our

transgressions,

Col. 2:14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

- In both cases, Paul emphasizes that our coming to life spiritually in Christ was something God made happen
 - We did nothing to prompt God to take this step
 - We didn't ask for it, and we certainly didn't initiate it
 - God did it all
- And in fact, the Father planned it long ago
 - Paul says He placed our personal debt of sin on Christ even as Christ hung on the cross
 - This demonstrates that the Lord was already preparing for our salvation long before we were ever born
- And furthermore, Paul adds both in Ephesians 2 and Colossians 2 that we were made alive while we were dead in our transgressions
 - While we were like a corpse, spiritually speaking
 - Like a dead man, we had zero potential to respond to the Gospel
 - God made us alive without our involvement because we were unable to respond
- Think back to the story of Lazarus in the Gospel of John
 - In the instant before Jesus called Lazarus to rise and come forth from the tomb, Lazarus was a corpse, dead three days
 - If you remember, Jesus didn't ask Lazarus if he wanted to be raised
 - And even if Jesus had issued Lazarus such an invitation, Lazarus couldn't have responded
 - He was incapable of responding because he was dead
 - Dead things know nothing, hear nothing, agree to nothing
 - The only way Lazarus was walking out of that tomb was if God made him alive
 - Only then could Lazarus respond to Jesus' order to come forth
 - And so it was for us spiritually
 - When the time came for our salvation, in an instant the Lord made us alive
 - By His Spirit, we were born again as Jesus says in John 3
 - Then once we were alive, we responded to the call of the Gospel, we believed and we professed Christ
 - Notice that Paul adds at the end of v.5 that this is the technical definition of grace
 - The biblical definition of grace is God making us alive while we were dead and

- unable to do anything to help ourselves
- Grace is *not* merely an offer or an invitation to be saved
- Dead people do not accept spiritual invitations
- Grace was God acting on His own to save us
- And more than just saving us, the Father has made us to share in everything He granted to Christ
 - Paul says in v.6 that we were raised to sit with Christ at the right hand of the Father in heavenly places
 - Obviously, you and I haven't traveled into Heaven as yet
 - So we know Paul was speaking spiritually
 - He's saying we've been granted a spiritual version of what Christ Himself received at His ascension
 - In the Bible, to sit implies to have finished working
 - So Christ sat because His work of redemption was complete
 - And spiritually, we too have been seated with Christ, because we don't work for our salvation either
 - The Lord did all the work, including making us alive so that we could receive the Gospel
 - Which means we will also share in Christ's inheritance
 - In ages to come, Paul says the constant refrain of God's children will be praises for His kindness toward us
 - The more we understand about what God did for us, the more those praises will grow
 - If you praised Him when you thought you chose Christ, how much more do you praise Him now that you know He chose you?
- Perhaps you're surprised to learn that God made you alive so you could receive the Gospel, because that doesn't seem to agree with our personal experience
 - Our personal experiences in coming to Christ appear to be the result of our decision to believe
 - We didn't detect a moment of being born again before we professed Christ
 - We didn't perceive the Spirit's arrival into our hearts
 - We simply heard or read the Gospel, and it seemed sensible to us and so we agreed with it
 - That was our experience...but it turns out our experience wasn't the whole story
 - That's why I said earlier we have the word of God to explain spiritual truths that can't be understood merely through human experience
 - Our experience in coming to faith simply doesn't prepare us for understanding *how* it actually happened

- The Bible teaches that we heard the Gospel because the Father opened our ears
 - And the Bible says we agreed with the Gospel because the Spirit gave us the ability to accept spiritual truth
 - And the Bible says we confessed Christ because God gave us a new nature programmed to accept the things of God
 - Our personal salvation moment was just the last step in a long chain of events that God initiated for our sake long before we knew Him
- So why did the Father do these things for us?
 - Paul says in v.4 because He is rich in mercy
 - Being rich means having an excess of something
 - Your rich uncle has an excess of money
 - Or we say a dessert is rich because it has an excess of sweetness
 - Being rich means having plenty to spare
 - Likewise, the Lord showed us an excess of mercy
 - It was more mercy than we had right to expect or deserved
 - We had every reason to remain dead and rightly under condemnation for our transgressions
 - Adam placed humanity in that condition, and the Lord was under no obligation to correct the situation
 - But the Father being rich in mercy chose to save us
 - As Paul says, He did this purely because of His great love for us
 - He didn't extend us mercy because of something we said or did
 - It certainly wasn't because we earned His mercy through our good works
 - As we learned earlier, we didn't have any good works to offer Him
 - No, the truth is we were spiritually dead, we were unable to please God, and we deserved nothing
 - We stand here today saved only because God loved us
 - Remember I said we're walking the same path that Christ walked on our behalf
- He shared in death because we were already dead and in need of salvation
 - Then Christ was made alive so that He might blaze a path for us to follow
 - And in the same way, we move from death to life also by the Father's might
- Paul says in v.6 that the Father had you in mind even as He raised Christ
 - We were "in Christ" spiritually at the moment the Father raised Christ from the dead
 - The Father had us in mind as He acted to raise Christ, so that in a day to come He would do the same for us
- Now we can have a life like Christ in every respect

- We possess a new nature, a living spirit that has been reprogrammed to hear the Spirit and obey His voice
- The problem is we still have a flesh that obeys Satan's programming, so we must battle it if we want to please God
- If you've walked with Christ for a time, then you probably have noticed how your new spirit has produced positive changes in your life
- Do you notice that you think differently and act differently?
 - Do you notice that you feel differently about sinning?
 - You still do it, of course, but you desire it less, right?
 - And when you do succumb to sin, it doesn't feel as rewarding as it once did, does it?
- Moreover, did you gain a new desire for God's word, for knowing Him and hearing Him?
 - Weren't you drawn into a life with God's people
 - Have you become aware of your bright spiritual future and does that future excite you?
 - If so, then you can see by all these things how you are now spiritually alive and growing in respect to spiritual truth
- On the other hand, maybe some of these things have yet to happen for you or they hold little interest for you
 - That's not unexpected, because Christians move down the path of sanctification to varying degrees and at their own pace
 - Some move farther and faster than others
 - But if you're not moving at all, then take a second look at how you're walking with Christ
 - Sanctification is always a matter of obeying the Spirit
 - We must daily take up our cross, so to speak, so we may crucify the desires of our flesh while strengthening our spirit through spiritual disciplines
- I should add that in some rare cases, a person's complete lack of interest in spiritual truths *may* mean he or she has yet to be born again spiritually
 - In such a case, a person would be claiming to be Christian without even knowing what it truly means to be in Christ
 - But I want to caution us against jumping to that conclusion in the case of someone we know who may have a very shallow walk with the Lord
 - Behavior and attitudes are messy things, and therefore they are an imperfect guide to assessing a person's heart
- We'll end today with Paul's own summary

Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

Eph. 2:9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- Paul summarizes his argument with one of the most powerful statements in all his letters
 - To understand these verses properly, we need to take them apart grammatically
 - First, Paul says we were saved by grace
 - Sometimes you may hear someone say that Christians are saved by faith, but this is not correct
 - We are saved by grace
 - This point is important because it completely changes the location of action
 - If we say we are saved by faith, then the location of the action is inside us
 - The believer is the one who has faith and if having faith produces salvation, then we could say we saved ourselves
 - We would be saying that at the moment we took the step of believing, then we brought salvation to ourself
 - But Paul makes clear this is not correct
 - Rather salvation is by grace, and grace comes from God
 - God gives grace to us, and by His grace He made us alive while we were dead
 - By grace He predestined us to receive salvation
 - By grace we were saved
- But how does God show His children that He has bestowed His grace upon them?
 - Imagine if God had determined to save us but never told us about it
 - Only when we came into His presence following our death would we know that we had been given grace
 - How much better that He show His grace to us while we are on earth so that we can begin to praise Him even now
 - So God manifests His grace to us *through* faith in Jesus Christ
 - Through our faith, God's grace becomes evident, both to us and to the world
 - We can see faith coming to someone, by which we know that person was saved by God's grace
 - Faith is still the essential requirement for salvation, but faith is the result of God's grace, not the way we gain God's grace
- And just to make sure we understand the relationship between grace and faith, Paul adds that the faith we possess is "not of yourselves"
 - Your saving faith in Jesus Christ did not originate inside you
 - Paul says at the end of v.8 that it is a gift of God
 - God gave you the faith that you have, so that you would show evidence of His grace
 - Some commentators claim the "gift" God gives cannot be faith

- They argue that in the Greek text, the pronoun “it” is in the neuter voice, yet both the words grace and faith are feminine nouns
 - Therefore, they believe that “it” must refer to the entire preceding statement, meaning salvation itself is the gift
 - They are right, but they are cherry-picking in their interpretation
 - I agree that when Paul said “it” he was referring to the preceding clause
 - But let’s look at all that we find in the preceding clause
 - We find not only salvation but also grace and faith
 - All these things are part of the gift God gives to bring us into righteousness
 - That’s why Paul says “it” is not of yourself
 - Yes, the grace we received is from God
 - And so is the salvation that God’s grace produced
 - But so is our faith which manifested God’s grace
 - All three are “not of yourselves,” because together they are all the gift of God
- Because God did everything with respect to our salvation, Paul adds in v.9 that our salvation is not the result of works
 - Works refers to anything a human being can accomplish
 - For example, physical acts are works
 - Therefore, Paul says no physical act contributed to our salvation
 - This means walking down an aisle or kneeling or praying did not save us, for those are human works
 - Works also refers to anything a human being can say
 - We professed Christ when we were saved, but the speaking of those words didn’t save us
 - Neither did a reciting of a confession of faith
 - If we hold that those things save a person, then we are saying a human work is partly responsible for salvation
 - But Paul says this is not true
 - And works even refers to our thoughts and emotions
 - Did you know that thoughts and emotions are works as well?
 - Do you remember when Jesus said that anger is equivalent to murder and lust is equivalent to adultery?
 - Jesus’ statement establishes the principle that what we do in our thoughts is just as real as what we may do with our bodies
 - And our thoughts or feelings did not save us either
- Paul says that our salvation came apart from any human involvement whatsoever
 - Even the things we did do like believing and confessing were themselves the

products of God's grace working in our hearts

- It was God Who produced faith in us causing us to confess
 - So that when all is said and done, God's children will have no reason to boast in themselves
 - We will by necessity give the Lord all credit for our salvation
- Paul's teaching unequivocally refutes every false teaching proposing that works are a way to reach Heaven
- Religions such as Catholicism, Islam, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Eastern pagan religions all teach that human achievements are required to enter Heaven
 - Paul says it is not so, for if it were, then men could boast concerning their salvation
 - We would be able to say we played a part in reaching Heaven
- But the Lord will have no such boasting, for how can dead people boast about becoming alive?
- Could Lazarus boast that he raised himself from the dead?
 - Could he have said, "I heard the Lord's voice so I decided to sit up and walk out of the tomb?"
 - If Lazarus had dared to say this, wouldn't the onlookers have responded, "Yes Lazarus, but who caused you to come to life so that you could hear Jesus' call?"
 - To which the only answer would be "God made you alive so you could respond."
- And the same is true for you and me
- We may say we were saved because we responded to the call of the Gospel and we believed
 - To which scripture asks, "Yes, but who caused you to come to life so you could hear Jesus' calling and obey it?"

- As we began our study in Ephesians, you may remember I opened with some background on the history of the church of Ephesus
 - I said the church of Ephesus was located in a wealthy culture full of temptations
 - If you were a Christian in Ephesus, you might be tempted to compete for the potential prestige and wealth of the city
 - And a church meeting in the city might be tempted to measure its success by the standards embraced by the culture
 - In short, you faced temptations to live like Ephesus and look like Ephesus
 - Over time, these temptations conspired to lead the church into leaving its first love of serving Christ, according to Revelation
 - They respected the word of God, Paul told us
 - They couldn't tolerate false teachers
 - And there is no reason to think the believers in Ephesus were idle
 - They were at work, no doubt, but they weren't working on the right things
 - They drifted away from the mission of serving in Christ's name
 - In its place, they may have done social works, or simply no works
 - Perhaps they merely served their own desires
 - Paul's parting words to the church in Acts seem to suggest this concern

Acts 20:35 “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.’”

- Paul's final words to the church admonished them to seek service over wealth
 - It would seem Paul had reasons to think the church might have decided that receiving things themselves was better than giving to others
 - But I think his concern went far deeper than merely money
 - The problem was one of works too
 - Jesus said this church left its first love of serving Him, and I believe He meant both with their wealth and with their time
 - We know our use of money reflects our heart, as Jesus said we cannot serve God and money
 - But how we spend our time is just as powerful a measure of our heart as money
 - Because in many ways, time is more valuable to us than money
 - There's always more money to be gained if we set our mind to it
 - But there is a finite amount of time in our life
 - Every day has only 86,400 seconds

- Every year has 365 days
 - And every life has only so many years
 - When it's gone, it's gone
- When we're stingy with our time, we're being stingy with our most powerful and important resource
 - That's why Paul has spoken so forcefully to this church in Chapters 1 and 2 about the origins of their faith
 - Paul said they were in Christ because of the work of God making them alive
 - He gave them saving faith and brought them into a new eternal future with Christ
 - They will have what Christ has received
 - And they have it because of His power, not their own
 - So what do we owe a God Who has saved us and given us so much?
 - Do we not owe Him our very lives?
 - As Paul says in Romans 12

Rom. 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

- The Lord expects every believer to respond to His grace with a life lived for His glory
 - Each of our lives will take a certain path
 - Our family lives will be different, our careers and personal pursuits will vary
 - But as Christians, we have one major thing in common: we all are called to serve a Lord Who asks us to be His hands and feet
- So no matter what else in life we choose, we are all expected to give Christ our lives in service – whether as a vocation or as a volunteer
 - He gave His life for us, so we give our lives to Him
 - He should remain our first love, our priority
 - And that brings us to v.10 of Chapter 2, where Paul explains how we are to live in service to Christ

Eph. 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

- In the preceding two verses Paul explained we were saved by His grace, receiving our salvation as a gift, which God manifested in us through faith in His Son
 - We did absolutely nothing to bring about our salvation

- God is sovereign in our salvation
- He stepped into our lives, forever altering our path, bringing us out of death and into life
- He saved us when we weren't even looking for Him, Paul says in Romans 3
- And He did it because He is rich in mercy and loved us
- And now Paul says God did these things because the Lord desired to be glorified through us
 - We are His workmanship, created in Christ so we could walk in good works
 - And these works were prepared beforehand for us
- Let's understand what Paul is saying
 - First, Paul says we are His workmanship
 - The Greek word for workmanship appears only twice in the New Testament, here and in Romans
 - In both cases, the word refers to the masterwork of a craftsman
 - Like a delicate piece of furniture or a marble statue or a fine painting
 - These things reflect glory upon the one who made them because they testify to the genius and vision and artistry of their creator
 - Paul says we too are the exquisite product of a Master craftsman
 - Paul's not talking about our physical creation
 - He's talking about our spiritual nature again, and remember that we were born dead in our trespasses and sins
 - We were not a thing of beauty but rather we were children of wrath
 - But by His grace, Paul says God created us anew, spiritually, in Christ Jesus
 - This is why the Bible calls it being born again
 - It's truly like starting over
 - And it's that new form that holds potential to reflect glory to God
 - But only if we live in keeping with that new nature
- So if we are going to fulfill our purpose, we have to show the world the work He has done in us
 - But how do we show off God's handiwork?
 - He has given us a new spirit, a living spirit with the potential to obey His word
 - But a spirit is invisible
 - And He has brought us into a new life with Christ with a new eternal future
 - But the kingdom has yet to arrive
 - And He has given us faith in the meantime to manifest His grace in us
 - But faith in the heart cannot be seen

- So how is the craftsmanship of God to be appreciated?
 - Imagine if Michelangelo painted the Mona Lisa and then it was stuffed away in an attic forever
 - Or his statue of David had been stored in a garage
 - How could we appreciate the skill of the craftsman without the ability to see his handiwork?
- Paul explains that God's miraculous work in us is to be seen and appreciated by our "good works"
 - We discussed works in previous weeks
 - And we learned that a human work is anything we might do or say or even think
 - And that these works had nothing to do with our salvation
 - Because the works of unbelievers are like filthy garments to God
 - Furthermore, our works had nothing to do with our salvation
 - We were saved by the grace of God alone, Paul said
 - For no one will be permitted to boast of how they arrived in Heaven
 - But now we learn that our good works aren't irrelevant to our salvation
 - Works are the way we bring glory to the God Who saved us
 - And if so, then it stands to reason that the kinds of things we think and say and do following salvation should be different than those we did prior to salvation
 - That if we are to bring glory to the Father by showing His craftsmanship in Christ, we must reflect that change in our works
- So at this point we may be tempted to think we just need to get busy serving Christ
 - Let's go do something! Let's do works!
 - Let's start acting different, let's start talking different, let's look like Christians
 - Well not so fast
 - That's called acting or worse, it's hypocrisy, and it's the farthest thing from good works
 - In a way, it's the equivalent to trying to earn your salvation
 - The Lord said you can't earn salvation, since our works do not please Him
 - And likewise, you cannot bring Him glory by trying to work your own sanctification
 - God brings us the faith that saves, and He brings us the works that please Him
- Paul says the good works we do to bring God glory are works prepared beforehand by God so that we might walk in them
 - Throughout this book we've been confronted, and maybe challenged, by the sovereignty of God
 - We've learned that God predestined us to salvation

- That we were chosen in Christ Jesus to receive what we have
- That even our faith is not of ourselves
- And that revelation makes us uncomfortable, I'm sure
 - It may disagree with what someone taught you in the past
 - Or perhaps these concepts seem contrary to what you concluded by our own reading of the Bible
 - It's an unsettling experience to learn we didn't get the full story the first time or that our understanding of the Bible was incomplete
 - It may even cause you to doubt what we're learning now
- I know the feeling because I was once there myself
 - And I compare the experience of coming to appreciate the sovereignty of God to someone standing inside a circle drawn in the dirt
 - We draw the circle around ourselves and we conclude that everything outside the circle is God's
 - He controls the world and the forces of nature
 - He controls the heavenly realms
 - He directs nations
 - He brings all things to good in the end, etc.
 - And then we tell ourselves that everything inside the circle belongs to us and is under the control of our free will
 - We are in control of who we are and where we will live and what we will do
 - We run our lives and we make our mistakes
 - And perhaps we also believe that we decide whether we to accept or reject Jesus
 - We know God is all powerful, but we tell ourselves that God has left these things for us, that He stays out of the way
 - That He "respects" our free will
 - But then we turn to scripture and we read things like:

Prov. 16:9 The mind of man plans his way,
But the Lord directs his steps.

Prov. 19:21 Many plans are in a man's heart,
But the counsel of the Lord will stand.

- Suddenly we realize that even the plans we make are controlled by the sovereignty of God

- We didn't sense His control, certainly, because that's not how God works
- He's so powerful, He can direct our thoughts and actions to accomplish His desires without us even knowing it
- And so we erase our little circle and redraw it a little closer to ourselves
 - We relinquish a little of that control, because scripture makes us do it
 - But we hold on to the rest, still certain that God shares control with us
 - We're a little uncomfortable, but we go on reading the Bible
 - Then we read about Joseph's life and how his brother's conspired to kill him by sending him to Egypt, and yet later Joseph says this:

Gen. 50:18 Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."

Gen. 50:19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place?"

Gen. 50:20 "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."

- Now we realize that even the evil things men do by their free will fall under God's sovereign control and fit into His plan
- And so we erase our little circle and redraw it a little closer to ourselves
- Then we read Paul tell us that we were chosen before the foundations of the earth to receive a salvation brought to us by the Spirit of God
 - And so we erase our smaller circle and redraw it even closer to ourselves
 - By now, we're standing on barely a patch of earth, clinging to one last idea
 - The idea that at least the good works I do for God are of my own choosing
 - I'm in control of how I serve God, right?
- And then the Lord tells us that even the good works we do for Him are works that God Himself has prepared for us to do
 - Paul is explaining that God has determined beforehand what works He will accept from us
 - We can't make up our own works
 - We can't decide for ourselves what God wants us to do
 - We either follow Him in doing the works He has prepared for us to walk in, or we go our own way which is called disobedience
 - Let me explain how this works using another analogy
 - Imagine going to lunch at a cafeteria restaurant (or buffet)
 - People like these restaurants because the food is usually pretty good
 - More importantly, we like being able to see it before we eat it

- That food was prepared for us beforehand
 - They don't make the food according to our desires
 - You can't order off the menu
 - There is no menu...there's just the food they decided to prepare beforehand sitting there in those stainless trays
- It's up to us to choose what we want, yes, but our choices are limited by what the restaurant decided to prepare beforehand
 - We can take a few things or if we have the appetite, we can take a lot of things
 - The more we take, the more we will experience what the restaurant has to offer
 - Our will has a place in the process...it determines what we select
 - But our will doesn't create the options
- Now imagine if I decided I didn't like what the restaurant offered, so I brought a sack lunch with me into that restaurant
 - I sat down at a table and began to eat
 - I suspect the restaurant management would not be very pleased
 - They would tell me that I can't bring my own food into their restaurant
 - If you want to do your own thing, go elsewhere they would tell me
- I think that analogy accurately reflects what Paul means when he says that we were created to walk in good works that God has prepared for us beforehand
 - God knew He would bring you salvation from before the foundations of the Earth
 - So that in a day He appointed, the Spirit came to you, gave you new life and brought you the gift of faith
 - You awoke to the truth of the Gospel
 - And by your faith you live as a testimony of God's grace
 - Now you have a mission to reflect glory upon the God Who saved you
 - But His sovereignty doesn't end with your salvation
 - He has prepared a menu of good works that He desires you and I would accomplish in bringing Him glory
 - This menu of good works is one the Lord set before us
 - Because these works are the best ways we can glorify Him and serve His purpose in blessing others through us
 - We don't get to define our own path of good works but we do get to choose which ones we will do
- So the Lord has set before you a buffet of opportunities for how you can serve the Lord during your Christian life
 - Your ticket to this buffet is your faith, because without faith it's impossible to please God

- But through faith, you may serve Him in the ways He determined
- You might imagine that on this buffet are works of prayer, service, teaching, counsel, giving, and more
- These works have been prepared for you because they fit your abilities, they cater to your spiritual gifting
- More importantly, they are designed to promote the spiritual growth inside you that the Lord desires to accomplish
 - Now you can eat as much as you want
 - The more you eat, the stronger you will become spiritually
 - And the more blessed you will be for having served the Lord
 - When you pass something up, you're missing out
- This is the reason churches shouldn't hire out for basic service needs
 - Don't hire someone to cut the grass
 - Don't hire janitors
 - Ask the congregation to serve in those things because those may be the works on their buffet
 - This is where they may find their opportunities for sanctification, and to do otherwise is outsourcing their sanctification
- But the key again is we can't create our own good works, our own menu
 - God desires we obey him by serving where He desires
 - We can't substitute our own ideas for what God may want from us
 - And then try to justify our decision by claiming we are making great sacrifices for God

1Sam. 15:22 Samuel said,

**“Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
As in obeying the voice of the Lord?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
And to heed than the fat of rams.**

- We can't tell God what He values
- We can only obey His commands
- So though there are many good things that we could do, the good works we should do are those God has prepared for us to do
 - And yes, we have a degree of free will in this matter
 - You can choose from among the things God has appointed for you
 - Or you could choose to do nothing or to do your own things
 - And no, you can never exhaust the buffet for there will always be more to do

- Because God has designed it just for you
- And this makes perfect sense when you consider that God also chooses how to gift us and where to place us in the world
 - Some believers are given buffets filled with glorious works to perform
 - Men like Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon and Billy Graham
 - God equips men like these with great gifts of oratory, leadership and courage
 - They brought Christ glory through their history-changing work while facing great burdens and personal sacrifices
 - They had an incredible buffet set for them, but they still had to pick the tray and walk that line
 - Others are given buffets of “ordinary,” common works
 - Moms and dads raising godly children
 - Believers volunteering at church to mow grass, print bulletins, play music, change diapers
 - Retirees sending small checks to distant missionaries
 - Parents sending children to witness in distant lands
 - Missionaries dying lonely in forgotten villages
 - These men and women had a far different buffet set for them, but they too had to walk in faith doing as God called them to do
 - Martin Luther or Bill Graham couldn't walk your path in life and you can't walk theirs
 - And everyone has equal potential to be blessed and rewarded by their works
 - We aren't graded against other believers, but only against what opportunities God gave us
 - But one thing is true for everyone
 - We all were created to walk in good works
 - And no Christian has the option of saying no to Christ
- You might ask, how do we know what God has prepared for us?
 - The simple answer is we don't, not until we start serving somewhere somehow
 - By that I mean you have to begin serving to know what God has prepared for you
 - You have to try something to know if it's for you
 - Like sampling a dish to know if it tastes good
 - Volunteer somewhere, sign up for a mission trip, take a step of faith, and always pray for the Lord to reveal His will
 - See where you land and you'll know better what you should do next
 - You'll come to know the general direction you should go when you see your gifts

- intersecting with your opportunities with a result that produces fruit
- That fruit will be most visible first in your own sanctification
 - Your first love will grow, you'll want to serve Christ more, and you will come to know Him more
 - Meanwhile, you will find your passions in life changing
 - You will desire sin less and desire for more of God's grace
- Secondly, as you serve the Lord He brings you joy in the response of those you serve
 - You teach and people learn
 - You pray and people receive the Lord's answer
 - You serve and people are encouraged and blessed
 - You see the Lord turning your meager efforts into something great
- And the more of His prepared works we select, the more opportunity we have to be blessed in these ways
 - Both now and in eternity
 - It's my experience that the more of the buffet I sample, the greedier I get
 - The more I want to serve Christ
 - I want to see more of what's on the buffet, because it's all good
 - Moreover, I lose interest in spending time eating elsewhere
 - I don't want what the world is serving
 - And I don't want to make up my own good works, works that can't please God because they aren't a matter of faith
 - You see, even after we come to faith, we have to operate in faith or else our works are still filthy garments
 - Being busy isn't the same as being obedient
 - We must seek to remain in His will
 - One thing we can say though...no Christian has the option to get out of line
 - After all, we were created specifically for good works
 - You were saved for that very purpose
 - So if you're just nibbling at the buffet of good works God has placed in front of you, you're missing out on something special
 - Perhaps you weren't aware that God has prepared good works for you
 - Perhaps you didn't know that every believer has this expectation, that good works is not optional
 - Well, now that you've heard the counsel of God's word on this point, what excuse will you offer the Lord in that future day?
 - What excuse can we have for sitting on the sidelines?

- Let's not pursue our own agenda in life
 - Let's fulfill our purpose in the salvation we've been given
 - Let's each make it our goal to understand what gifts we've been given
 - And what works God has prepared beforehand for us to accomplish
 - And let's put our hand to the plow, as it were, and serve the Master Who bought us by His blood

- Remember I started this letter explaining how our understanding of doctrine informs our behavior
 - Our outlook on life, the choices we make, the priorities we set are all driven by what we understand about our relationship with Christ
 - Knowing the doctrines of our faith develops within us an eternal perspective on this life and the one to come
 - Conversely, we can't expect to rise above worldly temptations and our own sins unless we seek that eternal perspective
 - When we see a believer caught in a worldly carnal life, it's usually because they lack this understanding
 - They may not realize all they've received by faith, how rich they truly are
 - Or they may not understand their mission on earth and the need to remain focused on serving Christ over self
 - Or perhaps they have heard these things, but whatever understanding they gained, it remained purely academic
 - They never allowed it to drive thinking and choices
 - In Chapter 1 and 2 we've studied Paul's teaching on the means of our salvation in Christ and now the meaning of our salvation
 - Last time we studied v.10 to learn we were saved for a purpose, to accomplish good works
 - And these good works were prepared by God for us to complete to the glory of Christ
 - He has prepared a buffet of good works for us to perform by His Spirit and in His name
 - He has placed opportunities before us so that we would walk in them, but the choice of whether to walk in them lies with us
- To this point Paul's teaching has centered on the spiritual life of the individual believer
 - Yet we know believers don't exist in isolation within the family of God
 - By our faith, we have all received the same Spirit of God
 - Therefore we are united by the Spirit into one body, scripture says
 - So the works we have been called to accomplish must be corporate works, even as we accomplish our individual part
 - That buffet of works was intended to be consumed "family style"
 - But what if we become divided from one another in some way?
 - Then obviously we aren't likely to work together
 - And if we fail to work together, then we won't accomplish the works God has predestined for us to perform
 - From what Paul says next, we can see that this church was wrestling with a particular kind of division

- It was a division centered on personal importance, on status, on a view that Jewish believers were superior to Gentile believers
- In the church, personal importance runs at odds with corporate success
 - Personal importance is an attitude of pride and it's usually a zero-sum game
 - In order for us to win, someone else must lose
 - If we are to get the promotion, someone else must be rejected
 - If we are to get the business deal, someone else must lose it
 - We climb the ladder by stepping on those below us
 - But such an attitude is toxic in the church, and it reflects an immature understanding of Christian doctrine
 - So Paul now moves forward to explaining the importance of corporate unity in the church
 - And in particular, he is going to address the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers in the church
 - Obviously, this kind of division is common for us today, but it will be an opportunity for us to understand some important doctrine which we can apply to the needs of the modern Church

Eph. 2:11 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 —

Eph. 2:12 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.

- We should notice that v.11 starts with “therefore” indicating that Paul is making an application based on his prior teaching
 - In v.10 Paul said we've been created for good works, and now he applies that truth to the church in Ephesus
 - The first and most important work any church must perform is to live and work as one body as a witness of the love of Christ
 - In the case of Ephesus, the church seems to have been divided, and not just by their affections for the world
 - They were also divided along the lines of Jew vs. Gentile
 - Ephesus was a Greek city, but it was also part of the diaspora
 - The word diaspora means dispersion and it refers to the settlement of Jews throughout the Gentile world
 - The cities of the diaspora dotted the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea, including the city of Ephesus

- In each of these cities, a sizable contingent of Jews settled and established communities
 - They built homes, businesses and synagogues
 - They grew stronger and often became very financially successful
 - Typically, the Gentile populations of these cities grew to resent the Jews' success, and over time prejudices grew
- The Jews for their part didn't help matters by their attitudes toward Gentiles
 - The Jew was taught that Gentiles were "dogs" and unworthy of God's love
 - They said that God created Gentiles merely to fuel the fires of hell
 - They had a saying that even the best of serpents still crush, and even the best of Gentiles still kill
- Paul draws his Gentile readers' attention to this separation in v.11 when he says, remember what you lacked prior to coming to faith in Christ
 - He starts by calling out those who were "Gentiles in the flesh"
 - Paul's referring to the physical mark of Jewishness, which is circumcision
 - All Jewish boys were to be circumcised or else they were excluded from the nation of Israel
 - Therefore, circumcision was symbolic of Jewish identity, and lack of circumcision was symbolic of being Gentile
 - In that sense they were Gentile in the flesh, meaning Gentile by virtue of lacking the mark of Jewishness
 - A Jew, the "circumcised," would refer to Gentiles as the "uncircumcised" and it was always an insult
 - Paul says remember you were once despised by Jews because you lacked the mark that made you part of God's family
- But then Paul adds that this mark came through human hands, referring to the way circumcision was accomplished
 - Remember, Paul just established that no one enters the family of God through a human work
 - So if circumcision is a mark in the flesh made by human hands, then it cannot be the means of salvation for anyone, whether Jew or Gentile
 - It served a purpose of uniting a group of people as one nation under a covenant
 - But it was never a substitute for faith
 - Nevertheless, it did create a separation
 - In v.12 Paul reminds his Gentile readers of all they were separated from
 - They were separated from the promises of the Messiah
 - They had no knowledge of a coming Messiah nor any interest in what He offered
 - Consider the magnitude of Paul's first point in v.12

- As we studied in Genesis, in the centuries that followed the fall of Adam, God revealed Himself through a certain line of humanity; the line of the seed promise
- And then beginning with Abraham, Issac and Jacob, the Lord revealed Himself to a nation of people
- But apart from a few exceptions along the way, the Lord did not reveal Himself to the vast majority of humanity
- Millions of people have lived and died without ever knowing the Creator except at a distance
 - They were separated from the Messiah
 - Their separation was the result of humanity's sin
 - So Paul reminds the Gentile believers just how special it is that God has granted us an opportunity to know Christ now
- Then Paul adds that Gentiles were separated from the commonwealth of Israel
 - Commonwealth refers to the civic, religious and commercial life of the people of God
 - Gentiles had no place in Jewish society
 - Therefore they could not benefit from the supernatural success God visited upon His people
 - Over history and despite their persecution, there has never been a people more blessed than the Jewish people
 - Social studies have confirmed that Jews are overrepresented among the world's greatest scientists, musicians, artists, businessmen, politicians, etc.
 - Jews make up about 0.2% of the world's population, yet the percent of successful Jews in business, science and art is far higher
 - And the accumulative contributions of the Jewish people to the world are truly astounding
 - The science that drives the technology of our life came from Jewish scientists and engineers
 - Men like Einstein, Freud, Carl Sagan, Oppenheimer, Edward Teller, Jonah Salk, Niels Bohr, Max Born, Steve Ballmer, Mark Zuckerberg
 - Jewish writers include Asimov, JD Salinger, Karl Marx, Ayn Rand, Norman Mailer
 - And artists and actors include Harrison Ford, Woody Allen, Daniel Radcliff, Gwyneth Paltrow, Dustin Hoffman, Billy Crystal, Oliver Stone, Leonard Nimoy, William Shatner, James Caan, George Gershwin, Billy Joel, Bob Dylan, Lauren Bacall etc..
 - You have Jews to thank for almost everything you touch in life
 - Do you wear Levi jeans? You have a Jew to thank
 - Do you use a Dell computer? You have a Jew to thank
 - Did you like the movie ET? Or Jaws? You have a Jew to thank

- Do you like Hershey's chocolate? You have a Jew to thank
- What explains this higher rate of Jewish success?
 - God promised to bless the Jewish people disproportionately in the covenant He gave to Abraham
 - But the unbelieving world labels Jewish success a "conspiracy" and uses it as an excuse to persecute God's people
 - Paul calls it the commonwealth of Israel
- But Paul says we lacked these things because we were strangers to the covenants that brought them to Israel
 - The Lord accomplishes everything through His word, which He gives to men in the form of covenants, or promises
 - The Lord makes promises and gives assurance to men
 - And then by His word, He fulfills these things by His own power
 - If we are to receive the things God promises, then we must first become party to the covenant by which He promises
 - The Lord gave His promises of a Messiah and a commonwealth to Abraham and to his descendants
 - Gentiles are not the natural descendants of Abraham
 - Therefore, Gentiles are not members of that covenant by birth
 - God later gave Israel other covenants, and we were strangers to all of them by birth
 - As a result, Gentiles had no hope and were without God in the world
 - Obviously, Paul doesn't mean that Gentiles have no hope for anything
 - In a general sense, hope is merely a common human experience
 - Kids hoped for nice gifts, women hoped for a faithful husband, men hoped for a good harvest, etc.
 - But Paul isn't talking about that kind of hope...he's speaking of an eternal hope, a sure and certain knowledge that our death is not the end of us
 - He's describing the unique hope that is made possible by a true knowledge of the Living God
 - It's a hope of the Creator's promise that we will live again, that we will not receive the penalty for our sin
 - That's a hope that Gentiles didn't have in days past
- God intended this separation to exist between Jew and Gentiles
 - In fact, the Lord made Israel to be a peculiar people
 - Their uniqueness separated them from the Gentiles so they might remain distinct over millennia of history
 - This separation served God's purpose in bringing the world salvation through a

distinct people

- His purpose continues even today among unsaved Jews still bound under the Old Covenant
- And it was in the midst of this culture of separation that Christ came to inaugurate a New Covenant in His blood

Eph. 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

- Paul says in v.13 that Jesus opened the door for Gentiles to receive the promises given to Israel
 - A New Covenant inaugurated in Christ's blood brought the Gentile "near"
 - The word near stands in stark contrast to being separated from God, far from Him and without a knowledge of Him
 - That divide was healed by Christ's suffering and death
 - And now by faith in Christ, we are brought near to God
 - Paul is revealing a mystery that he will come back to several times throughout the rest of this letter
 - Ironically, mysteries aren't things that are mysterious
 - The word mystery in the New Testament describes a hidden truth of God that He eventually reveals
 - We only know of these mysteries after they have been revealed
 - Paul was privileged to explain a total of 8 mysteries in his New Testament letters, and one of the most important mysteries is explained in this letter
 - We're talking about the mystery of the Church
 - That God intended to form a community of Gentile believers who would follow the Jewish Messiah that Israel largely rejected
 - That God would bring the Gentiles near through Christ
- As Gentiles, we are likely to take this grace for granted
 - That is, we probably overlook just how amazing it is that God has included us in the promises He gave to Israel
 - No one saw this coming...it was a mystery
 - Not even the Apostles themselves expected God to reach out to the Gentiles
 - In the book of Acts we see Peter struggling to accept that he must preach to Gentiles too
 - Yet here we are, and more than that, receiving what Israel was promised even before Israel itself is receiving it
 - The covenant that has brought us near to Christ is just like all the covenants

God has made

- They are covenants between God and Israel

Jer. 31:31 “Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

Jer. 31:32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord.

Jer. 31:33 “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Jer. 31:34 “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

- The Lord gave His New Covenant with Israel
 - The Lord says the covenant will place a “new” heart in God’s people leading them to keep His commandments
 - It’s a covenant with the power to compel righteousness
 - It’s a promise of glorification
 - Secondly, Jeremiah says that when this covenant comes to Israel, there will be none among Israel who need to be taught of the Lord
 - When it comes for Israel, all Israel will receive it
 - It’s a covenant promising to make Israel a nation of faithful, glorified followers of God
 - Obviously, Israel still awaits the fulfillment of this covenant, which will happen at the end of this age
 - Meanwhile, you and I have already received it
 - The Church precedes Israel in receiving what Israel was promised
 - God has done this to fulfill His promise to Abraham to bless all nations through the Messiah
- In the meantime the Lord is bringing this covenant to Gentiles in the Church
 - By faith in Jesus Christ, we have been reconciled to God
 - The Spirit of God Who has written God’s law on our heart
 - We have a hope of resurrection and a life in the Kingdom
 - And we have a life of service to Christ in the meantime
 - But Gentiles are not the only ones receiving this covenant

- While most of Israel still remains unbelieving, some are coming to faith in Jesus Christ
 - Sometimes we call them completed Jews or Messianic Jews
 - They are the remnant, those who continue the unbroken line of believing Israel
- But now that God has moved to bring Gentiles into His family, the Jewish believers in the diaspora were struggling
 - The thousands of years of separation which had previously defined the relationship of Jews and Gentiles was now working against the unity of the church
 - Many Jewish believers were slow to abandon their practices under the Old Testament Law, practices intended to foster separation from Gentiles
 - And certainly Gentile believers were not interested in adopting Jewish law as a consequence for following Christ, which ensured continuing separation
- Paul was frequently forced to defend the rights of Gentiles in the church and to rebuke the Judaizers who sought to impose Jewish law on Gentile believers
 - In fact, Paul fought this very battle in Ephesus
 - We see this reflected in Paul's letter to Timothy, who pastored in the city of Ephesus

1Tim. 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope,

1Tim. 1:2 To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

1Tim. 1:3 As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines,

1Tim. 1:4 nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith.

1Tim. 1:5 But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

1Tim. 1:6 For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion,

1Tim. 1:7 wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.

- Notice Paul asks Timothy to instruct certain troublemakers who were absorbed in Jewish distractions
 - We know the false teaching being spread in Ephesus revolved around Judaizers because Paul mentions men teaching on genealogies and the Law
 - Both these things are uniquely Jewish concerns

- But Paul makes clear that this false teaching has no place in the church
 - The Paul calls it strange speculation and fruitless myth
 - It's unhelpful because it attempts to perpetuate a separation that no longer, in fact, exists
 - As Paul explains

Eph. 2:14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,

Eph. 2:15 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,

Eph. 2:16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

- Paul says Christ brings peace for Jew and Gentile
 - Obviously, Christ brings us peace with the Father
 - He reconciles us to the Father having taken the Father's wrath for our sin
 - But Christ also brings peace for Jew and Gentile in the Church
 - Obviously, God never expected Jew and Gentile to war with one another, but neither did He call them to unite
 - In fact, as we've already explained, the covenants of God instituted a state of separation between Jew and Gentile
 - And nothing symbolized that separation better than the wall set around the temple in Jerusalem
 - God required Israel build a wall around the outer courtyard of the temple
 - While any Jew could enter into the compound, no Gentile could legally enter
 - Even a Gentile convert to Judaism was barred from entry
 - A Gentile was forever barred by the Law from entering the temple compound
 - And if a God-fearing Gentile could not approach God in the temple service, how did such a person find fellowship with God?
 - The message was clear...only Jews were offered fellowship with God under the Old Covenant Law
- We'll talk more next time about how Jesus unites Jew and Gentile into a single body
 - But today, we don't usually see Jewish believers dividing against Gentile believer, though it does happen regrettably
 - Where it happens, it happens for the same reasons it happened in the first century
 - Teachers demand that believers return to a practice of the Law

- And by that practice, we erect a new dividing wall between members of the body
- Our experiences with divisions in the body usually turn on much more important things...
 - Like the color of the carpet in the sanctuary
 - Or the style of music in worship
 - I'm being facetious, though not entirely
- Anytime we focus on our earthly differences rather than on our eternal union in Christ, we are at risk of erecting new dividing walls
 - It happens when we forget our place as a part of the body of Christ
 - When our individual desires and concerns become more important than the needs of others and the unity of the body, division has begun
 - When preserving our past identity becomes more important to us than living out our new identity in Christ, then we're dividing
 - When we're asking what we can get out of the body rather than asking what we can invest in the body
- We've only just begun to study Paul's teaching on the importance of unity in the body, but already we can understand that Christ wants unity
 - We've been called to serve Christ by our works within the body of the Church
 - Many of our works are individual accomplishments, of course
 - But even then, our individual works are to be directed to the needs of others in the church body
 - If we're divided one from another, the very purpose in our good works disappears
 - Christianity is a team sport
 - But when we allow our pride or ego to erect dividing walls, then we're only hurting ourselves in the long run
 - We risk denying ourselves the benefit of spiritual gifts from others in the body
 - And we deny ourselves the opportunity to serve others
 - Both are a serious spiritual loss
- As we continue through Paul's teaching on unity in the body, I want to challenge us to consider where we may be erecting barriers, whether intentional or otherwise, with other believers
 - Where are we letting things like age, money, race or other meaningless differences divide you from other Christians?
 - Or do we divide too easily over differences of opinion about meaningless things?
 - Are we quick to be offended and slow to forgive?
 - It can happen faster than you expect, and it works against God's purposes in the

Church

- It's the start of a new year, and that means New Year's resolutions
 - We resolve to eat better and exercise more, to drop bad habits and start good ones
 - Many of our resolutions last about as long as champagne on New Year's Eve
 - Nevertheless, the tradition endures
 - The secret to a successful New Years resolution is to select goals that are easily achievable
 - For example, here are some of my resolutions
 - Sleep in more
 - Reduce the number of jokes in my sermons...done!
 - Share my opinions with other people more often
 - All easily achievable
 - What is it about a new year that prompts us to adopt new thoughts and new behaviors?
 - I think the enduring popularity of New Year's Resolutions is evidence of how much we desire to become something better than who we are
 - Like wiping the slate clean, we're seeking the ultimate do-over
 - And maybe we're wishing that major changes of our life can be as easy as flipping the page on a calendar
 - Praise be to our Lord Jesus Christ that we have already received the ultimate do-over through our faith in Him
 - We're made new in His likeness
 - And we have an entirely new and better future ahead of us
 - And that future is closer than you think, and it's begun even now
 - Because even now Christ is at work making many things new in us every day through the study of His word
- In our study of Ephesians, Paul's been explaining our spiritual do-over
 - Now at the end of Chapter 2, Paul's point is the unity of all believers made possible by our common faith in the One Redeemer
 - Paul began by reminding his largely Gentile readers how they had at one time been outside the grace of God
 - Gentiles were strangers to God and to the covenants that God gave exclusively to Israel
 - Then in v.13 Paul said "but now"
 - Now through Jesus Christ, Gentiles have opportunity to know the Living God
 - Now the message of salvation has reached our ears
 - And therefore those who were formerly far away from God have been brought near to God through the cross of Jesus Christ

- Paul said it was as though the stone wall that barred Gentiles from entering the Jewish temple had been torn down
 - Spiritually speaking, Gentiles and Jews were no longer separated
 - Where before the Lord had revealed Himself only to the Jewish people
 - Now all people could approach Him through Jesus Christ
- Let's pick up there again in Paul's explanation

Eph. 2:14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,

Eph. 2:15 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,

Eph. 2:16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

Eph. 2:17 and He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near;

Eph. 2:18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

- **Paul says our common faith in Jesus Christ destroyed a barrier between Jew and Gentile, referring to the wall around the temple**
 - Before Christ, only Jewish people had opportunity to enter the temple service and worship the true God
 - The Gentile – even a Gentile who feared and worshiped Yahweh – was never permitted to enter the temple grounds
 - He or she could only worship at a distance
 - Now Paul isn't saying that Gentiles were never saved
 - We know from the Old Testament that occasionally Gentiles would come to faith and even attach themselves to Israel
 - Biblical figures like Rahab, Ruth and the Queen of Sheba were God-fearing Gentiles
 - And even entire Gentile cities like Nineveh came to faith
 - But these were the exceptions that proved the rule
 - Gentiles were largely excluded from the family of God
 - Only Jews enjoyed an abiding relationship with God through the covenants He gave to Israel
 - Chief among those covenants was the Mosaic Covenant, which defined Israel as God's people and gave them God's Law
- The Law was the principle cause of Israel's separation from the Gentile nations

- The Law compelled Israel to live a unique lifestyle
 - The Jews were to dress, eat, and otherwise live very differently than their Gentile neighbors
 - The law of commandments and ordinances was specifically intended to create division between Israel and the Gentiles
- And over time those ordinances enflamed the passions of the flesh leading to enmity between Jew and Gentile
 - The Jewish people became haughty and prideful toward Gentiles
 - Their special relationship with Yahweh gave Jews excuse to look down on Gentiles, to despise them, to mistreat them
- Meanwhile, Gentiles saw Jews as a strange and isolated people who enjoyed an unexpected prosperity
 - So in jealousy Gentiles persecuted Jews seeking to take their prosperity for themselves
 - In that sense, Paul says the commandments of the Law resulted in enmity between the two groups
 - God wasn't to blame for their sinful responses to the Law
 - Nevertheless, as long as the Law held true for Jews, it fostered separation and the enmity that resulted
- Meanwhile, the one ironic similarity between Jew and Gentile was their sinful condition
 - Both Jew and Gentile were separated from God because of sin
 - Both experienced enmity with God even as they had enmity with each other
 - The Jews thought themselves superior because they had the Law, but it was the Law of God that condemned them for their sin
 - While the Gentiles thought themselves better because they didn't live in such strange ways, yet their godless lifestyle left them with no hope
- But all that changed when the promised Messiah came to Israel and the world
 - Paul says in v.15 that by His "flesh" Christ "abolished" the enmity that existed between these two groups
 - Obviously, hatred between Jew and Gentile didn't disappear the moment Jesus appeared
 - So how did Christ abolish the hatred that marked the relationship between Jew and Gentile?
 - The answer is that Jesus' flesh brought the Law of commandments to an end
 - And it was that law that prompted the division and enmity
 - The Law of Moses demanded Israel live according to certain standards
 - If Israel met those terms, then the Law also promised that the nation would know prosperity and security in their land

- Which was a veiled reference to Israel receiving the Kingdom
 - But if Israel failed to live according to the standards of the Law, the covenant required that Israel receive severe penalties
 - The Law was unforgiving...it offered no escape from its demands
 - And no sinful human being could ever meet its terms
- That's why the Son of God, Jesus Christ, took on flesh to live as a man
 - He came to live an earthly life that the Law demanded
 - He never sinned, scripture testifies, therefore Jesus met the Law's requirements for righteousness
 - And by His perfect life He is deserving of the Kingdom that the Law promises
 - But Jesus went a step further...
 - Though He hadn't disobeyed the Law Himself, nevertheless Jesus died as the Law required
 - He paid the Law's price for sin
 - Therefore, Jesus fulfilled or complete the Law's requirements for righteousness and for sin
 - As Jesus Himself declared to the Pharisees in Matthew 5:

Matt. 5:17 “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

Matt. 5:18 “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

- Jesus said His very purpose in coming to Earth was to *fulfill* that Law
 - To fulfill means to complete, so Jesus was saying He came to complete the Law by meeting all its requirements
 - Completing it for righteousness' sake meant living according to its exacting standards, which Jesus did
 - But completing the Law for *our* sake meant paying the price the Law required for our sin, which He also did
 - Once everything required in the Law has been accomplished in Jesus' life and death (i.e., by His flesh), then the Law was fulfilled
- By Jesus fulfilling the Law in this way, it means the Law is no longer in effect for those who believe
 - As a Jew or Gentile places his or her trust in Christ, the believer is credited Jesus' work of meeting the Law's requirements
 - By our faith, the Law comes to an end
 - As Paul says in Romans;

Rom. 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

- It's because the Law has come to an end for believers that Paul says Jesus abolished enmity
 - Jesus did away with the cause of that enmity, namely the divisions created by the Law itself
 - There is no dividing wall between the two groups
 - In fact, there is no need for a temple at all, nor sacrifice, nor any of the practices of the Law
 - The source of our division was ended because it was completed on our behalf
- What's more, the end of the Law meant the end of our enmity with God
 - The Law was the source of our condemnation
 - It was the Law of God that convicted us for our sin
 - And it was the Law that specified the penalty for sin, which is death
 - But since Christ fulfilled the Law on our behalf, we no longer stand condemned
- Paul says in vs. 15-16 that the Lord intended His work of redemption to make Jews and Gentiles one new man
 - New refers to the change that comes to every believer
 - When faith in Jesus comes, both Jew and Gentile receive a new spirit and enter a new life freed from condemnation and law
 - Both have changed yet neither has an advantage
 - Neither can turn to the other and claim that he had something the other lacked
 - They both required salvation and both have received it by faith
 - They are one man in the sense that they both stand before God as equals with the same identity in Christ
 - Moreover, both have been reconciled into one body or gathering
 - Where before each group congregated separately, now they are united as one
 - No further division, no further enmity
- Notice in vs.17 Paul quotes from Isaiah 57 where the prophet foretold that the Messiah's work would include uniting Jew and Gentile
 - He would preach the Good News to those who were near God, that is the Jews who could approach God's glory in the temple
 - And yet it was always God's desire to preach to those who were far, to the Gentile nations
 - Here we see that Scripture acknowledges both Israel's pre-eminence among nations and the equality of Jew and Gentile in the Church
 - Israel as a nation will always have a special place in the world as God has promised

- But that distinction is not observed on a personal level within the Church
- A Jewish believer remains a member of the nation of Israel
- But within the body, the distinctions of Jew or Gentile has no relevance because we find our way to the Father the same way
- We live in a very different world than the one Paul knew
 - The church today is virtually 100% Gentile, though there remains a Jewish remnant
 - You can still find churches today placing undue importance on Jewish background, traditions or even on practicing the Law itself
 - But the Bible is abundantly clear that Jewishness offers no advantage within the body of Christ
 - And therefore, we ought not waste time on it...let it go
- Instead, like a resolution, let's focus on what's new

Eph. 2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,

Eph. 2:20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,

Eph. 2:21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,

Eph. 2:22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

- As Gentiles we need not hang our heads or think ourselves second-class citizens in the body of Christ
 - On the contrary, we are no longer strangers and aliens
 - Those two terms are found in the Law
 - The Law often spoke of foreigners or strangers among God's people, referring to the Gentiles
 - It labeled Gentiles as lesser followers of God
 - Gentiles could associate with Israel, participate in the feasts, worship Yahweh
 - But they were always outsiders
 - Gentiles never forgot they were strangers and aliens among God's chosen people
 - But we are no longer to be considered strangers or outsiders in the body of Christ
 - We are fellow citizens with all saints, both Old Testament and New Testament
 - All those of faith in Jesus Christ are equal, made so by their faith in the work of Christ

- Paul says we are as privileged as the one born in the household of the master
 - In the days before Christ, a God-fearing Gentile could convert to Judaism but that didn't make the person Jewish
 - A Gentile could never become Jewish, since Jewishness is by birth only
 - The best a Gentile could hope for was to be permitted to remain among God's people for a time, called a sojourner
 - But today by faith we are considered members of the household with full privileges
- Paul ends the chapter with another analogy, speaking of believers in the church like the stones in a building
 - He begins his rhetorical construction project with the most important part of any building: the foundation
 - Paul says the church body's foundation was built by the apostles and prophets
 - Paul is referring to the word of God delivered by these men
 - The prophets of the Old Testament and the prophets of the New Testament, called apostles, delivered the word of God to the world
 - The word of God is the authority for all we believe and do as a body
 - And of course, at the cornerstone of that foundation is Jesus Christ Himself, Who established the church in His blood
 - Christ is both the subject of the word and the Deliverer of that word through His Spirit
 - And therefore the church, the body of believers, ceases to have authority or purpose without the word of God
 - Since the word of God is the church's foundation, then like any building, if our foundation is faulty, the whole structure will falter
 - A church damages its foundation at its own peril
 - If a church body compromises on the authority of the word of God, then its downfall is only a matter of time
 - And compromises come in many forms...
 - It usually begins by denying the literal interpretation of scripture
 - Instead of being taught that the text means what it says, we're taught creative and false views
 - And chasing after faddish interpretations becomes a goal in itself leading the church into many foolish beliefs and practices
 - The final step – and one that usually comes quickly – is the church abandoning the teaching of the word altogether
 - Today it's easy to find many churches at this point
 - Many church bodies meet under the banner of Christ but not under the authority of His word

- We're not saying those gatherings lack true believers
- We're saying those believers lack the truth they've gathered to hear
- If a church body is to remain true to its Master, it must forever submit to the word of God and never grow weary of studying and following it
 - As Peter said

1Pet. 2:2 like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

- Next Paul says we, the believers, are the building, so as we know the church is not the building but the people in the church
 - But notice also Paul emphasizes we have been “fitted together”
 - The word in Greek refers to the way stone masons worked the surface of adjoining stones to create a seamless joint
 - Paul says we're not just haphazard stacks of stones that happened to come together by chance and circumstances
 - On the contrary, Paul says we were fitted together precisely by our Father, the Master Stone Mason
 - First and foremost, Paul is referring to the larger body of Christ
 - When all is said and done, the total population of God's people will show itself to be a perfectly fitted group of humanity that serves God's purposes perfectly
 - Not a single person will be superfluous to God's plan for the Kingdom, nor will a need go unmet
 - The Lord will have exactly the number of people He needs to staff His government
 - But each of us occupies a particular place on earth and time within history by God's design
 - Therefore, we know Paul was also speaking of our place in own local church
 - In order words, we are not participating in this local church by chance
 - I'm here for a reason, you're here for a reason, the Father fit us together precisely
 - He fitted you and me so that we would slide right into place here and serve a unique purpose
- This fact reminds us that we shouldn't take our participation in a local body of Christians for granted
 - First and foremost, we shouldn't neglect gathering together, as Hebrews reminds us
 - Imagine a wall constructed by God with each stone carefully selected to complete the mosaic
 - And now imagine if a few of the stones were taken out

- They decided to stay home on Sunday...what would happen to that wall?
 - In the beginning, it's mostly a matter of appearances
 - The integrity of the wall hasn't weakened, but it doesn't look right with those holes
 - Instead of admiring the whole construction as God intended, our attention is naturally drawn to what's missing
 - Like a church that misses key areas of leadership or volunteers or funds or other essential needs
 - We may have 95% of what we need to glorify God as He intended, but it's those few missing pieces that get our attention
 - It reminds us how important every piece is in God's plan for the church
- But as more stones go missing, the wall's very survival becomes at risk
 - I'm not talking about the failure of the Church Universal, of course
 - Christ is the One Who builds and leads His church
 - And He said the gates of Hell will not prevail against it
 - I'm speaking about the health and continuation of a local congregation, the place where our individual service takes place
 - We know the body of Christ is much more than a once-a-week gathering, but that weekly gathering is of primary importance to spiritual health of every member
 - If believers drift away from the gathering where God has placed them, they will suffer spiritually in the end
 - Or even if a member of the body falls away from corporate church attendance in favor of private personal study or smaller groups, that stone has gone missing
 - In order for stones to be fitted to one another, they have to touch one another
 - And in order for each of us to play our appointed roles in the body of Christ, we have to gather together with one another in the place God has fitted us
 - But of course, there is a time to enter into a new fellowship and there comes a time to move on
 - We should leave just as we enter...obediently following the call of God and doing so with joy
 - If we leave a church in protest, we may be running away from an important lesson God wanted to teach us
 - We need to feel equal conviction when we part from a church as we did when we joined
- Secondly, Paul's analogy reminds us that each of us have a unique contribution to make to the body where we meet
 - As a mason shaped a stone, he took into consideration the shape of the stones on either side
 - The new stone was shaped to fit in that space perfectly

- In the process, the mason had to cut some of the stone away to shape it properly
 - He must strike the stone carefully, knocking off the rough points, throwing off sparks in the process
 - But at the end of that process, the stone emerges smooth and matched to its place in the wall
 - That's a great picture of how sanctification within the body of Christ works
 - When we come together with God's people, we show up with some rough edges
 - Our personality, our habits and our sins must be reshaped by our Stone Mason, the Holy Spirit, who chisels us by the word of God
 - Which reminds us why the church must remain committed to hearing the word of God taught
 - It's the sword in the hand of the Spirit to do His work on our hearts
 - That process can be painful at times, and it may throw off some sparks
 - Sparks of personal conflict, sparks of hurt feelings, sparks of wounded egos, sparks of conviction
 - But if we give the process time and if we remain dedicated to filling our place in God's building, then we'll see the fruit eventually
 - We'll find ourselves slipping into our place and as that mosaic is completed, we'll see the value of our place in time
- We are God's building, and the mortar holding us together is the Holy Spirit Paul says in v.22
 - This is God's construction project and we are His materials
 - You may feel your participation here doesn't matter much
 - But if that's your attitude, then you're selling the Lord short
 - You're forgetting the Lord delights to show Himself strong in our weaknesses
 - You're overlooking His sovereign choice to save you and to bring you here
 - Allow me to propose our collective New Year's resolution
 - We resolve to serve the Lord in the New Year
 - We resolve to serve Him in our appointed role above serving ourself
 - We resolve to make the gathering a priority
 - We resolve to come prepared to worship, pray, study and serve others with all the energy, joy and persistence we know Christ desires
 - We resolve to be patient with the "rocks" around us, most of all the hardheaded pastor
 - And we resolve to do everything with an attitude of love



VERSE BY VERSE MINISTRY
INTERNATIONAL

TEACHING THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

Ephesians - Lesson 3A

Chapter 3:1; 14-21

814 Arion Parkway, #410
San Antonio, Texas 78216
210.319.5055

©2017. Verse By Verse Ministry International.
All rights reserved

versebyverseministry.org/lessons/ephesians-lesson-3a

- We're nearing the end of the first half of Paul's letter, so I think it's a good time to revisit the structure of this letter
 - Remember I said this letter is half doctrine, half practice
 - The first three chapters of the letter teach fundamental principles of our salvation
 - Other than Romans, no other letter of the New Testament dives more deeply into the ramifications of salvation by faith in Christ
 - It's a deep exploration of grace
 - Then the final three chapters of the letter shift gears dramatically to explain how we live out our faith in specific ways
 - Paul explains using spiritual gifts
 - Putting aside sin in our actions and speech
 - Fulfilling our assigned roles in the church and in our families
 - Imitating Christ in resisting greed, showing forgiveness, living called out lives in the midst of an ungodly culture
- Today we start Chapter 3, but it's a short chapter which is why I say we're coming to the end of the first part of this letter
 - Chapter 3 was to be a prayer by Paul on behalf of the church in Ephesus
 - And he does give his prayer
 - But Paul interrupts his prayer to give a parenthetical explanation of an important mystery
 - Remember, I said mysteries are truths God hid from earlier generations but then revealed in the New Testament
 - They are mysteries in the sense that they were previously unknown
 - The mystery Paul discusses is the mystery of the Church, and we'll discuss that mystery in depth as Paul presents it in this chapter
 - But because of the way Paul approaches this chapter, I'd like to do something a little different with our study
 - Despite our name (Verse By Verse Ministry), I am going to jump around a little in Chapter 3
 - First, we're going to study the prayer, since it follows directly from Paul's teaching in Chapters 1-2
 - And then after we've studied the prayer, we'll go back and study the mystery, because the mystery serves as the foundation for Paul's teaching in Chapter 4
- The prayer begins in v.1, so let's start there...

Eph. 3:1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles —

- Before we study Paul's prayer, first take note how his prayer is interrupted at the end of that verse

- In my English translation, the editors placed a em dash at the end of the verse to indicate a break in Paul's thought
- Now scan down the page in your Bible and look for where Paul returns to his original thought
- At the start of v.14 you see Paul picking up again with his prayer using the same introductory phrase
 - The verse begins again with "for this reason"
 - So if we're to study his prayer, we need to jump from v.1 to v.14 as if vs.2-13 didn't exist
 - And that's what we're going to do this morning so we can study Paul's prayer intact
- So I'm going to read the prayer as a one passage

Eph. 3:1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles —

**Eph. 3:14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,
 Eph. 3:15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name,
 Eph. 3:16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,
 Eph. 3:17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
 Eph. 3:18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,
 Eph. 3:19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.**

- Since Paul repeated the phrase "for this reason," let's start by asking the obvious question, "What reason?"
 - The reason is the argument Paul made in Chapters 1 & 2
 - In those chapters, Paul explained how believers have received immeasurable blessings from God
 - From before the foundations of the Earth, we were selected to be God's own possession in Christ
 - From the Godhead, we receive promises of righteousness, peace, spiritual gifts and eternal blessings
 - And for that reason, as a result of all that we've received, Paul prays that the church would come to appreciate all these things
 - Specifically, circle some key thoughts in Paul's prayer
 - In v.16, the phrase strengthened with power
 - In v.17, the phrase rooted and grounded in love
 - In v.18, the word comprehend

- And in v.19 the words to know and to be filled up
 - These words or phrases form the outline of Paul's prayer and will guide our understanding this morning
- Back to the top for a moment, Paul begins by describing himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus
 - The word prisoner sounds negative of course, but in the context of v.1 it conveys a distinctly positive meaning
 - While we may not like the idea of being a prisoner, the truth is that all humanity is a prisoner of someone
 - We learned earlier in Chapter 2 that all humanity is born slaves to the enemy and to sin
 - We are all born into bondage to the enemy because we come into the world sharing the enemy's fallen nature
 - Therefore, we also share his condemnation, and it's impossible to escape that sentence on our own, thus we are a prisoner to our condition
 - But by the grace of God, we may be born again in the nature of Christ, so that by faith in Christ we receive His spirit
 - Our new spirit is incapable of sin, because we are placed in bondage or slavery to Christ
 - As Paul says in Romans

Rom. 6:22 But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.

- Frequently, the epistle writers refer to themselves as bondslaves to Christ
- So if you're going to be a slave, far better to serve the Living God Who loves us and grants us eternal life than to serve His enemy
- Paul then adds that his service to Christ was dedicated to the needs of the Gentiles
 - Paul, an eminent Jew, was commanded by the Lord to begin the recruitment of a Gentile church
 - Paul says in 1 Timothy he was commanded by God to serve
 - Do you remember Paul's experience on the road to Damascus, as the Lord literally arrested him and enlisted him?
 - Paul is simply emphasizing his life is dedicated to the needs of his readers, therefore his prayer is sincere and heartfelt
- And then we move to v.14 where Paul begins to pray to the Father
 - Notice that Paul directs his prayer to the Father specifically
 - We always pray to our Heavenly Father
 - We know the Son is interceding for us in our prayers at the right hand of the Father
 - But the destination for prayer is always the Father

- As Jesus Himself taught us when He told us to pray “Our Father in Heaven...”
 - Secondly, notice Paul says his prayer is offered as he bows his knees
 - It’s curious that Paul thinks to mentions his prayer posture
 - Paul must have included the detail of bowing to his knees to communicate something to us about prayer
 - And what it communicates is that Paul approaches the Creator with reverence and submission to His sovereign power
 - Notice in v.15 that Paul acknowledges the Father’s authority to determine everyone’s place in Heaven and on earth
 - It’s like the history of Creation is a giant chess board, and the Father has arranged every piece just as He pleases
- So Paul bows to his knees as he begins to offer a prayer on behalf of the saints in Ephesus
 - Your posture is more than a matter of convenience or preference
 - It’s not simply ritual
 - Your physical posture is as important as your heart attitude when you approach the Lord in prayer
 - Because one reflects the other
 - Our posture reflects how seriously we take the opportunity to speak to the Father
 - In scripture when we read of men praying – whether prophet or king, shepherd or farmer – you often see them bowing, face down, prostrate
 - They were driven to the ground in recognition of their own unworthiness
 - They were acknowledging the Father’s supreme holiness
 - Their minds and hearts were fully engaged and submitted to God in prayer, and so their posture followed suit
- So here’s Paul, fully engaged in heartfelt prayer, compelled to drop to his knees by his appreciation for all the Father is and all He has done
 - And this brings us to the first of our key thoughts in v.16
 - Paul prays the Father would grant His church in Ephesus to be strengthened spiritually by God’s power
 - Spiritual strength in the inner man is spiritual fortitude, spiritual maturity
 - He’s describing a Christian gaining power over his or her flesh, becoming less susceptible to the enemy’s schemes
 - It’s power from the Spirit of God to lead us into a closer walk, one dependent on the Spirit of God and less dependent on our own desires
 - For Ephesus, spiritual strength was the first order of business, since this community was prone to leaving their first love
 - They were surrounded by a rich ungodly culture so their flesh was a strong adversary
 - They needed strengthening from the power of the Holy Spirit

- If a Christian is not interested in seeking spiritual strength at the expense of the flesh, then not much more is possible for them
 - Trying to teach, guide or encourage a believer who isn't seeking spiritual strength is like trying to train a runner who won't tie his shoes
 - God is the One Who grants spiritual strength, but He grants it to those Who seek for it
 - And we should be making appeals to the Lord for increasing spiritual strength to prepare us for the rest of our journey with Him
- That brings us to the second mile marker in Paul's prayer in v.17: being rooted and grounded in love
 - The verse begins with the phrase "so that" indicating that should the Father grant Paul's request in v.16, then it may lead to the next step
 - The next step is that Christ would then dwell in their hearts
 - Paul was writing to believers, so these Christians already had the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them by faith
 - Therefore we know Paul was speaking of something else
 - You could translate v.17 to read "that Christ be at home in your hearts"
 - By gaining spiritual strength in our inner man, we become a place where Christ may feel at home
 - Christ indwells every believer by His Spirit but He dwells in us when our thoughts and behaviors mirror His
 - It's the difference between Christ being in the backseat of your car or behind the wheel
- Paul prayed that the thoughts of Christ would become the thoughts of the church, and as a result the church would be rooted and grounded in love
 - To be rooted in something means to find our supply in that thing
 - The roots supply the rest of the plant with everything
 - If you place a color dye in a houseplant's water, you can change the color of the entire plant
 - So what are you rooted in? Where do you go for your supply?
 - When a Christian is rooted in love, we're saying the person has tapped into the mind of Christ
 - By study of His word, by a growing spiritual strength made possible by appeals to the riches of God's mercy, by crucifying our flesh, we sink roots in Christ
 - Then as we face life's decisions, we draw from Christ's love
 - So we say the loving words, we think the loving thoughts, we do the loving things instead of what our flesh desires
 - And to be grounded refers to the foundation of a building
 - A building is grounded in the sense that it rests on something unmovable, something steady

- So Paul prays the church in Ephesus would be grounded in love
 - That they would not be distracted, tempted, or otherwise drawn away from Christ and from His love
- The chain of Paul's prayer is starting to make sense...can you see it?
 - He prayed for spiritual strength by the power of the Spirit, because the church relied too much on personal strength
 - Strength of finance, position, reputation, power, influence, etc.
 - And therefore, they were prone to leave their first love, to overlook the spiritual blessings they have in Christ
 - To overlook how blessed they are already
 - And by that spiritual strength they begin to make their home a place Christ may dwell
 - They will tap into the love of Christ
 - They will be grounded on Christ's love
 - And then as a church, they become resistant to chasing after the world's pleasures and rewards over those found in Christ's love
- And from this place of strength and steadiness, rooted in God's love, real spiritual understanding becomes possible
 - In particular, Paul prayed that from a position of spiritual maturity, believers in Ephesus might comprehend of the love of Christ
 - The term comprehend also means to lay hold of or to seize something
 - So Paul desires the church would take hold of something they already possess, though they are overlooking because of spiritual immaturity
 - And the thing he wants them to comprehend or seize is God's love, which Paul describes by four terms
 - Breadth, length, height and depth
 - The terms are intentionally vague because Paul is describing the limitless of God's love
 - Yet the four terms each have unique meaning in describing our experiencing God's love
- First, the breadth of God's love describes its all-encompassing nature
 - God's love is not reserved for just some kinds of people, like Jews or the pious
 - God's love, His mercy, His forgiveness, His riches are available to Jew and Gentile, kings and paupers, priests and pagans
 - God's love is broad enough for everyone
 - If the church in Ephesus could take hold of the breadth of God's love in Christ, they would see the world differently
 - And they would cease worrying about individual status or personal standing apart from their standing in Christ
 - Jewish believers would embrace Gentile believers and vice versa
 - The church would have united as a single family, and from their unity they

could show the love of Christ to the entire city

- Secondly, the length of God's love refers to His limitless reach
 - Is someone too far for God to reach? Is someone too evil, too hardened, too unworthy?
 - No, because the length of God's love reaches as far as the ends of the earth and into the hardest of hearts
 - Remember the people of Nineveh
 - Remember Saul on the road to Damascus
 - Paul himself says in 1 Timothy that he was called as an apostle specifically to demonstrate the length God was willing to go to extend forgiveness
 - If God could reach them, He could reach anyone
 - And for the Christian, the love of God can reach us no matter how far we stray
 - No matter how completely our sin may consume us
 - Or how discouraged we may become in our walk
 - God's love reaches further, His forgiveness never runs out
 - His grace is sufficient
 - If the church in Ephesus could comprehend the length of God's love, they would have seen the unsaved in Ephesus with more compassion
 - They might have taken their commission as ambassadors for Christ more seriously
 - They would come to recognize there are only two kinds of people in the world: those who belong to Christ and those who don't (yet)
 - And even after they forgot their first love and drifted away, they might have been drawn back by God's love
- Thirdly, the height of God's love refers to its inexhaustible and triumphant supply
 - God's love just keeps piling up, and it's always sufficient to address our deepest emotional needs, satisfying us in ways the world can't
 - In its immaturity, the church in Ephesus had turned to looking for love in all the wrong places
 - They valued good teaching but they also seemed to value the world's attention, rewards and pleasures
 - But the things the world offers just don't satisfy in the end, and they certainly can't meet our longing for contentment
 - If you've ever squandered a season of your life chasing after the world's rewards, then you already know how unsatisfying the pursuit can be
 - The thrill of the shiny toy, the challenge of the new job, the excitement of the new relationship...none of them satisfy
 - Once we get past the obsession and realize it was a waste of time, we look back on that pursuit and wonder why we were so foolish
 - But unless we ground ourselves in the love of Christ, we're likely to repeat that mistake over again

- But after you've tapped into the love of Christ so that you are walking in spiritual strength, having become an imitator of Christ, then your life begins to change
 - You come to know the height of God's love
 - You can't exhaust God's love
 - You experience a joy in serving Him that surpasses anything you could find in the world
 - You find the reward of contentment
- Certainly, life won't become perfect, and we still experience disappointments and tragedies
 - But the height of God's love leaves us satisfied in Christ all the more when the world lets us down
 - When you have anchored your satisfaction in life in the love of Christ for you and His riches reserved in eternity, then you aren't rocked by life's disappointments
 - You see those afflictions as momentary and light, because the love of God given to you in Christ towers above them all
- Finally, Paul prays we would know the depth of God's love, which refers to His unlimited mercy and supply
 - God's power to bring us joy far surpasses the degree of sorrow the world can inflict
 - Believers walking in spiritual strength rooted in God's love still face difficulties in life
 - But by God's love we can face them with a resilience the world can't understand
 - We still have feelings...we still feel pain, or anger or resentment, at least for a moment
 - But the depths of Christ's love brings a new, mature perspective to those circumstances
 - The church in Ephesus dearly needed to appreciate the depths of God's love, because the things they were chasing were going to lead to ruin
 - Historically, we know this city entered into a decades-long economic decline
 - The port harbor they depended upon for trade began to silt up and as it did, commercial trade disappeared
 - This city of wealth became a city of ruin, but what of the Christians in the city who chased for the wealth the city offered?
 - Where would they be once the city crumbled?
 - If they could set a foundation of Christ's love, then nothing could shake them
 - Their joy wouldn't depend on economic trends or commercial success
 - They might know the fullness of God
- Notice Paul ends v.19 praying for that outcome
 - He prays the church could be filled with the fullness of God

- He asks that the church might find its complete satisfaction in the full mercy, grace and peace that comes from an abiding walk with the Lord
- Does the thought of such contentment seem out of reach to you?
- Does it sound like religious speak? Like fairytale?
- Perhaps you're listening to the Bible's teaching this morning, yet you're doubting that such a life of contentment is possible for you
 - If so, then you haven't been listening
 - You're thinking that God's love has limits
 - You've forgotten that it has no limit in breadth, length, height and depth
 - You're assuming that you have to work hard to obtain what God freely gives to those who rest in Him
- And Paul seemed to know you and I might have such doubts, because he ends his letter with a strong encouragement for us to pray this same prayer ourselves

Eph. 3:20 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,

Eph. 3:21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

- The Lord is able to do things you can't even imagine
 - And even more impressively, God is ready to do things you have already assumed He isn't willing to do
 - You want to step away from an addiction, but you assume God isn't willing to help
 - You're feeling led to change your job or your career plans, but you fear God won't be there to provide
 - You're burdened with guilt for some terrible mistake or you're afraid to reach out to someone in need
 - Whatever it is you can't see past, you've been assuming the love of God didn't reach that far
- But the word of God says the Lord can do far more in us and for us and through us than we could ever know
 - And if you pray to be strengthened in the Spirit
 - And as you direct your life according to Christ's desires, the love of God will manifest itself in your life in ways big and small
 - You will come to see the riches of God's love for you in Christ
- I'm not saying everything in your life will become perfect
 - But in time, you will because of the power of God working in you
 - And you will know contentment and peace
 - To Him be the glory in this church, and in Christ Jesus to all our generations forever and ever, Amen.

- Last week we dissected Chapter 3 of Ephesians
 - We noted how the chapter was a prayer interrupted by a mystery
 - In the prayer, Paul asked the Lord to grant the church spiritual power
 - So they might comprehend the love of Christ
 - That they might be rooted and grounded in that love
 - So they may be content and filled with the fullness of God
 - But almost from the start, Paul suspended his prayer to explain an important mystery of the church
 - The mystery and the prayer were connected as we'll see today
 - Essentially, Paul was praying for unity in the body, a bond of love between Jew and Gentile
 - And the mystery he explained relates to that union
- Let's start back again at the beginning of the chapter in v.1

Eph. 3:1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles —

Eph. 3:2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you;

Eph. 3:3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.

Eph. 3:4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,

Eph. 3:5 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;

- As we did last week, we'll start with the "reason" Paul was speaking of in v.1
 - In Chapters 1 & 2 Paul carefully explained all the blessings that every believer possesses even now while we await the Kingdom
 - We possess them by faith in Jesus Christ
 - This was a plan before the foundations of the earth
 - So even though we don't see all of them yet, they are no less ours and we will have them one day soon
 - And therefore, Paul argued every believer should be living in light of that truth
 - We shouldn't complain about what we lack or waste time chasing after poor substitutes on earth
 - Neither should we perpetuate divisions that marked our unbelieving life
 - By faith we've been united in a new family with a new future, so let's live in light of that reality now

- This concept of unity is very important, and though the things that divide us may have changed since Paul's day, the need for unity hasn't
 - In Paul's day, the most common wedge between believers was Jew vs. Gentile
 - That division was the result of the Law of God which required Israel to stand apart from other nations
 - And the Law was so effective in that regard that even after the Law was fulfilled by Christ, that division persisted inside the church
- So Paul wanted to address the problem of division in the church, which he does in four parts
 - The first part we studied earlier in Chapter 2, while the second and third parts we're studying now are in Chapter 3, and the final part comes in Chapter 4
 - In Chapter 2, Paul acknowledged that the Gentiles were once far off
 - Yes, God did intend division between Jew and Gentile for a time
 - But that time has passed
 - Today in Christ God has brought the two together into one body, Paul explained
 - The second part is found here in Chapter 3, as Paul prayed for the church to comprehend the all-encompassing power of God's love
 - In particular, the Jews in the church had to understand that God's love was capable of embracing the Gentiles...
 - ...a group of people the Jews had written off as "unlovable"
 - Similarly, the Gentiles who now enjoy the love of God couldn't turn their backs on disobedient Israel
 - The Lord hadn't forsaken His people, so Gentiles must not become arrogant against the nation of Israel
 - The fourth part of Paul's antidote to division is found in the next chapter
 - In Chapter 4 we'll study the life of a unified body
 - And so today, we're studying the third part of Paul's argument...explaining the mystery of a united church
- At the end of v.1 Paul says he was a prisoner of Christ for the sake of the Gentiles
 - And from that point, he takes his detour to explain why he was given responsibility to preach to Gentiles
 - And in typical form, Paul's detour is one long sentence running to v.13
 - And like Paul's earlier lengthy sentence from Chapter 1, we need to take this thought apart to follow it carefully
 - The detour begins in v.2 with Paul asking rhetorically if his audience had heard how Paul came to be a steward of God's plan of grace
 - Paul's referring back to his conversion account while on the road to Damascus to arrest Christians
 - Paul's story is told a total of three times in the book of Acts, including the first

account in Acts 9

Acts 9:3 As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him;

Acts 9:4 and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

Acts 9:5 And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,

Acts 9:6 but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.”

Acts 9:7 The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.

Acts 9:8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus.

Acts 9:9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Acts 9:10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.”

Acts 9:11 And the Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying,

Acts 9:12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight.”

Acts 9:13 But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem;

Acts 9:14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.”

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

Acts 9:16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

- I know this account is familiar to most of us, but take note of the key details once again
 - Paul was an enemy of the church, but he didn’t view himself at odds with God
 - On the contrary, Paul viewed himself to be aligned with God against a people intent on perverting Judaism
 - Paul saw himself doing the work of God by putting to death those who declared Jesus as the Messiah
 - A zealous, upright Jew like Saul couldn’t imagine that the true Jewish Messiah could be killed by Gentile Romans
 - Therefore he persecuted the Christians in full conviction that he was on God’s side
 - But when Jesus appeared to Saul, he came to understand that everything he thought he knew was wrong

- Ironically, the Lord used blindness to grant Paul this new insight
- And most shocking of all for Paul, the Lord assigned him the mission of reaching Gentiles as well as the sons of Israel
- It's this mission Paul is talking about when he says in v.2 he was given the stewardship of God's grace
 - The Greek word for stewardship means to manage on behalf of another
 - Paul was assigned responsibility to manage the delivery of God's grace to the Gentile people on Christ's behalf
 - What an awesome responsibility
- Paul says he received this mission because the Lord desired that Gentiles receive mercy too
 - And as reasonable and inevitable as this plan sounds to us today, it was not always seen in that way
 - In fact, I think it required that a prominent Jew reach out to Gentiles as Paul did before many in the early church could accept this possibility
 - It's probably why the story of Paul's conversion was repeated so often in scripture
 - It's God's way of demonstrating His determination to bring the Gospel to all people
- In v.3 Paul describes this reality as a mystery, one made known to him by revelation
 - Paul defines what a mystery is in v.5
 - It's a truth not made known to the sons of men
 - But it has now been revealed through the apostles and prophets
 - This is the definition of a Biblical mystery
 - God held back important information about His plans from mankind (sons of men)
 - He was waiting for His Son's appearing
 - After His Son was revealed, then the Father revealed hidden truths through the apostles
 - And they came to know these things only because the Spirit of God revealed it to them so they could share it
- There are 8 mysteries revealed in the New Testament writings of the apostles
 - Five of those mysteries related to the Church, of which Paul reveals four of them
 - Two of those Church mysteries are revealed in this letter
 - And the first of those mysteries is the one Paul is discussing here
 - Which is the mystery that God intended to unite Jew and Gentile in the church
 - It didn't have to be this way...God had other options
 - He could have chosen to make the Church only Jewish

- He could have saved Gentiles in the New Testament days in the same way He did before Jesus came
 - He could have left Gentiles outside the assembly, watching the Jews enjoying the fellowship of the saints
 - Much like God-fearing Gentiles were kept outside the wall of the temple
 - Had God decided to operate this way, He would have been no less faithful to His promises
 - He would still have been blessing all nations through Abraham's Seed
 - After all, no one even knew that the possibility existed for God to do otherwise
 - But God preferred to bring Jew and Gentile together into one body in the Church, and so He did
 - Why? Paul is working toward that answer
- Knowing that God desired to unite these two groups was critical for building unity in the church
 - Both Jew and Gentile entered the church with prejudices concerning the other
 - Those prejudices were the result of sinful flesh reacting absent spiritual understanding
 - If they didn't know God's heart and His purposes, they would operate in spiritual ignorance
 - And spiritual ignorance gives opportunity for the flesh to take charge
 - Notice Paul emphasizes that he had already explained this to them briefly earlier
 - Paul could be referring to his earlier comments in this letter about the mystery of the church
 - Though it's also possible Paul is referring to an earlier letter
 - In either case, Paul says he only briefly mentioned the mystery in passing previously
 - Therefore, now he explains it in detail so they may understand this mystery of Christ
 - Obviously, it was important for the church to know and appreciate this truth
 - Because understanding this mystery and obeying it requires both groups change their thinking and behavior
 - Paul will explain this later in Chapter 4
- And now Paul begins his explanation of this mystery...

Eph. 3:6 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,

Eph. 3:7 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.

Eph. 3:8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,

Eph. 3:9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;

- Specifically, the Lord revealed to Paul that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body of God's people
 - Jews had long held this position of privilege and had been promised many good things by God
 - They had promise of a Deliverer to lead them out of sin and into everlasting righteousness
 - They had promise of an inheritance in a Kingdom where they enjoy peace and security
 - They had promise of an abiding relationship with their God
 - The Jews received these promises by God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
 - The Jewish people did nothing to deserve nor earn these things
 - In fact, they weren't even a people until God Himself made them out of Abraham's barren wife
 - And because the Jewish people were descended from Abraham, they were heirs to these promises
 - An heir is typically a family member, and so they receive an inheritance because they have a relationship with the one who died
 - When the Son of God died, He delivered an inheritance to God's people
 - This inheritance was promised to those Jews who were in the family of God by faith
- Now Paul reveals to the world that God desired for Gentiles to be fellow heirs of these promises with the Jewish people
 - God intended the Gentiles to be fellow partakers in the promises given to Israel
 - How did these strangers become fellow heirs?
 - How did they obtain that opportunity?
 - Paul says at the end of v.6 that they obtained it through the Gospel
 - The Gospel is the call to repent and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior
 - It's the call to be born again, to receive a new spirit
 - It's a message that resurrects dead souls and bodies
 - Salvation has always been by faith in the promises of God
 - And the promise of a Messiah has always been the salvation message for both Jew and Gentile
 - The difference now is that God was prepared to bring repentance to Gentile as

well as Jew

- As the apostles themselves discovered early in the life of the Church

Acts 13:44 The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord.

Acts 13:45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.

Acts 13:46 Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

Acts 13:47 “For so the Lord has commanded us,
 ‘I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles,
 That You may bring salvation to the end of the earth.’”

Acts 13:48 When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

- Paul and Barnabas were preaching the Gospel to Jews who were hardened and did not receive it
 - So the apostles declared they were turning to preach to Gentiles instead
 - And when Gentiles heard this, they rejoiced in the same message, leading to their salvation
 - The message for both is the same
 - But the difference is that God was now prepared to appoint salvation to the ends of the earth
- Furthermore, Paul says in v.7 that he was God’s chosen minister of this Gospel by the power of God
 - The Greek word for minister means deacon, which is an office of service to God
 - Paul served God in bringing this message to the world
 - Paul didn’t invent this idea
 - He worked this plan because he was entrusted with the plan by God
 - Furthermore, Paul served in the power God gave Paul to validate his calling
 - Paul, like all apostles, possessed supernatural gifts intended to demonstrate the working of the Spirit in these men
 - Paul united service with God’s power and that’s a powerful combination
 - We know we can’t accomplish anything in our own power
 - But neither can we accomplish anything if we make no effort to serve God
 - Paul says in vs.8-9 he was the very least of the saints, and certainly many in the early church would have agreed with Paul’s assessment
 - He’s referring to his past of persecuting Christians

- If opportunities to serve God were based on merit, Paul would have been the last person qualified to serve God
 - But then so would we
 - We all serve in our own way according to the same terms
 - We serve God because he entrusts some work of service to Him
 - We serve despite our disqualification
 - And we serve in His power so that everything we accomplish is credit to Him
- And this is why Paul's personal history was so important to His work in the church, and particularly to this mystery
 - Paul was the last person you would expect to encourage inviting Gentiles to come to God
 - Paul's unlikely conversion story disarmed his critics, because they couldn't claim Paul had been a lifelong Gentile sympathizer
 - Everyone knew Paul hated Gentiles, or so he used to
 - Therefore, his sudden affection for Gentiles could only be explained supernaturally
 - So Paul says in v.9 that he brought to light the plan of this mystery which had been hidden for past ages
 - For centuries and millennia the Lord held back this truth
 - Generations of Gentiles came and went without opportunity to know God
 - Then the Lord appeared and then the mystery was revealed
- Why did God chose to reveal this truth in this way? And why wait until Jesus' appearing before uniting the two peoples?
 - Paul gives the answer in v.10

Eph. 3:10 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.

Eph. 3:11 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,

Eph. 3:12 in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

- Paul says this mystery was hidden for ages to be revealed by the apostles so that God's manifold wisdom would be made known
 - The word manifold means diverse, multifaceted, made up of many kinds
 - Paul's talking about the intricacies of God's work
 - The incredible details and unexpected twists and turns of how God shuts up all people in disobedience yet brings salvation to many
 - The unfathomable depths of his wisdom that brings all events in human history

together culminating in the work of His church

- For truly the Church is the pinnacle of that work
 - The Church is where every detail of the Old and New Testaments come together
 - The Church is where the Spirit of God dwells, where the Law of God is written, where perfect obedience will occur
 - And it's the place where the Son of God is preached in His full revelation in fulfillment of past prophecies
- That's why this mystery waited for so long to be revealed
 - The Lord was waiting for the appearing of His Son before He revealed the plans for His church
 - In prior generations, the Lord alluded to this day
 - Speaking through prophets, the Lord said He would make His people jealous by a people who were not God's people
 - And He used pictures like Boaz and Ruth to leave clues to the coming union of Christ and Gentiles
 - But no one could understand those things until the mystery was fully revealed in the New Testament, as God intended
 - The Church would be God's grand display, the pièce de résistance
 - And so it waited for His Son's arrival before it could be known and appreciated
 - Paul says in v.11 that all these things were in accordance with the eternal purpose He carried out in Jesus Christ
 - From the beginning of Creation, the plan of God centered on Jesus dying to redeem humanity from sin
 - That plan existed before sin existed
 - And therefore, the plan of a Church uniting Jew and Gentile existed before either Jew or Gentile existed
 - That's why both Jew and Gentile can have boldness and confident access to the Father through Jesus Christ
 - Because after all, if God planned all this for our sake from so long ago, why be timid? Why doubt?
 - Instead, we should celebrate our place in the family of God
 - We should live as children of the King, secure in our place in His family, determined to serve Him and enjoying access to His wisdom and power
 - And we should unite with others who share those same privileges
- But Paul says God was working this plan for another audience beyond you and me
 - Did you notice at the end of v.10 that Paul made mention of another group of observers?
 - He says that God wanted to make known his multifaceted wisdom to rulers and authorities in the heavenly places

- Who are these rulers in heavenly places?
- At first, we might think angels
 - But this doesn't make a lot of sense
 - Because angels need not be taught of God's wisdom or even his plan
 - They are spirits created to minister to the needs of the saints, including the Gentiles
 - Certainly God's wisdom is self-evident to the angels
- So what other heavenly rulers need to be taught the wisdom of God?
 - Consider another verse from this same letter

Eph. 6:12 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.

- In this verse Paul is clearly speaking about unholy forces
- He calls them wicked and darkness
- Yet notice he also refers to them as rulers, as authorities in heavenly places
 - All three of these words are the same ones Paul uses in here in v.10
 - These are the demonic forces that inhabit the spiritual world and war against God and God's people
- Remember, the enemy fell into sin because in his beauty and pride he thought himself a rival for God's throne
 - Somehow he imagined he could compete with God and even exceed Him in power and wisdom
 - In Revelation 12, we learn that Satan recruited a third of the angelic realm to follow him into rebellion against God
- These are the rulers, the authorities in heavenly places
 - They are not ultimate rulers, they do not have ultimate authority
 - But they possess authority for a time
 - And they are an audience for this amazing work of God
- Here's the message I think God wanted to send to those rebellious angels through His mystery of the church
 - That God's wisdom and power is far beyond anything they could comprehend
 - That God could work for so long, through so many people and nations to accomplish His plan
 - That every detail would come together in the end
 - That promises made so long ago would still come to pass in time

- That people seemingly beyond reach were yet found
- And that nothing the enemy might try would change even one detail
 - That even when he thought he was destroying the seed promise with Abel, with Isaac, with Judah, with David, with the Christ child
 - Still, the promise kept moving
 - And even when the Enemy was killing Jesus, he was actually hammering the nails into his own coffin
- The mystery of the church is God's triumphant statement to spiritual darkness: Game Over!
 - You lost, and your proof is that the Gospel is reaching to the ends of the earth
 - Not only are Jews being saved, but so are Gentiles
 - And not only did Christ live again, but so will all these
- But fallen angels have only one future
 - As the writer of Hebrews says

Heb. 2:16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.

- They are destined for destruction for there is no promise of salvation for them
- They know this, and the existence of the Church simply stands as testimony that God could have saved them...but chose not to
- So these fallen angels see the Church as proof they have been passed over in God's mercy, and so they hate God all the more
 - Which is why Paul ends this passage in v.13

Eph. 3:13 Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.

- The demons take out their hatred for God on God's people, including Paul
- And so Paul says his tribulations are simply proof of the glory God has brought to Gentiles like you and me

Rom. 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

- We've officially moved beyond the first half of this letter, where Paul provides a foundation of Christian theology, so now we can breathe easier
 - Now we turn the page – literally – to the second half of Paul's letter and a new emphasis on our corporate life in the body
 - And you'll remember I introduced our study by dividing Paul's letter into halves
 - The first half, Chapters 1-3, focused on doctrine
 - Doctrine are the truths of our faith
 - They explain who God is and how we know and please Him
 - And they explain who we are and why we need Him
 - And I said we learn doctrine first because it's intended to guide our living
 - The ministry of the word of God for God's people isn't merely listening to teaching
 - Ultimately the ministry of the word is putting into action what we learn
- I think it's ironic that misinformed or immature Christians will sometimes say that they don't find Bible teaching relevant
 - They prefer preaching that's "practical" they say
 - This is like a medical student saying "I don't want to sit for lectures on human anatomy or infectious diseases..."
 - ...I need something more relevant and practical"
 - If a doctor doesn't understand the basic science of their profession, they'll never move on to the practical courses
 - Likewise, if a Christian doesn't understand Biblical doctrine, then he or she stands little chance of adopting the lifestyle of a disciple
 - And even if a pastor taught "practical" advice from the pulpit, I can't replace doctrine
 - Because if I call you to think or do certain things or refrain from doing other things, will you understand why?
 - And the more important question is, will you obey?
 - When a preacher calls his congregation to action based on his own ideas or wisdom, the congregation will ask itself does my pastor's advice seem sensible?
 - But when the preacher presents doctrinal truths from the word of God calling his congregation to act accordingly, the question becomes will we obey God?
 - Proper Christian practice comes only from an understanding of Christian theology
 - That's why Paul himself spent three chapters wading through important doctrine before he gives specific direction to the church
- Therefore, as we move into the "practical" portion of Paul's teaching, I'll refer back to the theology of this letter from time to time
 - So now in Chapter 4, Paul's transition into practical application begins with a

sweeping call to live a Christ-like life worthy of the magnificent grace we've received

Eph. 4:1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

Eph. 4:2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,

Eph. 4:3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

- Paul signals that he's moving into application with the transition word, "therefore"
 - Obviously, Paul's referring back to the previous three chapters
 - And so we could summarize Paul's teaching by saying...
 - "Because God chose you to be an adopted child to receive mercy by faith, and because you have His Spirit and an inheritance and a glorious future..."
 - For all those reasons...
 - Paul urges to walk in a manner worthy of this calling
 - He uses the euphemism "walk" to describe our testimony of life in Christ
 - In fact, the word "walk" is our mile marker for the second half of this letter
 - Paul uses the term 6 times at key places to emphasize obedience
- We're so familiar with this euphemism and so unaccustomed to walking anywhere, that we don't stop to consider the picture it creates
- When I travel to teach, I am usually working with a local team of supporters
 - I enjoy meeting new cultures and experiencing different lifestyles
 - And in many places, the culture is accustomed to walking far more than we do in America
- I remember on several occasions my hosts and I were preparing to leave for my teaching, and I walked outside to get into the car
 - But I looked up and I'm the only one standing by the car
 - Everyone else has started walking down the road
 - The church was about half a mile away, so naturally I'm thinking we're driving there
 - While they were thinking it's *only* half a mile away, so naturally we're walking
- This happened to me once in Norway, when the temperatures were in the 20s and it was snowing lightly
 - As they began to walk, I politely suggested that we should drive since the weather was a bad
 - They replied, there is no such thing as bad weather...there is only inadequate clothing
- My point is that in modern cultures (except Norway) we're in danger of losing an appreciation for this euphemism "to walk with Christ"

- Even recreational walks around the neighborhood can't give us a proper appreciation for Paul's analogy
 - Walking in Paul's day involved a journey
 - You had a starting place you wanted to leave
 - And you had a destination you wanted to reach
- Furthermore, a walking journey required three things
 - First, you had to have the energy
 - In Paul's day, a person might walk 20-30 miles a day for days on end to get somewhere
 - To travel between Jerusalem and the Galilee was about a three days walk of about 25 miles each day
 - Each step in the journey required a small amount of energy, but collectively the energy was significant
- So secondly, walking required persistence
 - There would be times when it was downhill or the scenery was uplifting or the conversation made time go faster
 - But there were times when you walked uphill or in the rain or into the wind
 - You might face threats or periods of boring silence with nothing but the sound of your feet hitting the dirt in rhythm
 - No matter what you found on a given day, you knew you couldn't reach the destination unless you kept going
- Finally, your journey on foot required a sense of direction
 - It's very easy to get lost walking in open territory
 - Unless you have a path to follow or a guide to lead you, you're likely to walk in circles
 - Ask anyone who's been lost in the woods
- Each of these details relates to the euphemism Paul will use in the second half of this letter
 - He is asking us to set our minds on a journey living as disciples of Christ
 - Our faith has placed us on this journey, this walk
 - Our starting point is the place God found us, whether as a child or teen or adult
 - It's a place we want to leave, a place of sin, ungodliness, brokenness and hopelessness
 - And by faith in Jesus Christ, we've been adopted into a new family, a family with a glorious future and eternal blessings
 - This family is like the Norwegians I mentioned earlier
 - The family of God has set its mind on following Christ and so it heads out to the road for a walk of faith

- You can't take a shortcut...there's no car or train
 - You just start by placing one foot in front of another, dedicating energy, committing to persistence and under direction
 - The energy for our spiritual walk comes from the Spirit of God, Who pulls us away from worldly distractions and lust
 - So He can put those resources to use in obedience to Christ
 - And He encourages perseverance for the journey
 - Sometimes the journey is easy because He puts the wind to our backs and brings friends alongside us to pass the time
 - Other times he strengthens us by giving us hills to climb
 - And all the while He's speaking to our hearts, encouraging us, challenging us, reminding us that the destination is closer every day
 - Finally, He guides us in our journey by His word
 - Pointing the way to righteousness
 - And even calling us back to the path when we wander off
 - That's what Paul's talking about when he calls us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling
- In a general sense, he's asking us to set our minds on leaving the world and seeking the destination of obeying Christ
 - He's urging us to bring our resources of time, talent and treasure to bear in serving God in whatever way we're called
 - He's asking us to show perseverance
 - And Paul's asking us to walk in the counsel of God's Spirit so we may stay on track
- I hope that makes it easier for you to appreciate His euphemism, but we know it's a lot easier to talk about these things than it is to live by them
 - Most of us begin the journey with enthusiasm
 - We're eager to please Christ, because we imagine a glorious trip filled with excitement and reward
 - Like the day a family starts a long road trip...
 - But then things don't go as planned...
 - We get a flat, we face detours, the trip takes longer than we expected, fights break out in the backseat...the poodle gets motion sick
 - And pretty soon we're all asking "Are we there yet?"
- The problem isn't the journey...it's our perspective
 - We need to start our journey with the proper point of view
 - Our walk with Christ isn't a day trip, it's not even a two-week vacation road trip
 - It's a lifelong journey

- And the roads won't always be paved and smooth
- The roads will have potholes and there will be detours to avoid
- So Paul says in v.2 that if you're going to walk – that is live – in a worthy manner, you must start the journey with the right attitude
- Paul describes that attitude in terms of three virtues
 - First, we need an attitude of humility
 - In Greek, humility literally means having a lowliness of mind
 - Paul says something similar in Romans 12 when he cautions the church not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought
 - The idea is to have a realistic appreciation for the difficulty of the journey because of the strength of your opposition and your own weakness
 - We must have a sober appreciation for the difficulties that lie ahead
- Secondly, Paul counsels us to maintain an attitude of gentleness
 - Gentleness means having grace for other believers who will face the same difficulties with you
 - It's the natural compliment to humility
 - Humility is recognizing you're not going to just glide through your spiritual journey without missteps
 - And gentleness means being understanding when others stumble from time to time in their walk
- We appreciate others' challenges even as we acknowledge we face our own
 - That's why Paul says we must show tolerance for others in the body of Christ in love
 - We know people aren't perfect
 - So when they show their imperfections, let's react in agape love, thinking of their needs above our own
 - We don't judge or condemn, we show tolerance
- And while we're on the topic of tolerance, let me address the common misuse of the word in our culture today
- Many people in the world call for tolerance
 - Most of the time the world uses that word very differently than the Bible does
 - The Bible is asking us to show understanding for others in the body of Christ when we sin, when we make mistakes
 - We tolerate a mistake in the sense that we show patience and give opportunity for the person to learn and do better in the future
- But the world calls for tolerance in the sense that we *accept* their sin
 - They call for the world to be tolerant by accepting various sexual sin as normal and legitimate
 - And they call for Christians to be tolerant toward other religious viewpoints by

- agreeing they are equally valid to our own
- In other words, tolerance means accepting any viewpoint or preference while silencing any opposing view
- Ironically, the modern view of tolerance is self-contradictory
 - By the world's standard, any mutually exclusive point of view is inherently intolerant
 - If you hold a view that by its claims eliminates all other views, it must be rejected simply because it holds an absolute view
 - If you believe only one kind of marriage is true marriage, then you are intolerant
 - If you believe that there is only one way to God, then you are intolerant
 - And anything intolerant must be bad, the world declares
- You can see the enemy's fingerprints on this one, can't you?
 - He's working in the minds of the unbelieving with a call to tolerance
 - He's insulated them from the mutually-exclusive claims of Christ by predisposing them against any absolute truth
 - We need to be careful to not bring the enemy's definition of tolerance into our theology
 - We will tolerate mistakes among us as Christ does for us
 - But we not declare evil to be good for that is never the loving thing to do
- Finally, Paul says we need patience
- Patience was an essential requirement for any long journey
 - Impatient people usually don't even start long journeys, much less finish them
 - Our walk with Christ may last 3, 4, 5 decades or even longer
 - We have to bring an attitude of patience to this walk, or we're likely to burn out quickly
- If you've ever watched a Christian begin their walk of faith with a burst of energy and then quickly flame out, you've almost certainly seen someone start with the wrong attitude
 - Excitement and anticipation is good, but it must be accompanied by patience
 - Perhaps no one sat them down and explained from scripture that our walk with Christ isn't a sprint, it's a marathon
 - And so how we start will have a lot to say about how we finish
- We need to start with humility concerning ourselves and gentleness for others walking with us
 - We need to devote energy, but not in bursts...we must measure out the energy to ensure we give attention to our walk in a daily way
 - We need to persevere for the tests we know will come against us
 - And we need to seek the counsel of God in His word throughout the journey so we

don't lose our way

- And for all these things, we need patience in our heart
 - Patience for ourselves and patience for others
 - And with patience and love and tolerance, we'll preserve our unity
 - We'll give grace to others, remembering no one is perfect
- And speaking as a pastor and on behalf of your elders, we especially value and need your patience and tolerance and love
 - We're on the same walk with you
 - Which means we're also walking away from sin and weaknesses of one kind or another
 - And we're moving toward a destination of godliness and sanctification
- We're going to stumble, we're going to have our bad days
 - We don't ask you to excuse our sin, much less approve it
 - But we do ask you to tolerate it with patience for the sake of our unity, even as you pray for us to do better
 - And we'll do the same for all of you
- Which leads us to the next part of Chapter 4

Eph. 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;

Eph. 4:5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

Eph. 4:6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

- Paul supports his call for the church to act in unity by reminding us that we are already united spiritually
 - It's like telling two siblings to treat each other in brotherly love
 - I always wondered what brotherly love was
 - For the longest time I thought brotherly love was intended ironically to mean dislike
 - Because my relationship with my brothers growing up was anything but loving
 - But Paul isn't speaking ironically, of course
 - He's saying the body of Christ is united in important, eternal ways
 - So let's act like it
 - And to illustrate his point, Paul lists seven ways we're already united with one another
 - These seven aspects of unity are all spiritual
 - They are markers that identify us as part of the same family and destined for the

same eternal future

- Therefore, they argue strongly for us to live and think in ways that reflect our unity
- So let's take a brief look at these seven aspects of Christian unity
 - First, there is one body Paul says
 - The word body refers to the universal church
 - Every person on earth who has been born again by the Spirit of God through faith in Jesus Christ is a member of the Church
 - We are one body of people
 - The point is that there are not multiple separate bodies
 - In human terms we may break up the body of Christ in various meaningless ways
 - Different denominations, theological views, affiliations and even just multiple campuses work to divide us in earthly ways (often regrettably)
 - But these things don't change the fact that we are one institution
 - Therefore, no one can come along and claim to have "rediscovered" the true church (like the Mormons)
 - And no one can claim that their unique style of worship or teaching or location or whatever defines the true church
 - The body of Christ transcends such superficial things
 - A true confession in the Name above all Names is the one and only requirement to become a part of that body
 - And no one has a monopoly on the name of Christ or His body
- And secondly, that one body is held together by the indwelling of the one and only Spirit of God

Rom. 8:16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,

- Our membership card for the Church is the Holy Spirit
 - We don't check your ID as you enter this building
 - But Paul says the Lord certainly checks for that ID card before you enter His body spiritually
- In Acts 8 we see a case where a man wanted to enjoy the benefits of membership without possessing the proper ID card

Acts 8:18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,

Acts 8:19 saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I

lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 8:20 But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!

Acts 8:21 “You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

- Simon was an unbeliever seeking to enjoy the power and recognition that came to the apostles by the Spirit of God
- But as Peter observed, his heart was not right with God, which is why he lacked the Spirit
- He had attached himself to the body of Christ, but he was not part of that body because he did not possess the Spirit of God
- Thirdly, Paul says we have one hope in our common calling
 - We have the same hope concerning our future, the hope of resurrection and eternal life
 - Our common eternal hope is perhaps one of the most powerful unifying principals of Christianity
 - No matter how diverse our socio-economic backgrounds
 - No matter how different our dreams for the future
 - No matter how differently our lives turn in this life
 - Nevertheless, we all share exactly the same understanding and expectation for what we will have waiting after our death
 - What other group can you say that about?
 - Knowing we share an eternal future should silence any petty difference that divides us now
 - One day we’ll both be living in eternal bodies in the kingdom serving Christ
 - I expect that some day you and I will run into each other
 - And when we do, we’ll probably laugh at ourselves, at our foolishness and our meaningless disagreements
 - And we’ll marvel together at our shared blessings in Christ
 - You know, we could skip the first part and just jump to that second part now
- Fourth and fifth, we serve one Lord by one faith
 - These points should be self-explanatory
 - There is one Lord, meaning one Savior God
 - As Peter declared

Acts 4:12 “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

- Here again, the world would call us intolerant for our unwillingness to accept there may be other ways to heaven
 - But holding to the truth is not intolerance...it's love
 - Our message is the only one that saves
- Likewise, we have entered into the family of God by one faith, which means one confession
 - The only way to salvation is by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ
 - As Paul said simply

Rom. 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

- Faith in a specific church does not save you
- Faith in a good work does not save you
- And faith in your own goodness or worthiness will not save you
- The word "faith" requires an object, something you place your faith in
 - And if you don't place your faith in the right thing, you will be disappointed
 - But as Peter wrote

1Pet. 2:6 For this is contained in Scripture:

**"Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone,
And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed."**

- Christ is our cornerstone, and so we are united by a shared faith in the one and only Savior
 - No matter what other disagreements or disputes might divide us, we have agreed on our Savior
 - And that common faith unites us just as much as it divides us from the unbelieving world
- Sixth, we have all experienced one baptism
 - Paul is speaking about the spiritual baptism that comes by the Spirit of God
 - The baptism of the spirit comes at the moment of our faith
 - And in fact, it is inseparable from the moment of faith
 - That common experience unites all believers
 - It is our common experience of being born again
 - In a way, it's like all of us had the same spiritual womb
 - We were all birthed in the same process

- Just to clarify, Paul isn't talking about water baptism, because clearly we didn't all experience the same water baptism
 - Some believers are never water baptized whether by disobedience or lack of opportunity
 - For example, the thief on the cross was never baptized in water
 - Yet Christ said he would be in paradise with Jesus
 - Furthermore, different churches practice water baptism in different ways
 - I believe that scripture teaches that there is only one correct way to practice water baptism
 - Nevertheless, I cannot say that my brothers and sisters in Christ who were water baptized in a different way are less a part of the body
 - We all share the same spiritual baptism, and therefore we are no less one simply because we performed different rituals
- Finally, we are all the children of the same God and Father
 - I mentioned that my brothers and I didn't get along very well growing up
 - Now that we're adults, we've mostly put those things behind us
 - Recently, my father has been enduring some difficult health issues
 - He's required care and attention from me and my siblings, which has caused us to come together as a family
 - My father's situation has reminded my brothers and I that we are part of the same family and from the same father
 - And so it should be with us as the family of our God and Father
 - No matter what differences mark our earthly lives
 - No matter how much we disappoint, disregard or annoy one another
 - No matter how often we may fail to show love to one another...
 - Blood is thicker than water, as the saying goes
 - We are all children of the same God and Father Who called us into His family
 - None of us had reason to expect or deserve our adoption
 - We are all in need of God's grace and we're all brothers and sisters
 - So let's act that way as we walk this journey together

- Valentines day is right around the corner (heads up men!)
 - That day reminds us that when we care about someone and we want to show it, we often bring them gifts
 - A gift is a sign of our affection
 - It can't begin to equal our feelings for the person, but a nicely chosen gift can be a wonderful representation of how we feel
 - And almost everyone loves to receive a nice gift...like the teacher in the small town who received gifts from her class on Valentines Day

All the children brought presents for their teacher.

The florist's son handed the teacher a gift. She held up the box and said, "I bet it's some flowers!"

"That's right!" shouted the little boy.

Then the candy store owner's daughter handed the teacher a gift. She held up the box and said, "I bet it's some chocolates!"

"That's right!" shouted the little girl.

The next gift was from the liquor store owner's son. The teacher held up the box and saw that it was leaking. She touched a drop with her finger and tasted it.

"Is it wine?" she asked.

"No," the boy answered. The teacher touched another drop to her tongue.

"Is it champagne?" she asked.

"No," the boy answered.

"What is it?" she said.

"A puppy!"

- Gifts are a good thing, but only if we understand them properly
 - And this is true for both kindergarten teachers and for those of us in the body of Christ
- For we all receive gifts from Christ
- Last week in Ephesians, Paul implored the church to see itself as one body rather than as individuals or even as two groups of Jew and Gentile
 - He reminded the church that they were united by the same Spirit Who brought them into a common baptism of faith
 - They entered that faith by the same calling from the same Father
 - And therefore, they had no spiritual reasons to consider themselves separate
 - As we've discussed before, it's likely the church was dealing with false teachers
 - They were Judiazers, who were trying to drive a wedge between Jew and Gentile in the church
 - While there used to be such a separation, it was removed in the New Covenant
 - Now the Jewish follower and Gentile follower of Christ were on equal footing

- So this morning Paul moves his argument forward one more step, to explaining that everyone in the body was equally empowered by Christ for service

Eph. 4:7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

- As further proof the church body has been united by our common faith, Paul adds that each of us has received a measure of God's grace in the form of a gift
 - The gift Paul's talking about is the spiritual gift that Christ's Spirit assigns to every believer
 - Spiritual gifts are specific assigned abilities to serve in the body of Christ
 - You may remember our study on spiritual gifts a few years ago in our study of 1 Corinthians
 - We learned then that spiritual gifts are assigned to us at the moment of faith by the Spirit according to the will of God
 - He determines what gift we each get
 - And our ability to serve in that gift remains under the control of the Holy Spirit so that as we serve, the Lord gains the glory
 - That's the very purpose of a spiritual gift: to glorify Christ through service to His body
 - Paul raises the topic of spiritual gifts in this chapter as further proof of the spiritual unity of the church body
 - All believers receive a gift from Christ, not just Jews or Gentiles
 - This experience is common to all believers
- But Paul's argument goes deeper than simply common experience
 - Paul's making a reference to marriage
 - When a man and a woman entered into a marriage covenant (called the betrothal), the bride received gifts to seal the covenant
 - Typically she received a ring or other symbol as a gift
 - You may remember how Isaac and Rebecca were betrothed

Gen. 24:22 When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half-shekel and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels in gold,

- The societal rules of engagement and marriage have changed over the years
 - But men still give women an engagement ring today
 - Paul's referring to this practice, because Christ is our Groom and we are His Bride

- So because we have entered in a covenant with Him through our faith, we have received a betrothal gift
- Notice in v.7 the word “gift” is singular, which I believe indicates that we are given a single spiritual gift, not multiple gifts
 - We may use our gift in a variety of ways, but our supernatural gift is singular
 - For example, a person may have a gift of service, but they put that gift to work in teaching or counseling or praying for others
 - Or someone may have a gift of teaching, but they use that gift while serving as a pastor or evangelist
 - In the end, we all have a supernatural gift given to us by Christ to empower us in service
 - Paul says this was God’s grace
 - Every gift is by definition an act of grace
 - When I give you a gift, I’m bestowing something upon you that you didn’t earn and had no right to demand
 - It comes to you only as a matter of grace, undeserved favor
 - Furthermore, it was a measure of his grace
 - The word measure in Greek suggests some gifts represent a greater share of grace because they are more important to the body
 - For example, the gift of apostleship or prophet is a greater measure of God’s grace than lesser gifts
 - So some got “more” grace than others did, but everyone got exactly what the Lord desired for them
- It’s this common experience of receiving spiritual gifts that argues for our equality before God
 - If all believers are gifted by the same Spirit, then it must be that God intended for all members of the body to be equal participants in the life of the body
 - That’s Paul’s argument
 - The Lord has made His desire for unity clear by gifting all believers in the body
 - He expects all to work together arm-in-arm without prejudice or haughtiness
 - And therefore, any teaching to the contrary – any teaching that seeks to erect new barriers between believers – must be rejected
 - Furthermore, if everyone in the body has been given a gift, then it must be that all of us are called to put our gift to work for the sake of unity
 - Have you ever considered that your spiritual gift plays a role in ensuring the proper unity of this body?
 - That if you withhold your spiritual gift from the body of Christ you may be contributing to our instability and even disunity?
 - Paul will elaborate more later in this chapter on how spiritual gifts work to unite the

body

- But first, Paul is going to insert a brief sidebar from the Old Testament
- In his sidebar Paul wants us to understand what the Messiah had to do in order to grants us these gifts
- Gifts that some of us may be taking for granted or leaving dormant
- Paul explains in vs.8-10

Eph. 4:8 Therefore it says,

**“When He ascended on high,
He led captive a host of captives,
And He gave gifts to men.”**

Eph. 4:9 (Now this expression, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?

Eph. 4:10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

- In v.8 Paul quotes Psalm 68:18, though he paraphrases the verse to reveal its prophetic meaning more clearly
 - Back in Psalm 68, v.18 reads like this:

Psa. 68:18 You have ascended on high, You have led captive Your captives;
You have received gifts among men,
Even among the rebellious also, that the Lord God may dwell there.

- In the English translation I use (NASB), the translators phrased line two of the verse to say Christ received gifts from men
 - But Paul rephrases the verse in Ephesians to read that Christ gave gifts to men
- We can see that Paul’s view is correct when we look at the Septuagint, the Jewish translation of their scriptures into Greek

Psa. 67(8):18 You have gone up on high, You have led captivity captive, You have received gifts for man, yea, for they were rebellious, that You might dwell among them.

- From this translation we see Paul’s interpretation is correct
- The psalmist wrote that Christ received gifts *for* men
- Which is to say the Father gave His Son gifts to be given to men
 - These are the spiritual gifts that Paul is talking about, which the Father bestows on His children in faith by means of Christ’s Spirit

- So the Father is the One determining our gifts, and His Son has received all glory and power from the Father, which He gives to men
- The rest of Psalm 68:18 explains the occasion when these gifts will be made available to men
 - The psalmist says the Messiah gives gifts to men when He ascends on high
 - This is a reference to Christ's ascension into the throne room of God following His resurrection
 - The book of Acts records that after Jesus' resurrection from the tomb, He spent 40 days on earth making appearances to His disciples
 - Those appearances proved Jesus' claims to live again
 - Then in Acts 1 we reach the moment when Jesus departed the earth and returned to the right hand of the Father

Acts 1:9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Acts 1:10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them.

Acts 1:11 They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

- We call this moment the ascension because Jesus ascended, He was raised up, into Heaven
 - But Paul seizes on this word in the Psalm to explain its full meaning
 - In v.9 Paul says that Jesus' ascent was from a place in the lower parts of the earth
 - The lower place Paul is talking about is a place that the Old Testament scriptures call Sheol
 - To understand what Paul is saying and how it relates to the giving of gifts, we need to learn about Sheol
- The Bible teaches that no one can approach the holiness of God because of our sin
 - God is holy and perfect and just in all ways
 - So if sin enters into His presence, His perfect nature will lead Him to bring proper judgment against sin
 - Perfect justice requires that sin be judged
 - He cannot do otherwise, because if God were to permit sin to abide in His presence, He would be imperfect and unjust
 - Under the Law of Moses, the Lord gave Israel a sacrificial system to demonstrate these principles
 - God's glory dwelled with Israel in the tabernacle but only behind walls and

curtains out of view

- God's glory occupied the Holy of Holies above the mercy seat
- His glory was hidden away from sinful men behind tents and curtains
- For sinful men can't survive an encounter with the Living God, as God Himself declared to Moses

Ex. 33:19 And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."

Ex. 33:20 But He said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!"

- In the Law, the Lord did make a way for the High Priest to enter the Holy of Holies one time each year to make atonement for the people
 - At the feast of Yom Kippur, the high priest would make sacrifices of animals as atonement for his own sin
 - And then he would fill the Holy of Holies with smoke to obscure the glory of God
 - And then he could enter to perform his priestly duties without risk of death
- Hebrews tells us that the tabernacle was merely a picture of heavenly things
 - The tabernacle taught Israel that a blood sacrifice was necessary before sinful men could enter into the presence of the Lord
 - First, it taught that sin had to be judged
 - And the only judgment God accepts for sin is death
 - But it also taught that the death of an animal is not a sufficient payment for the sin of men
 - Every year the high priest had to repeat the sacrifice of animals before he could re-enter the Holy of Holies
 - That sent a message to Israel that the problem of our sin cannot be solved by the blood of animals
 - Something better would be needed to satisfy the wrath of God
 - And that something better was the sacrificial death of God Himself on our behalf
 - So the Messiah was God's provision to sinful man
 - When Jesus died on the cross, He shed His blood to make the one and only payment for the sin of mankind
 - Anyone covered by His sacrifice need never make any other sacrifice for their sin
 - The Father accepts the sacrifice of His Son as full payment for all sin, whether past, present or future
 - So because of Christ's sacrifice and our faith in that sacrifice, when we die our spirit can enter into the presence of the Father without fear of judgment

- The judgment we had coming for our sin was already poured out on Christ on the cross
- Leaving us without condemnation
- But what about those saints who died prior to Christ's sacrifice on the cross?
 - For example, what happened to Abraham when he died?
 - The Bible says he was a man of faith in God's promises
 - And because of his faith, God credited Abraham with righteousness

Gen. 15:5 And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

Gen. 15:6 Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

- The Bible declares Abraham was a righteous man by faith
 - Which means Abraham was assured by God that he would be protected from God's wrath for his sin
 - When God declares a person to be righteous by faith, it means they will be acquitted of their sin on judgment day
 - God's wrath for Abraham's sin was poured out on Christ instead
- But hold on...Abraham lived long *before* Christ died on the cross
 - When Abraham died, Christ's sacrifice for sins had not yet happened
 - His soul couldn't have entered into the presence of God when he died because his sin debt was unpaid
 - So when Abraham breathed his last, and his body was buried in the tomb, where did his soul go?
 - For that matter, what did God do for the souls of all Old Testament saints?
 - Even John the Baptist faced the same dilemma, since he died while Jesus was still alive on earth
- Scripture says God provided a place of comfort for these people until the time of Jesus' death and resurrection
 - The Bible calls this place Sheol
 - You'll see occasional references to Sheol in the Old Testament
 - For example, when Jacob learns that his favorite son, Joseph, has been killed by wild animals, Jacob says this in his distress

Gen. 37:33 Then he examined it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!"

Gen. 37:34 So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days.

Gen. 37:35 Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, “Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son.” So his father wept for him.

- Jacob declares his sorrow will cause him to “go down to Sheol”
- Jacob was an Old Testament saint like his father and grandfather
 - He was righteous by faith, so like Abraham knew he would be saved from the penalty of his sin at his death
 - As we would say today, Jacob was a saved man, and yet here he declares he expects to go “down to Sheol” after he died
 - Why isn’t Jacob talking about going “up” to Heaven as we would say today?
 - Because Old Testament saints understood that they would go to Sheol at death
- So what is Sheol exactly?
 - It’s a place where God held the souls of all those who died prior to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross
 - And Sheol is two places, actually
 - One part of Sheol held the souls of the Old Testament saints like Abraham or Jacob
 - They were held in Sheol in a place of comfort awaiting the sacrifice of Messiah as payment for their sins
 - As we just explained, until Jesus paid the price for sin, no one could enter into God’s presence so this temporary home was necessary
 - Since the place of comfort was Abraham’s home for a time, it came to be called “Abraham’s Bosom,” meaning the place of Abraham’s comfort
 - But Sheol was more than just Abraham’s Bosom
 - Sheol had a second part that held the souls of all those who died without faith
 - This part of Sheol goes by a different name: Hades
 - Hades is the Greek word for the place we call Hell
 - And as the name suggests, this side of Sheol is not a place of comfort
 - Jesus describes the difference between Abraham’s Bosom and Hades in a short account about two men who descend to Sheol after death in Luke 16

Luke 16:22 “Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried.

Luke 16:23 “In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom.

Luke 16:24 “And he cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.’

Luke 16:25 “But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.’

Luke 16:26 ‘And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.’

- By the time of Jesus’ first coming, both sides of Sheol were packed
 - Abraham’s Bosom held the souls of every Old Testament saint since Adam and Abel
 - While Hades held the souls of every unbeliever since Cain
 - We can safely assume that the population of Hades was much larger than that of Abraham’s Bosom
 - As Jesus said

Matt. 7:13 “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.

Matt. 7:14 “For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

- We know from scripture that Jesus’s body lay in the tomb for three days
 - During that time, Jesus’ spirit descended into Sheol to spend three days in Abraham’s Bosom
 - While He was there, Jesus must have preached to the Old Testament saints
 - Remember the Lord only revealed bits and pieces of His plan of redemption to the Old Testament saints
 - They all had faith in a promised provision for sin, but they didn’t necessarily know exactly how or when God would provide it
 - Now they were learning the full the story...from the Messiah Himself
 - Best of all they learned that Jesus had just paid the price for their sins by dying on a cross
 - And so now they would accompany Him into God’s presence without fear
 - What a joyous celebration must have followed that news!
- But Jesus also preached to another crowd in Sheol

1Pet. 3:18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive

in the spirit;

1Pet. 3:19 in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison,

1Pet. 3:20 who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.

- Peter says Jesus also preached to the souls of the condemned suffering in Hades, which Peter calls a “prison”
 - At first, we wonder why would Jesus preach to these souls?
 - Was He giving them a second chance to believe?
 - The answer is no, because Hebrews 9:27 teaches there is no second chance following death
 - We are appointed to die once and then comes judgment
- Instead, Jesus witnessed to their just condemnation
 - Remember, sometimes the Lord uses our witness to bring others to faith and salvation
 - But other times He uses our witness to bring just condemnation against their hard hearts
- The Bible teaches that eventually every tongue will confess and every knee will bow at the name of Christ...eventually
 - Confessing Christ only yields salvation if we make that confession on faith, before we die
 - I’m sure the spirits in prison confessed Christ as Lord when they saw Him arrived in Sheol
 - But their confession was not a confession of faith, since they could see Jesus was the Messiah
 - Therefore, their confession could not save them
 - What terrible mourning must have followed that news!
- Now that brings us back to Paul’s explanation in Ephesians 4
 - Paul says Christ’s soul descended into the lower parts of the earth
 - Paul came to that conclusion because Psalm 68 said the Messiah would take with Him a host of captives when He ascended
 - The captives Jesus took were the souls of all the Old Testament saints who were waiting patiently for Him in Abraham’s Bosom
 - So Jesus’ ascent started from below the earth in Sheol
 - Remember, Jacob said he would go into the earth when he died, so too did Jesus
- Then after three days, Jesus ascended with the souls of the Old Testament saints

- And at that time, the Messiah gave gifts to men, that is those followers He left behind on Earth...to the church saints
 - The spiritual gifts He gave to the church at Pentecost following His ascension ten days earlier were our proof that we are His bride
 - While the Old Testament saints are already enjoying the full presence of Christ, the saints on earth receive a measure of His grace
 - This measure of grace unifies all of us, confirming that we are His even as we wait to join the rest
- That's why Paul says in v.10 that the same Christ Who descended into the earth for our sins is the same Christ Who ascended into Heaven
 - He is Lord of both those of the Old Testament (Jews) and those of the New Testament (Gentiles)
 - Christ did this to fill (or it should read *fulfill*) all things
 - Jesus accomplished all this to fulfill scripture and to fill us with His spirit

- So today we continue in Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts within the body
 - We're studying how spiritual gifts contribute to the unity of the body
 - Unity has been Paul's topic since Chapter 3
 - And God's call for unity in the church is a wonderful example of God's sense of humor
 - In the church, God has taken people from every walk of life, from different cultures, different languages, different perspectives...
 - And He has told us we are united into one group
 - This is a unity that defies human nature, which is exactly the point since God unites us spiritually despite our natural differences
 - In that way the body of Christ is an opposite to the nation of Israel
 - In the case of Israel, the Lord created a people out of nothing
 - They began as a single family created by covenant and set apart from all other people
 - Israel was like box of Cheerios...
 - Almost identical to one another
 - But unique in the world
 - On the other hand, God made His church to be like a box of Fruit Loops...
 - The body of Christ comes in a rainbow of colors and flavors
 - Each of us very different from another
 - But God has knit us together into a common gathering, a body of believers who reflect the world's diversity
 - We too were set apart as was Israel, but we're set apart spiritually
- And key to maintaining our oxymoronic unity-through-diversity are the spiritual gifts Christ has given to His body
 - Last week we learned that the Lord took great steps to connect the church saints to things before and things to come
 - Jesus descended into the lower parts of the earth to preach to the captives before setting them free to enter Heaven
 - And at that time, Christ also gave gifts to His Bride, the Church
 - He did this to communicate that Church saints are just as much a part of His family as those who came before
 - And He did it to ensure we would enjoy the same unity that Jews knew in the days prior to the Church
 - So now Paul explains exactly how these gifts function to create unity, beginning in v.11

Eph. 4:11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as

evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,
Eph. 4:12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;
Eph. 4:13 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.

- In this passage we find one of three lists of spiritual gifts found in the New Testament
 - All three lists are written by Paul
 - In addition to the one here, we have lists in 1 Corinthians and in Romans
 - All three lists differ at least a little from one another
 - And the context of each passage makes clear Paul provided these lists as examples to make a larger point
 - Each list of examples support a different perspective on spiritual gifts
 - In 1 Corinthians, Paul was explaining the proper regulation of gifts within the corporate gathering
 - In Romans, Paul explains the proper attitude toward spiritual gifts in the body
 - And here in Ephesians, Paul explains the purpose of gifts in the body
 - Therefore, Paul's lists were not intended to be comprehensive inventories of spiritual gifts
 - In fact, there is no list of all spiritual gifts in the Bible
 - Even if we were to combine all three of Paul's lists, we still wouldn't have a complete list of gifts available within the body
 - Furthermore, some spiritual gifts in Paul's lists are no longer present in the body
 - While others are only available under certain circumstances
 - So let's keep an open mind about God's potential to gift members of the body yet remain grounded by scripture
- Turning to the details, Paul is explaining the central purpose of spiritual gifts in the body of Christ
 - But he begins with three important words: He gave some
 - These three words each have theological importance
 - And if we overlook them, we're likely to come to wrong conclusions about spiritual gifts
 - The first word is He
 - Obviously, that pronoun refers to Christ, as it refers back to the person in v.10 who descended and then ascended
 - Christ is the One in charge of spiritual gifts

- Spiritual gifts aren't under our control or the control of another person like a pastor
 - In 1 Corinthians Paul teaches that spiritual gifts are according to the will of God
 - So the Bible teaches consistently that Christ forever remains in control of spiritual gifts
- Which brings us to the second word...gave
 - Christ gave us our spiritual gift
 - We didn't lobby for it, request it or earn it
 - God made a sovereign choice to equip us a certain way
 - You noticed that the first gift on Paul's list is that of apostle, and of course we know this was Paul's spiritual gift
 - But do you remember how Paul obtained his gift?
 - According to Acts, Paul received his gift in the same moment the Lord brought Paul to faith
 - It's obvious, the Lord already had Paul's gift in mind before Paul even knew Him
 - So Christ gave Paul the gift of apostle, and there was never a point when the Lord asked Paul what he wanted
 - Just as Paul had no choice in joining the body of Christ, he had no choice in the gift he would receive
 - Similarly, your gift was appointed for you at the moment of your faith
 - Most of us don't receive a clear word from the Lord concerning our gift
 - So we must come to know our gift through experience and trial and error
 - Nevertheless, you received a Christ-given, Spirit-enabled ability to serve the body of Christ
 - And it came to you at the moment you believed
- Finally, Paul says some...
 - Everyone in the body of Christ receives a spiritual gift according to the will of God
 - But we don't all receive the *same* gift
 - Paul says that the Lord gave "some" to be apostle, some to be prophet, etc.
 - Meaning God doesn't give everyone in the body of Christ a common spiritual gift
 - So taken together these three words establish our theological understanding of how spiritual gifts come to the body
 - Christ selects and controls the gifts each believer receives
 - He delivers the gift to us by means of His Spirit at the moment of our faith according to His will
 - And He diversifies gifts within the body by assigning different gifts to different people
 - There is no common spiritual gift that all believers share

- You may encounter some who teach that certain spiritual gifts lie within our grasp
 - That every believer can obtain these gifts either by praying for them, mimicking someone else or learning them ourselves
 - This teaching presumes that spiritual gifts are handed out continuously by Christ in response to our petitions
 - And they may even claim that every believer must demonstrate a common spiritual gift or they aren't truly saved
 - But as you can see, the opening words of this passage (among other scripture) denies this teaching plainly
- Turning to Paul's short list of gifts, this list is unique compared to the other two
 - His list emphasizes those spiritual gifts key to unity in the body
 - These are some of the most important gifts God can give
 - And for that reason, they are commonly associated with leadership roles
 - But with the exception of the gift of apostle, these gifts are not automatically offices in the body
 - They are spiritual abilities that may or may not lead to a leadership position in the church
 - The one exception is the gift of apostle
 - The word apostle means "one sent with a message"
 - It refers to being the first to bring the Good News into a place
 - Apostles were the men appointed by Christ to bring the message of the Messiah to the world in the first century
 - They had a uniquely difficult mission
 - They traveled into areas of the world preaching a Jewish Messiah and the opportunity for Gentiles to know Him
 - They entered into cultures that knew nothing and cared even less about Jewish teachings of a Messiah
 - In fact, many of these cultures were hostile toward the teachings of Judaism
 - Even worse, these men preached without the benefit of 2,000 years of church history supporting their claims
 - There was no New Testament scripture, and no one had heard of Jesus
 - They had no allies waiting to receive them
 - And enemies followed them everywhere
- Under these circumstances, an ordinary evangelist wouldn't have stood a chance
 - So the Lord equipped certain men in special ways to reach the world and establish the church
 - The gift of apostle included two key qualities
 - First, these men were given supernatural insight into the word of God

- They received supernatural understanding of Old Testament prophecies that had long alluded others
- And they received new revelation from God, which eventually became the New Testament canon of scripture
- Secondly, these men received authority to establish the church in unreached places and dictate proper church practice
 - Every apostle was appointed by Christ through a personal appearing, like Paul on the road to Damascus
 - Each one was a representative of Christ to the early church
 - Therefore, they had supreme authority over the flock
- And each man received supernatural abilities to demonstrate and validate their authority
 - In the Bible we see examples of these men performing supernatural healings, sometimes using nothing more than their shadow
 - They could pronounce a judgment against a believer and see that judgment carried out supernaturally even from a distance
 - They could be bitten by poisonous snakes and live
 - And they even raised the dead to life
 - These supernatural abilities were a part of how Jesus validated each apostle's right to teach and lead the church
- Therefore, apostle was the highest gift God gave to the church – but Jesus only gave it for a time
 - By the end of the first century, the church was well-established and the New Testament canon was complete
 - Therefore, the church had no more need for the office of apostle
 - So when the last apostle, the Apostle John, died near the end of the first century, the gift of apostle died with him
 - It's obvious how Jesus used the gift of apostle to bring unity to the early church
 - They unified the church through a common understanding of the creeds and doctrines of the faith
 - And by their authority they advanced the Good News around the world even as they protected the church from those who attacked the faith
 - It's fair to say that without apostles, the church would not have survived at all
- And as the last apostle died, the most powerful unifying gift shifted to the next gift on Paul's list
 - Even after the apostles were gone, prophets continued to guide the church in understanding the word of God
 - The revelation of God was complete in apostles, but the early church still needed help to understand the meaning of scripture

- Remember, access to copies of scripture remained limited for many centuries
 - And even literacy was not universal
 - So God equipped some with a gift to relate scripture to the church
- We know the prophetic gift is different than the apostolic gift since it's listed separately here
 - But we also know the Apostles were prophets too, since they delivered the New Testament to the church
 - So what's the difference?
- The difference is the gift of prophecy doesn't involve revealing new scripture
 - Scripture itself says that no one may add or subtract from the words God gave to the final apostle, John
 - Therefore, the gift of prophecy provides supernatural understanding of God's word
 - A prophet will reveal the proper meaning of scripture to a generation where that understanding was lost (like during the Reformation)
 - Or a prophet may bring the knowledge of scripture to places where the word of God itself is restricted (like in China)
- So unlike the gift of apostle, prophecy may continue on even today
 - Particularly in areas of the world where access to God's word is limited, the Lord may move through prophets to bring a knowledge of Himself
 - Their prophetic speech doesn't add to scripture or compete with scripture
 - It echoes scripture by bringing it to life in the hearts of those who lack understanding or access to God's word otherwise
- Once again, it's easy to see how this gift promotes unity in the body
 - Unity always begins with a correct understanding of God's word
 - The word of God is THE sanctifying, unifying force in the body of Christ
 - As Jesus Himself prayed to the Father on our behalf

John 17:17 "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

John 17:18 "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

John 17:19 "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

- The church is sanctified (made holy) and united by the truth
- So gifts that promote an understanding of God's word are of first importance in bringing unity to the body
- As we look at the rest of the list, we see this principle at work
 - The next gift is evangelist

- The word in Greek means someone who brings glad tidings or good news
 - This gift involves more than merely witnessing Christ to the world
 - Anyone can evangelize, and in fact, everyone *should* evangelize to some degree
 - But the gift of evangelist is something beyond the norm
- The gift of evangelism is a supernatural combination of courage, boldness, tactfulness and apologetics
 - This a potent and yet rare combination of skills, which is why it relies on a supernatural gifting
 - Someone with a gift of evangelism will initiate conversations about Christ when others couldn't find the courage
 - They will enter dangerous places without hesitation
 - They will endure persecution without backing down
- And most importantly, they will bring a solid, biblical defense of Jesus to the world
 - The gift of evangelism includes a supernatural ability to communicate the Good News accurately
 - The person understands salvation by grace through faith inside and out
 - They aren't necessarily scholars or even very well studied
 - Instead, the Spirit in them gives them the defense they need to explain the truth accurately before kings and authorities
- Once more we can see how the Lord uses evangelists to unite the church
 - Evangelists unite us in mission and purpose
 - We see them moving and feel courage to follow
 - Together, they lead the church to new converts to strengthen our numbers
 - And they ensure that the growth of the church is set on a proper theological foundation
 - The gift of evangelist usually shows itself in style and results
 - A gifted evangelist is "wired" to talk about Jesus
 - If you or I stand in the checkout line at the grocery store, we think to ourselves, "I should mention Jesus to the clerk"
 - But usually the moment comes and goes and we leave the store having said nothing
 - Before the gifted evangelist leaves the checkout line, he's presented the Gospel, received a response and made an appointment for a baptism
 - He or she is bold, willing to speak
 - And having spoken, the Lord then brings great fruit
 - This gift is not a replacement for our individual efforts to witness Christ to the world

- Instead, evangelists inspire and lead us in that work, creating unity in the accomplishment of the mission of the church
- Finally, Paul lists pastors and teachers, but in the Greek language the construct of this phrase suggests a single compound title
 - So Paul seems to be talking about a single gift called pastor-teacher
 - In Romans Paul lists a gift of “teacher” without mentioning pastor
 - So it’s possible that there are separate gifts of pastor-teacher vs. just teacher
 - But in my view, it’s not necessary or even possible to separate these gifts practically speaking
 - Biblically speaking, all pastors must be able to teach
 - And all teachers are engaged in shepherding the flock
 - So in my experience, the gift is pastor-teacher with some being given a greater ability for one aspect than the other
 - Remember, these gifts are not the same as roles or positions of authority
 - A person with the gift of pastor-teacher is not necessarily an authority figure in the church
 - We receive our spiritual gift from the moment we are saved, but a person cannot become an authority in the church on Day 1
 - And some who have this gift never aspire to a leadership role
 - They serve as a Sunday School teacher or in some other way
 - Yet all the while they are shepherding God’s people through their skills of teaching, counseling and exhortation
- This final gift is obviously the most common among those in the list, and one that we still depend upon today
 - But notice how all these gifts center on building up the body of Christ through a knowledge of the word of God
 - Simply put, there is no substitute for unifying believers in their understanding of God’s word
 - We can’t truly be unified if we don’t share a common understanding of the truth
 - Unity is important, but unity is a means to a greater end
 - Notice in v.12 these gifts come to the church for the purpose of equipping you and me
 - Paul says it was for the equipping of the saints
 - Obviously, you and I are the saints who are to be equipped
 - And the word equipping can be translated training
 - So a primary reason we gather once a week is to be trained by those who possess these gifts
 - That’s why Paul says elsewhere that the gathering is for believers, not

unbelievers

- We come to the gathering expecting to be trained, to be built up as a body
 - At the end of v.12 Paul says our equipping should strengthen us corporately
 - Don't overlook that point
 - Christianity is a team sport
 - We must seek to be strengthened together such that if someone is dragging behind, we should close ranks to bring them along
 - Don't take personal satisfaction in your own knowledge of scripture if at the same time others around you remain ignorant
 - In particular, the gifts like pastor-teacher are supposed to identify any such discrepancies and address them
 - In that way, we can see even more clearly how pastor and teacher work together
 - It's similar to the way shepherding is a combination of leading and feeding a flock
 - A shepherd can't feed just some of the flock or lead just some...he must lead and feed all without losing any
 - And this must be our corporate goal as well, both old and young, new and mature Christians
 - We share a corporate responsibility to seek for this outcome
 - It's not merely the responsibility of the evangelist or pastor-teacher
 - In fact, if a single person is doing too much of the heavy lifting for the church, the opportunity for others to be strengthened is lost
 - One time, renown evangelist and preacher, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, was preaching and leading the worship choir in his church
 - After one service, a dear old lady came up to Chafer and said you are doing too much
 - You ought not have to preach and lead the worship choir also
 - So she said, "Why don't you find someone else to preach?"
 - Since everyone has a stake in the outcome, everyone has a role in achieving that goal
- And we shall continue in this corporate pursuit until we arrive, Paul says
 - In v.13, Paul says we are seeking to attain to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God
 - He's describing arriving at a faith equal to Christ's faith
 - And a spiritual knowledge equal to Christ's knowledge
 - Christ's faith never doubted, never acted contrary to the will of God
 - And His knowledge of God's word never failed so that He always had a proper

response for the devil and his agents

- Obviously, these goals are lofty, so Paul isn't suggesting that we will become Christ's equal this side of Heaven
 - Paul is simply setting the right goal, the high standard that we are all called to seek in a daily walk: Christ
 - Paul calls our goal attaining to the mature man
 - The Greek word translated mature is literally complete or perfect
- That's our true goal
 - We want to become as perfect or complete spiritually as we can
 - Through the training we receive from a unified body made possible by these gifts
- As we all seek to grow in these areas by setting our sights on Christ, then we will begin to move toward Him
 - And as each of us is doing the same things, equipped by the gifts of those in the body, we grow closer together
 - Our bond of unity grows stronger
 - A.W. Tozer described this process elegantly using an example of a room full of pianos
 - He said:

Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same [tuning] fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. [Likewise,] one hundred worshipers [meeting] together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to...turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship [in some other way].

- That's our goal, Paul says...to measure up to the statue, to the height, of Christ's fullness and perfection
 - We are all called to strive for that standard individually
 - But we can only achieve it through the unity of the body of Christ
- Many Christians aren't even striving, and still others strive alone thinking they can make the trip alone
 - But the scriptures tell us something different
 - We all must strive to equal Christ in faith and knowledge
 - For that is the command of our Lord
 - It is what pleases Him and what allows us to accomplish the mission He gave us

- But we are to strive together, as a body, with the gifts of the body working to our advantage in that regard
 - So come to the gathering regularly
 - And come to be trained and to train others for the glory of Christ

- There comes a time in every church family when tough words must be spoken
 - Times when our leaders give us direct counsel, admonishing us to live up to our calling in Christ
 - After all no one in the body of Christ is perfect
 - No one is above correction
 - Yet in polite society, we usually shy away from confrontations and difficult conversations
 - We worry about perceptions, hurt feelings, losing friendships
 - Polite company overlooks flaws and avoids sharp words
 - And there is no society more “polite” than church society
 - Now, it’s a good thing to be concerned with preserving relationships
 - And it’s an act of love to overlook someone’s flaws or idiosyncratic behaviors
 - But when those flaws stand in the way of our corporate pursuit of godliness or the mission of the church, then we must respond
 - Our leaders must confront issues
 - And the body must rally around the weaker members and support them
 - But if things don’t improve, the leadership ultimately has a responsibility to the larger body to take action
 - We must rebuke, expel or otherwise discipline the offending member or members
- In the New Testament, we have a number of letters focused on misbehaving or spiritually immature churches
 - Typically, our thoughts turn to the letters to Corinth
 - This church had a reputation for carnality
 - And Paul’s letters record the many shortcomings in the way that church operated, including their misuse of spiritual gifts
 - So Paul wrote to correct the church, and as you read those letters you find Paul moving between encouragement and admonishment
 - But Corinth did corner the market on carnality and immaturity
 - There was another church in the first century that struggled with rising above their pagan culture
 - And that church has not two but three letters written to it
 - Of course, I’m speaking of the church of Ephesus
 - Besides the letter of Ephesians, we have two letters Paul wrote to the pastor of that church, Timothy
 - And add to those Jesus’ short letter to Ephesus in Revelation and we begin to see how important this early church is in scripture
- By the midpoint of Chapter 4, Paul has explained the purpose of spiritual gifts in the

body to this church

- He told us that the Lord has gifted the body of Christ with a diversity of special abilities
 - And He intended that we put our spiritual ability to use in service to Him by strengthening the body of Christ
 - As we serve others in our spiritual gift, we make others spiritually stronger, so they, in turn, can serve better
 - And so the cycle continues
- But this process only works if we all participate in such a way that we preserve the intended purpose and usefulness of our gift
 - Gifts must be developed before they reach their full potential
 - I may have the gift of teaching, but I can't teach effectively until I've applied myself to developing my knowledge and skills
 - This process doesn't deny the supernatural origins of my gift
 - It merely reflects God's purpose in equipping me
 - He wants me to spend time working in me by His Spirit so I will develop into a mature man in Christ even as I help others
- Secondly, these gifts must be regulated in the body so they work together in harmony
 - We can't have everyone doing everything simultaneously
 - We have times and places and even seasons when particular individuals serve the body
 - If we regulate gifts properly, everyone has a place and role, everyone is growing, everyone is maturing together in unity
- But when some are left behind or everyone is left to do things their own way, the gathering of the body deteriorates rapidly into anarchy and confusion
 - In the letters Paul wrote to Corinth we can see that outcome, which is why Paul commands them to "grow up" spiritually
 - He calls them to stop thinking and acting like children but to begin to mature in their understanding and behaviors
 - Child-like behavior in the church means thinking and acting like the unbelieving world
 - Holding to the same bad thinking and false teaching
 - Conceding to the same temptations
 - Embroiled in the same disputes, exhibiting the same pride, contempt and jealousies
 - And these same problems existed in Ephesus
 - So now in Chapter 4, Paul's letter takes on a decidedly negative tone, at least for a moment

- Having explained spiritual gifts as tools to strengthen and mature the body, he now admonishes the church for failing to use their gifts to this appointed outcome

Eph. 4:14 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;

Eph. 4:15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,

Eph. 4:16 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.

- Paul begins v.14 with the Greek word *hina*, which means “in order that” or “as a result” as my Bible said
 - The church’s spiritual gifts were given to the church to drive our spiritual maturity
 - And God accommodated our spiritual growth as Christians through this gift *in order that* we would stop acting like children
 - Simply put, spiritual maturity is supposed to result from the proper operation of spiritual gifts
 - And proper behavior is supposed to result from spiritual maturity
 - At the end of the day, it matters little how much spiritual maturity someone gains through study or serving if in the end they don’t act the part
 - If we can talk the theological talk but aren’t walking the walk, it’s nothing more than vanity
 - Notice Paul defines being “children” in the body of Christ as being tossed in waves and carried about by the wind
- Paul’s metaphors emphasize two aspects or qualities to child-like living
 - First, the immature Christian has a spiritual life that’s out of control
 - When I say “out of control” I don’t mean crazy or bizarre
 - I mean it the way Paul does...someone who has not gained control over their own spiritual growth
 - They are “tossed” and “carried” by others
 - They don’t determine their spiritual course in life
 - They haven’t determined their strengths and put those to work in service to Christ
 - And they have no insight into their spiritual weaknesses and they aren’t seeking the help of other gifts in the body to grow
 - They are floating along, jumping from one thing to another

- Paul says they become victims of the trickery of men scheming deceitfully to entrap the ignorant believer
- Such was the case in Ephesus, where false teachers were contending with the leaders like Timothy
- And they were gaining a foothold by recruiting the spiritually immature within the church
- These spiritual children weren't grounded by a firm appreciation of biblical truth, so they were constantly tossed
 - The Greek word translated "tossed here and there by waves" is a euphemism for confusion
 - So when a new, false teaching comes along to tickle their ears, these children follow after it in ignorance
 - They are so confused in their understanding of their own faith, they have no hope to stay on course
- Or if a new spiritual book (like "The Shack") or some program (like "40 Days of Purpose") captures their attention, they quickly flock to it
 - Paul says they are carried away by every wind of doctrine
 - "Wind" suggests something fleeting, lacking substance, something that's here one moment and gone the next
 - Lacking maturity, these children of the faith chase after the latest spiritual fad like a child chases leaves blown by the wind
 - And these fads come and go because they make no meaningful impact on the spiritual maturity of the body of Christ
 - Even worse, these winds of doctrine distract the body from a proper study of God's word which produces lasting change in our hearts
 - The root problem for every spiritual child is they have no plan for where they're going in their spiritual life
 - They don't understand the big picture of what God is doing in their life
 - So they don't know where they're trying to go
 - They volunteer sporadically to serve in the church and often in places where they have no spiritual gifting
 - At the same time, they pass by the very opportunities to serve or learn that God prepared for them and they desperately need
 - They participate in their faith like someone rooting for a sports team
 - You may have heard that football is a game played by 22 men who desperately need rest
 - And it's watched by 50,000 people who desperately need exercise
 - Similarly, the spiritually immature children watch others at work in their spiritual gifts when they desperately need to get in the game themselves
- Obviously, Paul wouldn't have said these things to the church in Ephesus if not for the

fact that they weren't taking advantage of spiritual gifts in the body

- So in v.15 he calls for the church to speak the truth in love
 - What "truth" needed to be spoken in love?
 - By the context, we can only assume Paul is talking about correcting, admonishing and exhorting those who needed it
 - Those in the body who aren't participating at all
 - Or aren't doing the right things, or are simply working in the wrong ways or in the wrong places...need to know
- Someone needs to speak this truth to them, though in love
 - We encourage those who have self-doubt
 - We teach those who are acting in ignorance
 - We exhort those who are lazy or hesitant
 - We admonish those who are acting sinfully
- The only thing we *can't* do is remain silent or speak absent a sincere love for the person
 - If we love one another, we want each other to grow up into a mature reflection of Christ, as Paul says at the end of v.15
 - We want to be like the one Who leads His church
 - Or at least that should be our goal
 - And so we serve one another in our gift, we receive service from others and we speak up in love when necessary to ensure this body is working as God intended
- If you want a preview of how this process is supposed to work, consider Paul's analogy in v.16
 - When everything is working in the right way, you have first a "whole body"
 - We use the term "body of Christ" commonly, but sometimes I think we think of the work merely as a synonym for collection
 - Like I might say Mozart had a large body of work
 - But in the Bible, the term body points to a different collection
 - We're not merely a collection of Christians...ideally we'll work together as if we were a single organism
 - A single, like-minded body moving in the same direction with a common purpose
 - Like the human body, each part plays an essential role together
 - But Paul says we will be fitted and held together
 - These two Greek words are reminiscent of a description of a stone mason's handiwork
 - Fitting stones means selecting the right one for a particular use

- Sizing it up and then shaping it gently until it's perfectly suited to serve a place in the building
- Then it's put in place and held together
 - The stone would be held in place not by mortar but by the support of the surrounding stones
 - It was held together by the other stones that were equally well-fitted to their places
- That's the goal for this body of Christ
 - Our spiritual gifts are tools in the Hand of the Master Carpenter, Jesus
 - He knows where we are best suited to serve Him in this body
 - And He uses the gifts of others around us in the body to gently knock off our rough edges, spiritually speaking
 - So that we fit into place perfectly
 - And then He holds us there by surrounding us by other believers who are fitted to their respective places as well
 - They teach us to strengthen us for the walk ahead
 - They encourage us through trials
 - They pray for us continually
 - They perform music to help us worship
 - They cook and clean, mow and paint to nurture and comfort us
 - And they call us when we're absent and correct us when we're in error
 - And yet these things must be regulated, according to the proper working of each part, Paul says
 - That phrase is so beautifully worded in the Greek
 - The Greek word translated "proper" means literally poetic meter
 - And the word "working" can mean energy or action
 - So Paul is comparing the functioning of everyone together as like poetry in motion
 - Like all the instruments in a symphony playing in harmony
 - I see glimpses of that ideal at times here at Oak Hill Bible Church
 - When we work together in service to a family in need
 - Or when we come together for a work day at the church
 - Or when we rally to support a missionary in need
 - It's poetry in motion
- But every church knows times when things aren't quite in sync
 - When some parts are moving, but some are still

- Some instruments are in tune, some not so much
- Some of our works rhyme while others are poorly chosen
- When everything is in sync, Paul says it causes the body to grow
 - I believe he is speaking primarily about the individual spiritual growth of each individual
 - Each of us move further away from child-like spirituality and toward a mature perspective
 - More importantly, we adopt mature behaviors and become stronger followers of Christ
- But I think Paul is also speaking implying numerical growth
 - Because the world is naturally attracted to symphonies and poetry
 - Because the immature believer will take note of a mature, stable Christian who isn't tossed about by the fads in other churches
 - Because mature Christians will flock to those communities that reflect their values and grow
 - And because mature, strong Christians naturally multiply by witnessing to the world around them
- In other words, the very things we want so badly, to grow and reach a wider audience, are best accomplished by how we grow one another here
 - As Paul says at the end of v.16, we need to build each member of our body up in love to get where we want
 - Speaking truth in love about what needs to change, about how each of us may become a more mature member of this body
- Friends, that's what it looks like when every joint in our body is supplying what we were designed to contribute
 - It's a beautiful thing, but it only works in a culture where we're willing to roll up our sleeves and get to work
 - We need to drop the pretense of our perfect lives which is only possible when we maintain superficial relationships
 - We need to look and speak honestly about where we go as a body
 - We need to speak in humility and listen with patience
 - And the biggest threat to this unity is sin within the members of our body
 - By sin, I don't mean the occasional personal sins that everyone battles daily
 - I mean lifestyles of sin, adopted patterns of ungodliness that are condoned and even encouraged in the body
 - Often these sins fly below our radar, because they are common in worldly life
 - Paul addresses this enemy in the rest of Chapter 4, which we'll just step a little way into today

Eph. 4:17 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,
Eph. 4:18 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;
Eph. 4:19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

- After teaching on the purpose of spiritual gifts and exhorting the church to seek to live as mature Christians, he then calls them out for failing in this regard
 - Here's an example of Paul speaking the truth to the church in love
 - He says the church must no longer walk as Gentiles walk
 - In this context Gentiles is a euphemism for unbelievers, those Gentiles of Ephesus who are not a part of the body of Christ
 - These Gentiles represent the past for those in the church
 - Once before, the believers in the church in Ephesus lived like the rest of the city
 - They walked as those Gentiles walked, Paul says
 - They lived in the futility of their mind
 - The Greek word for futility means emptiness or vanity
 - Unbelievers live vain, empty lives, no matter how they may try to fill it with meaning or joy
 - They climb social and economic ladders that lead nowhere
 - They contend with one another in jealousy, anger and greed
 - They indulge their flesh in various ways and reap the fruit of their sins
 - Paul says they become callous to sin and its consequences, so they give themselves over to sensuality
 - Sensuality is a pursuit of any stimulation of our flesh
 - It's not merely sexual, though it includes sexual sin
 - It's hedonism in all forms
 - Prompted by an emptiness in the spirit, they compensate by overstimulating the flesh, which is sin
 - So they practice every kind of impurity with a greediness that can't be satisfied
 - A little drink isn't enough, so they need more
 - A little shopping isn't enough, so they max out the credit card
 - A little pornography isn't enough after a while, so they seek for something even more offensive
 - A little money or power or recognition isn't enough, so they do anything to get more

- When it all falls apart, they shake their fists at God
- Paul says unbelievers are darkened in their understanding and excluded from the life of God because of this pattern
 - They think they understand the world and themselves but they have no clue
 - They don't understand how far they are from God
 - They don't realize they're putting their faith in a world that is going to be destroyed
 - And they don't have a hope to avoid the eternal punishment awaiting them at death
 - The unbeliever's sin, which is present from birth, hardens their heart to the love of God
 - So they ignore the Gospel message even when it finds its way to them
 - Only if and when the Lord chooses to penetrate their heart with His word can they be woken from this spiritual slumber
 - Praise the Lord that His grace worked in this way for our sake!
- Which is why Paul demands that the church in Ephesus stop living as if that wake up call had never come to them
 - We don't know exactly what sins were predominant in this church
 - But whatever they were, it's clear they weren't mature and they weren't maturing
 - They seemed to have a problem with honesty and with coveting and greed, as you'll see later in this letter
 - All in all, they hadn't made the transition yet from merely a person who *knows* Christ to a person who *follows* after Christ
 - Their misuse or lack of use of spiritual gifts was robbing them of that opportunity
 - And their continuing pursuit of the world was sapping their energy
- Do Paul's words sound like they were written to you?
 - Do you feel the tug-of-war Paul is describing?
 - Are you still searching for that place God wants to "fit" you into the body of Christ?
 - Or maybe you're serving but it hasn't lit a fire under your walk with Christ?
 - Or maybe that life you had before Christ is still the life you're leading now
 - If that's you, then don't keep doing the same thing over and over again while expecting a different result
 - Rethink your priorities
 - Rework your schedule
 - Refocus on participating in the growth of this body so that you may serve the

purpose God has for you in His body

- If someone speaks truth to you in love, hear them and ask if the Lord is speaking to you through them before reacting
- And let's all grow together in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ

- In our previous study, Paul asked the believers in Ephesus not to walk as they once did when they lived as unbelievers
 - Paul uses the metaphor of a journey by foot, a “walk”, to represent the course of an earthly life
 - In vs.17-19 Paul described the walk of an unbeliever from God’s point of view
 - “Gentiles,” Paul called unbelievers, walk in futility of mind
 - Their thinking is vain, futile
 - Because they assume they understand life’s purpose and meaning, but they walk in the dark
 - The world chases wrong things in wrong ways out of ignorance, and after all is said and done, they just return to dust
 - Paul said their minds are darkened in their understanding of truth
 - Which is a way of describing the spiritual blindness that all people possess at birth, which prevents them from knowing God
 - They are excluded from eternal life, because of their blindness
 - And over the course of their lives, their conscience becomes increasingly callous, increasingly greedy for sensuality in all forms
 - Paul moved his audience through this progression to make a point of how thinking drives behavior
 - The world’s ignorance of God and their callous hearts explains their wanton life of sin
 - An unbeliever’s mind is trapped by a perspective; a view of self and the world that justifies pursuing a lifestyle of greed, violence, lust and hatred
 - They walk according to what they know
 - Unless God intervenes to bring a person to a knowledge of the truth, they will remain in the darkness
- On the other hand, a person who has received the truth by means of the Spirit gains an understanding of God that can transform their walk of life
 - Which is where Paul goes next...speaking of how believers should live

Eph. 4:20 But you did not learn Christ in this way,

Eph. 4:21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus,

Eph. 4:22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,

Eph. 4:23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,

Eph. 4:24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

- Paul opens saying the church did not learn Christ “in this way”
 - He’s speaking of the way the unbelieving learn their walk of life
 - Unbelievers walk by stumbling in spiritual darkness
 - They learn their walk according to the flesh, which drives them from one lustful desire to another
 - They have no spiritual compass, so the flesh rules
 - And this was our walk prior to faith too
 - But now Paul says you have a new walk, a walk with Christ, but you and I don’t learn our walk in the same way that unbelievers learn their walk
 - We don’t learn to walk with Christ by paying attention to the desires of the flesh
 - Our direction in life comes from the spirit
 - Yet some Christians fail to make this leap...they continue to walk according to what their flesh wants
 - The Bible has a term for a Christian who walks in Christ the same way they walked prior to faith: a carnal Christian
 - The word carnal literally means flesh
 - It’s the name the Bible gives to a believer who charts their path in life by paying attention to the desires of the flesh
 - Certainly all of us experience a degree of carnality
 - All of us follow after the desires of our flesh from time to time
 - And none of us are free of the temptations the flesh brings
 - But the question Paul is asking the church this morning is, are we letting our flesh drive our path in life?
 - Is carnality the rule or the exception?
 - Are we moving toward a new path, growing in a closer walk with Christ
 - Or are we trying to learn Christ the way we learned our prior life?
- Paul says we do not learn Christ the way the world learns, that is, with our flesh leading the way
 - We learn Christ by the spirit as a matter of God’s grace
 - And notice Paul didn’t say learn Christianity or learn obedience or learn piety
 - He said learn Christ, because we’re talking about a walk of knowing Him Who dwells in us
 - Knowing His character, His love, His mercy, His expectations, His values, His call on our lives
 - A believer’s call is to know Christ fully, which is a lifelong process
 - And if it’s a true pursuit, it’s a pursuit of spirit
 - For that’s the only way to know Christ truly

- That's why Paul adds in v.21 if his audience had, in fact, heard Christ in their hearts
 - The person who has merely learned Christ in a physical, fleshly sense is still an unbeliever
 - That kind of learning is head knowledge without spiritual understanding, which is not a saving knowledge of Christ
- In that sense, the flesh can pursue Christ in the same way it pursues any other sensuality
 - Pursuing religion rather than relationship is a common tragedy
 - We see it everyday among Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other false faiths
 - They invoke the name of Jesus but don't know the true Gospel
 - Since they try to learn Christ in the flesh, they learn nothing, and so their fleshly pursuit leaves them just as lost as before
- But we have been taught the truth "in Him" Paul says in v.21
 - As one who has heard the true Gospel and has received it in the spirit, we are born again
 - We learn the truth in Jesus by the Spirit, and so our walk of life as a follower of Jesus must continue as it began...in the Spirit
 - Which begins by laying aside their old self, Paul says, which is that former manner of life
 - Manner of life in v.22 can also be translated lifestyle
 - Paul's choice of words suggests a garment being taken off, like an old coat
 - That garment represents an old way of thinking and with it comes an old way of behaving
 - Paul says those things are clinging to us, but we must take them off
 - So imagine at the moment you came to faith in Jesus Christ, your inner person was brought to life spiritually
 - By God's Spirit, we gained a new spirit that is sinless and obedient to His every word Paul says in Romans 6
 - But our new inner self is still cloaked in our old flesh nature, like a filthy overcoat
 - If we're going to walk properly with Christ, displaying His likeness in union with our brothers and sisters in the body, we need to jettison that old nature
 - Paul says we need to lay it aside, like someone taking off the old coat, setting it on the ground and walking off without it
 - Paul uses a Greek verb in the aorist infinitive form, which describes an ongoing imperative or command
 - We are to ever more, continue laying aside the coat, as if we are removing the garment one thread at a time

- That coat represents our old life, the way we thought and walked in the flesh, the life we knew before Christ
 - We need to dump that old life like a cheap suit
 - But it's a life-long pursuit, and even Paul's choice of verb tense reflects that truth
 - We start today, and each day we set aside the old self so that more of Christ living in us shines through
- That's the call of sanctification in the life of every believer
 - Before faith we were spiritually dead and the flesh ruled
 - Now we have access to the mind of Christ and have been given a spirit that desires to obey Him
 - That's how we learned Christ
 - Yet we're still clothed in a flesh that wants to draw us away from Christ
 - Paul says that flesh is even now being corrupted by its lustful desires
 - That process didn't stop when we became a believer
 - Your body is still in decay destined to return to dust
 - Our body is literally dying around us, a death made necessary by its corrupt nature
 - So to stretch my analogy a bit further, if our old coat is falling apart on us, why seek to preserve it?
 - Why try to hold it together?
 - Instead, take hold of those fraying threads and give a good pull to hasten its unraveling
 - Ultimately the Lord will replace it, and even now we can diminish its power in our lives
 - That's what Paul means when he says we must not learn Christ according to flesh, but we must lay that old self aside
- Now if only it were so easy, right?
 - We all know that when it comes to sin, the struggle is real
 - While some of us may be more successful in our struggles than others, no one is totally free of the fight
 - So how can Paul speak of this challenge so casually, as if to suggest it's simply a matter of setting our mind to it
 - Well maybe it's a little simpler than we thought
 - The hard work is actually done by Jesus Himself
 - Paul says in v.23 be renewed in the spirit of our mind
 - To renew simply means to make something new
 - We know we have already been made new spiritually by faith in Christ

- We were born again in the spirit, and we received Christ's Spirit
 - But Paul says we must also be renewed in the spirit of our mind
 - The term "spirit of the mind" refers to our thinking, attitudes and outlook on life
 - Our thinking must now be made new, taught by that new spirit we received from Christ
 - The Greek verb translated "be renewed" is passive which means the work of changing our mind is done *to us*, not *by us*
 - We give ourselves over to the study of Christ in His word, and He creates the change in our thinking
 - He will renew our minds by His truth so that we gain a desire to live according to our Spirit
- As we are renewed in our minds, Paul says in v.24 we will put on a new self
 - This is the second key verb of action in this passage
 - In the first case, Paul said lay aside the old self, the old coat that hides our new spiritual self
 - That was a verb of action, calling for us to take steps to disassemble the old ways of life
 - But we are not to learn Christ in the old way
 - The old way hears the Bible say lay aside the old self, and we start making lists, drawing up plans, pledging commitments, etc.
 - Certainly some of these steps may be sensible and warranted in the face of ongoing sin
 - But real, lasting progress doesn't come from what we do in the flesh
 - We don't learn Christ this way
 - Instead we learn Christ spiritually, Paul says
 - And the key to setting aside the old is to obtain Christ-like thinking, which only comes from spiritual training in His word
 - And by that renewing we will put on the new self which is in the likeness of God
- Paul is presenting a beautiful picture that contrasts our spiritual reality to our outward appearance
 - We learn Christ through an inward change of spirit, which is a work done by God alone
 - This is the saving work of knowing Christ by grace
 - Initially, at the moment our new spirit arrives, it's obscured by our old, sinful flesh that covers the new inner person
 - In that sense, our sinful lifestyle is like a filthy garment hiding our new nature
 - So God asks us to lay aside the old self and put on the new self
 - Or in other words, we are called to make our outer appearance agree with the

- inner truth of who we have become in Christ
 - And it's a process of renewing our mind so that we think like Christ
 - Because if we think like Christ, we're more likely to act like Him
- A few years ago it became fashionable to wear clothing that said WWJD (What would Jesus do?)
 - The idea was to stir our conscience to think in godly ways to promote godly behavior
 - It was a nice idea, but it had the wrong approach
- The bracelets should have asked WDJS (What did Jesus say?)
 - The key to obtaining a more godly walk is to begin to share Christ's thoughts and desires
 - And that transformation of our mind comes from allowing God's word to replace our own thoughts
 - Soon, the renewing of our mind leads us to a change in desires and a change of behavior
 - In time, we take on the likeness of God created in holiness, righteousness and truth, Paul says
- Perhaps you consider yourself a student of the Bible...I certainly like to think I am
 - And if so, you may be questioning this promise
 - You may look at your life and see plenty of sin
 - You know you continue to stumble and you're struggling to gain hold of it
 - And even as you continue to study scripture you continue to make the same old mistakes
 - So perhaps you wonder if renewing your mind in God's word is truly working in your case
 - May I suggest that the very fact you recognize your sin and are unhappy with it is proof in itself that the word of God is working in your life?
 - Furthermore, have you forgotten the various sins God has already removed from your life?
 - The behaviors you've already laid aside, the "threads" of the old self that you set down years ago?
 - Sanctification is a life-long process, and it takes time
 - I'm not excusing laziness or neglect in our walk, but I'm saying what scripture says
 - Ever more, continue laying aside that coat
 - And let the renewing of your mind affect that change over time
 - How many stories could we tell here at OHBC over the past 30 years?
 - How many people have come through these doors, sat under the teaching of

- God's word for years
 - And in the course of time, lives were changed
 - Marriages healed, addictions broken, lusts removed, hurts forgiven, anger cooled, resentment mollified, relationships restored
 - Was it excellent preaching or stirring messages?
 - No, it was the simple truth of God's word faithfully preached in season and out of season
 - It was the renewing of our minds, learning Christ spiritually instead of simply making an outward show of religion
- And these are the things Paul expects to see changing in a church that sets its mind on learning Christ in the right way
 - A walk with Christ means changing a thousands areas of our lives, but some sins are particularly harmful to the proper operation of the body
 - Since the start of this chapter, Paul's been emphasizing the need for unity in the body
 - So now he turns his attention to five sins that especially work against unity
 - Paul gives the church advice in countering these five sins against unity
 - Each command has three parts
 - Paul gives a negative command
 - Followed by a positive command
 - Then finally a justification for the positive command

Eph. 4:25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.

Eph. 4:26 be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,

Eph. 4:27 and do not give the devil an opportunity.

Eph. 4:28 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.

Eph. 4:29 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.

Eph. 4:30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Eph. 4:31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Eph. 4:32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

- First, Paul asks the church to set aside falsehood, or deception in the Greek
 - Deception is more than a spoken lie
 - It includes anything that misrepresents reality, even flattery
 - Deception runs counter to the unity of the body, because it causes us to lose trust in one another
 - It's like that old garment re-emerges to cut us off from one another
 - Instead of deception, Paul gives the positive command to speak truth to one another
 - He quotes Zechariah when the Lord told Israel something similar
 - God wanted Israel to unify around the truth, just as Paul wishes the same for the Church
 - Which is Paul's justification for his positive command, that we are members of one another
- Likewise, unrighteous anger drives a wedge between members of the body
 - Notice Paul starts by saying be angry
 - Anger in this context means having a healthy sense of righteous indignation against sin
 - We should get a little angry when sin exists in the body, just as God shows wrath against sin
 - But then Paul gives the negative command not to sin
 - Paul makes a distinction between righteous forms of anger and sinful forms of anger
 - Anger itself is not wrong, as even Jesus displayed anger at times
 - But when the cause for our anger is not in keeping with righteousness, it is an expression of sin
 - If we become angry for righteous reasons, we must seek to resolve the issue "before the sun goes down," Paul says
 - I don't believe Paul meant literally before nightfall
 - Rather it's a colloquialism meaning in a timely manner
 - This is Paul's positive command in the context of anger, and it ensures we don't let anger get control or lead us astray
- We can't let anger fester because it gives opportunity for the devil, Paul justifies in v.27
 - The devil has no spiritual power over us
 - Our spirit has been born again and united with Christ's spirit
 - Therefore, the enemy's dominion has been broken in our life
 - Nevertheless, he desires to see God's people operate according to their old nature rather than in the new nature they've received
 - So he'll use any rope we give him to hang us

- Anger may begin righteous, but if we fail to resolve the issue that created our anger in a timely manner, we take a risk
- The enemy may turn our righteous anger into sin by leading us to grow resentful, jealous, spiteful, vindictive or worse
 - What may have begun as a righteous response to someone's error has turned into sin itself
 - And these consequences of misplaced or unresolved anger will split a church apart in no time
- Thirdly, Paul says thieves must stop stealing
 - Obviously, theft is wrong, but it can be especially devastating in the body of Christ
 - And that's the implication here
 - Paul is concerned about those who make a dishonest living and bring that behavior into the church
 - It's likely that behavior would only continue in the church, like with Judas among the apostles
 - This is another quick way to destroy the unity of the body by casting suspicions and distrust
 - Instead, everyone should labor performing his own work in a good and acceptable fashion
 - Not only will we avoid casting shame on the name of Christ, but we also restore trust and unity in the body
 - Moreover, if we all work in honest ways, we are adding to the combined resources of the church body
 - Rather than one person stealing from another, everyone is gaining
 - Which leads to Paul's justification that it means the church will have that much more to share with those in need
 - For that is central to the mission of the church to care for those who enter in by faith
 - Earning an honest wage is a part of meeting that mission
- Fourth, Paul directs that we not let an unwholesome word leave our mouths
 - The Greek word for unwholesome is literally counterfeit or worthless
 - Counterfeit currency is literally worthless, and so are certain kinds of speech
 - Gossip, innuendo, crude jokes or unfair remarks all have the potential to injure and weaken the body of Christ
 - Even an idle, unthoughtful word might fall into this category
 - So we should think carefully before speaking
 - Paul's positive command is to speak only what's good for edification according to the need of the moment
 - Edification means the strengthening of the body

- And there are times when saying nothing is the best thing we can do to edify the body
- And our purpose in this command is simply to give grace to everyone
 - Grace means being nice to that person who hasn't necessarily been nice to us
 - Refraining from a criticism against the person who deserves critique
 - Listening patiently to the long-winded laughing at the joke the tenth time you've heard it
 - Showing grace to another by using carefully chosen words that edify
- Your Bible may not reflect this accurately, but Paul's justification for not speaking out of turn continues into v.30
 - In Greek, v.30 begins with the word "and" indicating Paul is connecting this thought to the prior thought
 - We wish to show grace to all in our speech because to do otherwise is to grieve the Holy Spirit
 - Since we have been shown grace through the Holy Spirit living in us, don't grieve the Holy Spirit by failing to show at least grace to others
 - In this context, grieving the Spirit is similar to the parable Jesus taught in Matthew 18 of the man who was himself forgiven a great debt but was unwilling to forgive a small debtor
 - Jesus said that the Lord expects us to be as ready to show grace to others as He was to us
 - This is a service we provide to God in thanks for His mercy
 - So if we fail in that regard in something as simple as a kind word, we grieve the Holy Spirit
 - The very One Who seals us by God's grace
- We will cover Paul's fifth command next time as we move into Chapter 5
 - That leaves us for this morning reflecting on the need to lay aside the old, and put on the new by renewing our mind in the word
 - And as we walk our new walk, give special consideration to those sins that interfere with the unity of the body
 - For our participation in the body of Christ is the first mission of every believer
 - And it is your spiritual service of worship

- For unbelievers, the beliefs and practices of Christianity can appear to be a contradiction
 - On the one hand, they'll hear how we believe we're assured Heaven solely because of our trust in Jesus Christ
 - We reject any theology that doing good deeds is a means of salvation or that it even contributes to our salvation
 - Of course this confuses a world that assumes good things come to those who help themselves
 - As I've heard more than one unbeliever say having heard of salvation by grace through faith..."it can't be that easy"
 - But then having been saved, Christians maintain that doing good deeds should be the mark of a changed life
 - Jesus calls His followers to pursue doing good so that we may glorify our Father in Heaven
 - We put away sin and we seek to serve others as a loving response to our salvation, not a means of salvation
 - For believers taught by the Spirit of God, these concepts make perfect sense, but to the unbelieving world they can appear to be a contradiction
 - They see no sense in claiming a salvation that comes without regard to our personal merit or effort
 - Yet at the same time, teaching that the Lord demands good works from those He has saved
 - This theology is a stumbling block to other religious system because every false, manmade religious system assumes God thinks like we do
 - That He follows a cause-and-effect reward system
 - Those who do good, receive good; while those who do bad, receive judgment
 - That's how we operate
 - So unmerited favor seems too easy to an unbeliever, and doing works after receiving salvation seems pointless
 - It's like studying *after* the test is over
 - And yet this is exactly the way the Lord has constructed salvation
 - Because it brings Him all the glory and leaves us with none
 - He saved us without any of us lifting even a finger, so He alone deserves the glory
- Then secondly, when a believer lives an obedient life of good works, he or she continues to give God glory
 - Since we don't claim our good works as a means of earning salvation, then our good deeds can only be understood as an act of love for God
 - Consider the example of a young boy who decides to wash his father's car one Saturday morning

- Perhaps a neighbor witnesses the boy's good deed, and he assumes the boy's father must be paying the son to do this chore
- In which case, he simply concludes the boy is working to earn a wage
- But what would the neighbor think if he discovered that the boy wasn't being paid at all?
 - Instead, the young man simply decided to wash Dad's car out of love and respect for his father
 - Knowing this, the neighbor would naturally wonder what kind of father inspires such selfless love in his children
 - In that sense, the boy's good deed brought glory upon his father
 - And in the same way, we are called to glorify our Father in Heaven through good deeds done out of a heart thankful for our salvation
- We know by faith alone we have been adopted into the family of God, made sons and daughters of God Most High by His grace
 - So now that we are in the family, we are called to glorify the Father
 - First, by putting away sin, putting on the new self
 - And secondly, by living out our faith through good works
 - These things will lead the world to ask the question, "What kind of Father inspires His children to live this way?"
- This is where we find Paul at the end of Chapter 4 and moving into Chapter 5
 - He was exhorting the church to put on the new self, to let our Christ-like nature we received by our faith shine through
 - And to disassemble our corrupt, sinful outer man one thread at a time
 - This is the call of sanctification
 - It's a decision to take up an inward battle, to fight against ourselves for the glory of God
 - Paul's call to obedience in the faith runs three chapters, and when we last studied together, we reached the end of the first of those chapters
 - Paul was giving a series of five exhortations to adopt a different approach to life consistent with our new nature
 - If you remember, each of these exhortations had three parts:
 - A negative command to stop something, a positive command to begin something new in its place
 - And a justification or reason for why this change was beneficial or necessary
 - While we read through all five exhortations in vs.25-32, we only discussed four of the exhortations
 - The first was to stop speaking falsehoods
 - The second was to cease sinning in anger

- The third was to stop stealing
 - The fourth was to put an end to unwholesome speech
- Each of these is self-evidently a good thing
 - Just ask yourself how you feel when someone lies to you or comes against you in anger or steals from you or gossips about you
 - Clearly, these things are unloving and unholy and should not define the life of a follower of the Lord
- Yet as we said last time, they certainly define the world around us
 - In fact, these things are so common, they are expected and even tolerated
 - We celebrate someone who steals and gets away with it
 - We cheer those who say unwholesome things in a comedy routine or in a movie
- Therefore, it's all the more impactful when a Christian acts differently for the glory of God
 - We stand apart in a healthy way
 - And the Lord may use that to draw others to Himself, which is our mission while we await our resurrection
- That brings us to the final example at the end of Chapter 4, which is a list of several related behaviors

Eph. 4:31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Eph. 4:32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

- Paul commands that we put away or set aside six vices that work together in a particular way
 - Let's look at each vice for a second and see how they conspire to create a single problem in the body of Christ
 - First, Paul says put aside bitterness
- Bitterness is the Bible's term for a festering hurt or resentment against another
 - Bitterness is the opposite of grace and forgiveness
 - A bitter person keeps track of the wrongs done to him or her by another rather than letting them go
 - As Barclay once remarked, every Christian should pray that the Lord might teach us how to forget
- Next, Paul says put away wrath and anger
 - Wrath is a passionate response born out of forethought
 - It can come across as anger, but it's fundamentally not anger

- It's aggression or abuse focused against someone or something
- Anger is listed separately, because it's a different emotion
 - While wrath is a planned act of aggression, anger is an unthinking, emotional response to something
 - Remember, Paul said righteous anger is appropriate, since it is a Spirit-triggered emotion intended to stir us to a righteous response
 - But unrighteous anger manifested by the flesh is an impulsive act demonstrating a lack of self-control
- The next two, clamor and and slander, are also related
 - Clamor is a vocal outcry or outburst intended to create a disruption
 - Like shouting over someone else in an argument so as to silence them
 - Or being boisterous as a prideful display of power, like the way a man boasts loudly in a crowded bar hoping to intimidate an adversary
 - Similarly, slander is speaking words to hurt another, but the effect is very different
 - If clamor is a verbal frontal assault, slander is the rhetorical equivalent of a knife in the back
 - Slander is whispering false accusations about someone to anyone who will listen and hopefully repeat it
 - Lastly, Paul says put aside malice, which is focused hatred for another person manifested in a variety of ways
 - Having malice for another means being absorbed by thoughts of hurting them or seeing them come to harm
 - It's a preoccupation with another's downfall
- Paul asks us to put away these six vices, because together they work against healing and forgiveness in the body of Christ
 - There is no doubt that we will injure one another from time to time
 - You can't expect a group of very different people to come together into a single body and not expect some friction
 - That friction is a product of sin...of selfishness, pride, arrogance, thoughtlessness
 - While we understand that relationship problems will arise, we don't accept them nor ignore them
 - We came together to help each other put away our sin nature, so as our flaws come to light, we will call them out gently while encouraging better things
 - But that process will be blocked before it even starts if we harbor bitter, angry, unforgiving hearts
 - If someone does us wrong and we respond with wrath or slander rather than forgiveness, we will cement that person as our enemy
 - We can't shout them down or harbor hatred for them in our hearts, for that just

- exposes us as the evil one
- Which is why Paul issues the positive command to be kind to one another
 - Paul isn't merely saying "be nice" to everyone
 - He's speaking the context of being wronged
 - Be kind to those who wrong you, who hurt you or are thoughtless to you
- Don't just refrain from a negative response...go out of your way to provide a positive response
 - The opposite of retribution isn't merely silence...it's showing kindness
 - Paul says be tender-hearted, which means literally have a good heart
 - So that you might truly forgive one another
 - And of course our model is found in the way the Father forgave us in Christ
 - While we were His enemies, despising Him and offending Him in everything we did or said
 - He moved first to show us kindness, forgiving us and granting us mercy before we even knew we needed it
 - The kindness of God brought us to repentance
 - Here's one of the oxymoronic Christian moments for unbelievers
 - We show forgiveness to others because we have been forgiven
 - We show kindness to others who don't deserve it because the Father showed undeserving people like you and me His kindness
 - But it makes perfect sense to those of us who know the grace of God
 - We understand how love wins over the hard heart
 - So when we put away malice, anger and wrath, we surprise people who were bracing for a different response
 - When we refrain from clamoring to respond softly and kindly to a member of the body of Christ, we let kindness accomplish a work in their heart
- So as we end Chapter 4 and move into Chapter 5, we look back on Paul's command to live as one body putting on the new self
 - We live and work together in this world as one body with one Spirit through one faith
 - Yet we're gifted in a variety of ways by that same Spirit
 - Those different gifts work together to make us spiritually stronger together than we can be alone
 - We serve in our gifts, growing together in the likeness of Christ, acting as His body before the world
 - And if we're to fulfill that mission, we cannot look like the world
 - We must not follow in the same path of sin that defines their lives

- To do so is to be unlike Christ and therefore to be unlike His body
- And if we're not prepared to look like Christ, then how successful can we be in representing Him to the world?
- Like my example of the young boy who washes his father's car, what if that young boy was cussing as he did the job?
 - Or what if he used the neighbor's hose to wash the car, stealing the neighbor's water?
 - Or what if he threw his used rags on the neighbor's lawn?
 - Any message concerning the boy's love for his father was lost on the neighbor who saw just another unruly, thoughtless hooligan
- Which leads us into Chapter 5, with Paul moving away from discussions of behavior within the body to personal behaviors that mark our character

Eph. 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children;

Eph. 5:2 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.

Eph. 5:3 But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints;

Eph. 5:4 and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

- Therefore, Paul says, let's imitate God as His children
 - The word "therefore" comes in reference to our mission as Christ's body
 - Paul could have said "So that we may accomplish our mission, be imitators..."
 - This is a call to missional living for the sake of the Gospel
 - This is not about earning or preserving your salvation
 - This is about being effective in the role Christ assigned to His body
 - There is simply no other way
 - And it begins with walking in love
 - The phrase is certainly common, and everyone agrees with the concept
 - But when you see Paul's definition of what it means to walk in love, it gets harder
 - Paul defines walking in love as walking in Christ's footsteps
 - Specifically, Christ willingly lay down His life for those who were spitting on Him and whipping Him
 - He took insults and fists and returned them with sacrificial forgiveness
 - This is the biblical meaning of "walking in love" which is showing everyone self-

sacrificial, agape love

- This is walking in love, but it's hardly what the world means when it talks of love
 - But it is the love God expects, and it's a pleasing thing to our Father when we do it
 - If you and I are going to show that kind of love to others, then we must eliminate the behaviors that are contrary to that kind of love
 - And so what follows are an examination of the many ways we fail to walk in love
- Beginning with our personal purity
 - In v.3 Paul says if we want to walk in love as Christ walked, we can have no immorality, no impurity and no greed among the saints
 - These things can't even be named among us, Paul says
 - Which is to say that even the suggestion that such things are part of the body of Christ is harmful to our mission
 - If we thought Paul was going to go easy on us, it's clear Paul has no intention of skirting the tough issues
 - Immorality is a Greek word that always describes any conduct that defiles the marriage bed like fornication or adultery
 - While impurity refers to any form of unholy living like using pornography or illegal drug use
 - Finally greed seems to be connected to the earlier two thoughts, which means any uncontrolled appetite for evil things
 - Paul begins with these things because they are exactly the opposite of walking in love
 - Walking in love means sacrificing the desires of self for the betterment of others
 - But these actions are all about serving self at the expense of others
 - Fornication is having sex with someone without marrying them first
 - It's the most selfish form of love
 - It's stealing something precious from someone's future wife or husband
 - It's about serving our own greedy desires rather than sacrificing self for the sake of the other person and their future spouse
 - Obviously, we can say the same things about an adulterous or homosexual relationship
 - They are illegitimate relationships born out of selfishness and greed
 - They don't love another person because they aren't for the betterment of the other person
 - They are merely ways we love ourselves
- In fact, every immorality (drug abuse, pornography, etc.) is a selfish act that hurts others, whether directly or indirectly

- And therefore, we cannot allow such things to gain a perch inside the body of Christ
 - We cannot have even the suggestion that such things are compatible with a walk with Christ
 - Because their very existence in the body of Christ argues against the truth of our message
 - We say we want to show Christ's love to the world but then we act in ways that are the opposite to the way Christ loved
- In Paul's day in Greek cities like Ephesus, these behaviors were commonplace and so he's concerned about these things making their way into the church
 - But don't think we're far removed from these concerns
 - Many Christians today struggle with various forms of immorality
 - But it's even more troubling to know that many Christians aren't even struggling anymore
 - They have conceded to the existence of these things in their lives without even putting up a fight, as if it's the new normal
- Many churches have come to accept these things as normal in our culture
 - Like young Christian couples living together before marriage
 - Or Christians talking openly about enjoying watching near-pornographic television shows and movies
 - Or kids in Christian families using illegal drugs or alcohol, caught in "sexting" scandals at school, etc.
- If we think this is the new normal in the Church, then we've lost the message of love Christ left for us to share with the world
 - Our message has merely become the world's message
 - Which is love yourself at all costs
 - And that message brings no one closer to God
- Finally, Paul moves from immoral behaviors to immoral speech in v.4
 - Like Jesus said:

Matt. 15:18 "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.

Matt. 15:19 "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

- What lies in our hearts will find its way out of our mouths soon enough
 - And just as immoral and impure acts are contrary to love, so is vulgarity
- Let's look at each of Paul's concerns
 - Paul starts with filthy speech

- Filthiness is obscene conversation
 - Like two men discussing a woman's body in lurid terms
 - Or using profanity
- Speaking in these ways is the opposite of love
 - It's abusive to others
 - And it's insensitive to those who will be justifiably offended by such things
 - In fact, there is probably no faster way to undermine your Christian witness than to engage in profane or obscene speech
 - And by the same token, there is no more obvious and powerful way to stand apart from the world than to refrain from such language
- Next, Paul tells the church to cease silly talk, which could be translated foolish talk
 - This is a broad category of speech, but think of it as any talk that is beneath us
 - And in particular, any conversation that diminishes us in the eyes of those we're trying to influence for Christ
 - For example, repeating silly phrases like a child might or speaking in a silly voice
 - Or talking seriously about meaningless things as if they were worthy of mature conversation
 - I think much of what passes for entertainment on the internet (e.g., internet memes, for example) might fall into this category
 - We all enjoy the occasional cat video
 - But it's easy to get carried away with that sort of stuff to the point of acting juvenile
 - I think this category of speech is especially challenging for teenagers
 - It's a time in life when we're supposed to move beyond the silly and frivolous to serious concerns of life
 - Let's encourage our Christian teens to mirror their adult aspirations with adult speech patterns
 - Obviously, there can be moments in life when talking in silly ways is perfectly acceptable
 - Like when entertaining a baby or during private moments with your spouse
 - But when we carry these kinds of behaviors into a public setting, we encourage others to take us less seriously
 - And if that's who we become in front of our friends or acquaintances, then we'll find it difficult transitioning to serious discussions of eternal life
 - And it's in that sense that we are unloving when we talk in this way
 - If we truly have love for the lost, then we will guard ourselves against looking frivolous or silly before them
 - We want to make sure they see us as serious, thoughtful people who can be

- trusted to offer meaning counsel on weighty matters
- People don't seek eternal advice from people who can't act like an adult
- Finally, Paul asks us to put aside coarse jesting
 - He's talking about dirty jokes, and we all know one when we hear it
 - Keep in mind that this category also includes subtle dirty humor
 - Like double entendres that imply something profane
 - Once again, we know when we hear it
 - And term coarse jesting also includes crude remarks of any kind
 - For example, making off-handed remarks about someone's spouse
 - Thomas Constable tells a story of a time he attended a wedding where a guest proudly declared that she was the first person to get the groom drunk
 - That was coarse jesting too
 - Coarse talk of this sort isn't consistent with walking in love because it imposes on others
 - Either it offends
 - Or it incites lust
 - Or it celebrates depravity and sin in others
 - In all cases, it is contrary to love and detracts from our ability to represent Christ
- Instead of these speech patterns, use your tongue to give thanks, Paul says
 - First to the Lord Himself and then to others
 - Be someone who is a blessing with your mouth
 - Because in that way you will certainly stand apart from the world
 - Which can only serve to help you reach them for Christ
 - We've just begun the chapter and there is a lot more waiting for us here
 - Paul will move from individual purity to marriage and then family and to those in authority
 - We'll have plenty more to consider as we go
 - But before we look past today, give some sober thought to how you carry yourself in the things Paul mentioned
 - Remember, your job is to glorify the Father from a thankful, holy heart

- We're returning to Paul's fifth chapter of Ephesians, where we pick up again in Paul's list of personal vices that stand in the way of our mission as Christians
 - Last we studied, Paul was calling upon the church in Ephesus to walk in love as Christ did
 - Which we understood means to live self-sacrificially, loving others more than ourselves
 - Putting the needs of others over our needs
 - We do all this to show Christ to the world, as ambassadors drawing men and women to Christ
 - We're talking about having a missional mindset, which is a mark of spiritual maturity
 - But when our old nature drives our thinking and our behavior, we cease walking in love, choosing instead to love ourselves
 - In those moments – or seasons – of our life, we're setting aside our mission
 - We're taking a vacation from our service to Christ and from our witness to the world
 - Paul says we ought not do that
 - Then Paul embarked on a laundry list of personal vices that interfere with walking in love
 - Paul began with immorality and impurity
 - Then he moved to vulgarity and unhelpful speech
 - Those two categories alone were enough to convict all of us, I'm sure
 - But knowing what we should do is one thing, yet finding reason to actually do it is another
 - And Paul understood the challenge he was placing before the church
 - So he interrupts his list of vices for an exhortation to give cause for us to obey these commands
 - His exhortation begins in v.5 and runs until v.17

Eph. 5:5 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.

Eph. 5:6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Eph. 5:7 Therefore do not be partakers with them;

Eph. 5:8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light

Eph. 5:9 (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth),

Eph. 5:10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

- In v.5 Paul says that people who do the very things he just counseled against will not see an inheritance in the kingdom
 - In Greek, there is no article before the word inheritance
 - So the better translation would be that none of these people “has inheritance” in the kingdom
 - The lack of an article before the word inheritance suggests this is a reference to unbelievers
 - That is, those who have no part of the kingdom whatsoever
 - From there Paul goes on to contrast believers with unbelievers throughout the rest of this passage
 - His point is we can’t let the world’s behaviors become our testimony since we have a mission to stand apart from the world
 - That is to say, if we adopt the same behaviors as an unbeliever...
 - Paul says “if we become partakers with them”
 - Then we have no hope to influence the world for Christ
 - Then notice how Paul develops his argument
 - First, he tells the church don’t be deceived by empty words
 - False teachers were apparently teaching that a Christian’s behaviors were not important to God
 - Once we come to faith, we’re saved regardless of how we behave
 - Therefore, we shouldn’t concern ourselves with being holy or pursuing sanctification, etc.
- Paul disputes this false teaching with three arguments
 - First, Paul says these behaviors bring about God’s wrath
 - For believers, God poured His wrath out on Christ
 - While unbelievers receive God’s wrath themselves
 - Either way, Paul’s point is God detests these behaviors
 - Knowing these things lead God to pour His wrath out on the world, how can we think God approves of us following in their footsteps?
 - Do we suppose God doesn’t mind? Do we expect Him to turn a blind eye?
 - We may not receive His wrath, since He already poured that wrath out on His Son for our sake
 - Nevertheless, we would be foolish to think we can sin with impunity in the meantime
 - The Lord will not be mocked, not even by His children

- So Paul's first point is that we know these things are not acceptable to God, because He says they are deserving of His wrath
- Secondly, Paul says we are not called to be partakers with the world
 - The Greek word for partaker can be translated partner or one who shares something with another
 - We aren't supposed to share the same testimony or lifestyle as that of unbelievers
 - We are to live missionally, which requires we walk a different path
 - It's as if believers and unbelievers are both salespeople, each pitching a different product
 - Unbelievers are declaring that what they offer "Tastes Great"
 - And the Church is declaring that what we offer is "Less Filling"
 - But what if we adopted their slogan?
 - They said "tastes great" and our response was "tastes great"
 - That's what happens when we act like them and look like them
 - Their slogan becomes our slogan, because their product becomes our product
 - Missional thinking understands that we can't look like the world or else we have nothing to offer them
 - In v.8 Paul says, remember you were taken out of their world and brought into a new life by His grace
 - You were once a salesman for the product of darkness
 - Now you are selling the product of Light
 - So walk as children of the Light
 - Which means displaying goodness and representing truth
 - So Paul's second argument is, we must look different than the world if we are to influence the world
- Which leads us to Paul's third argument in v.10
 - We are to live for the goal of pleasing the Lord, not ourselves
 - The Christian who thinks he or she can do whatever they want because we've already been forgiven by the blood of Christ is seeking only to please him or herself
 - That's not the goal of a Christian life
 - Notice Paul says in v.10 that we are trying to learn what pleases Christ
 - The phrase "trying to learn" is a single Greek word that means to prove something
 - It's the same Greek word used in Romans 12:2 when Paul says

Rom. 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- So Paul isn't suggesting that we are all searching to know what Christ wants as if it's a big mystery
 - We already know what pleases Christ, because it's in His word
 - Paul means we "prove" to the world what pleases God
 - We are walking billboards displaying godliness and holiness
- When people witness us living differently, they get proof of what pleases Christ
 - They learn that God is pleased when we keep His commands
 - That He is pleased when we walk in love
 - And He is pleased when we serve Him in our mission
 - We prove these truths by our lifestyle
- But take a second look at how Paul began this passage
 - Paul opened in v.5 saying you know with certainty...
 - Paul strings together two different Greek words for "to know"
 - In effect, Paul says "you know that you know"
 - He's emphasizing this truth is something believers can't deny
 - We can't pretend we haven't heard it or we hope it isn't true
 - We know that unbelievers have no inheritance in the kingdom
 - This is an odd way for Paul to describe unbelievers, that is as those without inheritance in the kingdom
 - It's oddly specific, because of course unbelievers have no inheritance in the kingdom
 - They won't even *be* in the kingdom
 - So why make a reference to an unbelievers' lack of inheritance?
 - I think Paul chose that odd reference to remind believers that we need to think about how our behavior impacts our inheritance
 - Living like the world means potentially sacrificing something in the kingdom
 - In effect, this becomes Paul's fourth argument against sharing in the world's behaviors
 - Not only are we testing God, not only are we failing to stand apart from the world, and not only are we not pleasing Christ...
 - But we are also taking risks with our reward
- So rather than joining in the world's behaviors, Paul says we must go in an opposite direction

Eph. 5:11 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them;

Eph. 5:12 for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.

Eph. 5:13 But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.

**Eph. 5:14 For this reason it says,
“Awake, sleeper,
And arise from the dead,
And Christ will shine on you.”**

- Don't participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, Paul says
 - Here again, his mention of bearing fruit (or lack thereof) alludes to our inheritance
 - We'll gain nothing by following after the world's example
 - On the other hand, we bear fruit for God when we obey Him
- When we live a called-out life, Paul says we expose the deeds of darkness
 - This is an important principle of Christian witnessing
 - But it can be misunderstood in practice
- The principle is this: when we live a life following Christ, we expose the sin of the world, which is the purpose of the Church on earth
 - It's the Principle of Contrast
 - Differences in form suggest differences in meaning
 - When two things differ in appearance, they represent differences in meaning or message
- For example, the color red in a traffic light contrasts starkly with the color green
 - The contrast between the colors indicates to us a difference in meaning (i.e., stop vs. go)
 - And even if you're color blind, you can still perceive a contrast
 - Because the location of each colored light is contrasted (i.e., red on top vs. green on bottom) to reinforce there is a difference in meaning
- And so it must be for the Church if we're going to fulfill our mission
 - Our choices are supposed to contrast with the world's choices so we may convey a different meaning, a different message
 - That's what Paul means when he says we expose the deeds of darkness
 - Our life of godliness sheds light on the world's evil
 - But it goes beyond merely exposing evil
 - In fact, the Greek word translated expose actually means to refute
 - So by our life we are refuting the world's perspective

- For example, they say humans evolved from animals
 - By how we live, we testify we were created in God's image
- The world says fleshly desires are natural and cannot be judged no matter how depraved and selfish
 - We testify that we are desperately wicked by nature and deserving of judgment, yet by grace we may be rescued
- The world holds we are living meaningless and temporary lives of quiet desperation, therefore get all you can while you can
 - We testify that everyone has an eternal future, therefore consider carefully what comes after death
- As obvious as the Principle of Contrast may be, some Christians misunderstand how the Bible expects us to put this principle into practice
 - Some Christians think it's about what we say rather than what we do
 - So they choose to expose the world's sin using only their mouths, rather than through living a holy lifestyle
 - They call out others' sin while failing to deal with it in their own lives
- We've all seen examples of such misdirected witnessing for Christ
 - Like Christians who post condemning messages online against homosexuality, yet at the same time they praise movies depicting sex and violence or music laced with obscenities
 - They protest legalized abortion but they turn a blind eye to unmarried Christian couples living together
 - They complain about the ungodliness inside public schools while raising kids that use profanity and pornography
- So when Paul says we are to "expose" the deeds of darkness, we need to understand he's talking about our behavior, not our words
 - We are to preach the Gospel everyday and everywhere, but only use words when necessary
 - Our mission is to live a called-out life before our neighbors, not call out our neighbors for their sinful lives
 - To do otherwise is to risk becoming known for what we're against rather than to be known for Who we serve
- That's why Paul remarks in v.12 that it's disgraceful to even speak of the things the world does in secret
 - He means when it comes to dealing with the gross immoralities that characterize the world, believers need less talk and more walk
 - It's unwholesome to even discuss the evil that runs rampant around us, because the Bible tells us to separate ourselves from the things of the world
 - That means moving so far away from it that we're not even drawn into conversations about such things

- So when your colleagues at the water cooler or your friends between classes are entertaining discussion of evil things, step away
- Because in the end, apologetics isn't about bringing powerful arguments in to those moments
 - It's about having a convicting testimony
 - So that through living a called-out life, you expose the evil of the world
 - That exposure may then lead to an opportunity for you to give your testimony
 - Some may be convicted by your lifestyle, and so they will ask you to give a defense for the hope in you
 - At that point, you will have skipped past the need to discuss disgraceful things
 - You'll be speaking about the Lord and His love and grace
- That's what Paul means when he says the evil things of the world become visible when they are exposed by light, because light exposes everything
 - Living a life that puts away sin and obeys the Lord is light in an evil world
 - As Jesus taught us

Matt. 5:14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;

Matt. 5:15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

Matt. 5:16 “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

- Collectively, the Church is to be a light in the world
 - The Lord placed us in the world to make the truth visible
 - When we live differently than the world, we shine a light that exposes their darkness
 - Notice in v.16 Jesus says our light is our good works, not our good words
- Isn't interesting how often as we plan ways to reach the world for Christ, our thoughts run first to better ways we can communicate better about Christ
 - We make flyers, billboards, websites, programs, videos, etc.
 - We begin to think that our mission is to talk about Christ
 - But the Bible says that's putting the cart before the horse
 - Our mission begins with how we live, so that through good deeds, we bring light to darkness and then we follow that with our words
 - Ironically, if we were to talk to the world about Christ and about our church...
 - Yet at the same time we mimic the world's behaviors and habits and speech and values...
 - Then we would shed no spiritual light despite our words, because we blend into the world and share in their darkness

- But turn that around...when we live a called-out life before the world...
 - Showing kindness and charity to everyone, while restraining our speech
 - In purity and self-restraint, steering clear of the bad behavior of the world
 - And even going so far as to excuse ourselves when conversations turn to sordid or vulgar topics
 - Then Paul says we will be serving the mission of bringing light into darkness *even if we should say nothing about Christ*
- And in the end, your lifestyle will lead to opportunity to testify, because sooner or later someone is going to ask you important questions
 - Someone in a crisis will come to you for spiritual support because they remember you lived in a peace others lacked
 - Or someone convicted in their sin by your called-out life will ask how they can rise above their sin too
 - In those moments, you'll share your testimony, and it will have power to work far beyond your expectations
 - Because your life testimony preceded your testimony of words, and in that way you brought light into that person's dark world
- Paul sums up his arguments in v.14 by quoting what might have been an early Christian hymn or poem
 - He says to the believer "awake and rise from the dead, so Christ may shine on you"
 - This is probably a hymn paraphrasing of Isaiah 60:1
 - It's an elegant, concise summary of all that Paul has been teaching
 - Having been saved and made alive in Christ spiritually, now we must awaken from the dead life we lived before faith
 - This is another way of saying we must take off that old nature and put on the new self, in behavioral terms
 - Our spiritual nature has already changed – that is, we're awake – but now the time has come to rise up out of bed and get to work
 - But many Christians are still lying in bed, so to speak
 - Like a person who has been awoken by their alarm clock
 - They reached over to silence the alarm, but they think to themselves, "Boy this bed sure feels comfortable."
 - It would be so easy to just stay in that bed, to fall back to sleep
 - But they know they must arise, because they have to get to work or school on time
 - Getting out of bed requires a degree of effort and commitment and sacrifice
 - It doesn't feel good
 - Nevertheless, we will ourselves to do what's right even though it runs against the desires of our flesh

- We do so because we want the blessings that come from our paycheck or from the degree we're pursuing
- We know if we stay in bed, the good feeling passes quickly
- And before long, we'll regret putting something far greater at risk
- That's what the hymn means when it says "Christ will shine on you"
 - It's a reference to the blessing that Christ will bring to those who make the effort to leave their dead life behind
 - If we rise to follow Christ we will know His pleasure which is reflected in our reward
 - That's our motivation to turn off the snooze and crawl out of that comfortable bed
 - It's a decision to forgo temporary pleasure to gain eternal blessings
- As Paul concludes

Eph. 5:15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise,

Eph. 5:16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

Eph. 5:17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

- Therefore, let's be careful how we live our Christian life, our walk with Christ
 - Don't be unwise, which is to say don't make foolish tradeoffs
 - Electing to stay in bed an extra hour or two at the risk of being fired or failing a class is an obviously unwise choice
 - Similarly, electing to live in immorality, impurity, greed, vulgarity or in any way that pleases the flesh and displeases the Lord is also unwise
 - It's trading something eternal and weighty for something temporary and meaningless
 - Instead, Paul tells us to make the most of your time
 - Your time refers to the number of days each of us have been appointed to live on earth
 - People don't usually like to talk much about mortality
 - But everyone knows it...no one lives forever
 - We have a limited time to serve Christ, to prove ourselves faithful servants
 - As I reflect on my own situation, I can sense the time slipping away
 - My walk began when I came to Christ in my late twenties...so let's round up to age 30
 - Let's also assume I'll be blessed to live until age 80
 - That's gives me 50 years of opportunity
 - If that sounds like a lot of time, then you must be under the age of 25, because

to anyone past middle age, it doesn't sound like much

- And it isn't...that's only 18,250 days
 - Then consider I've already reached the age of 51, so that means I only have a little over 10,000 days left give or take
 - That's assuming I live to 80...it might be far less
 - And no matter what age we are now, who's to say how many years we have remaining?
- So Paul says count each day and maximize its potential
 - Don't worry about the days already past, since what can we do about those anyway?
 - Let's think only about what's left and ask yourself how are you going to use each of those days to bring light to the world?
 - What behaviors still stand in the way?
 - Paul asks us to make the most of those days...why let even one be wasted?
 - Paul says we should do this because the days are evil
 - He means if we don't make a plan and commitment to use the days well, the evil of the world around us and of our flesh will probably get the better of us
 - We may go to bed with the best of intentions to get up early and make it to work on time
 - But if all we have is good intentions, then "hope" is not a plan
 - So when the moment of decision comes, the evil in our flesh will likely pull us off our goal
 - One my brothers was notorious for sleeping soundly
 - His alarm clock would sound but he would silence it without even waking up
 - He was constantly late for school or work
 - He was sleeping at my house the night my wife went into labor with our first child
 - Despite the commotion, he never woke up
 - We even tried to wake him as we were leaving the house for the hospital, but no matter how hard I shook him, he wouldn't wake up
 - So eventually he had to make a plan to be sure he woke up in the morning
 - He bought the loudest alarm he could find and placed it on the other side of his bedroom
 - So when the alarm sounded, he was forced to arise and get out of bed to silence it
 - That's Paul's charge to us today
 - We must make plans in our life that will guard us from ourselves and lead us to make the most of each day that remains
 - And then we can live out the testimony we've been given

- For the purpose of glorifying our Father in Heaven
- Leading to the potential for greater blessing in the Kingdom to come

- It's time to return to Paul's instructions to the church concerning walking in love
 - Last week we gained a reprieve from Paul's exhortations for Christian living
 - Instead, we heard Paul's arguments for *why* we should pursue this walk
 - In short, Paul argued our lives are to be missionally-minded
 - And he gave several reasons for making missional living our goal
 - Paul summed up his argument in v.14 quoting a hymn of his day that paraphrased Isaiah 60:1
 - We are to arise from our slumber
 - To wake up from living like the world
 - So that as we walk out our new life before the world, we may serve Christ as He intended
 - Displaying light, exposing the world's evil and proving what pleases the Lord
 - As we do these things, we will see Christ shine on us
 - We will be blessed now and in the kingdom
 - As we understand this truth, we find greater motivation to tackle our sin, crucify our flesh and walk in the Spirit
- You remember he started the chapter discussing immorality, vulgarity and other ways our behaviors can detract from our witness to the world
 - In Ephesus these behaviors were likely common among the Greek pagans who were coming into the Church
 - So Paul called upon the church to put aside their old self and put on a new self, one consistent with their new nature
 - But as we noted, these behaviors are still common in the unsaved culture around us
 - So we still have equal reason to set them aside today
 - We need to look different if we're going to convince the world we possess a different message
 - That's our mission, and it requires focus
 - Then Paul gave us added urgency saying we must make the most of the time God gives us for accomplishing this mission
 - Because our lives are short, at least in view of eternity
 - We each get very little time to serve Christ before we receive our report card
 - And the days in which we live are evil, Paul says
 - So we have to prepare and plan to do the right thing if we hope to succeed more often than not
 - So let's go back to Paul and pick up where he left off, naming sins that easily entangle believers and distract us from our mission

Eph. 5:17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Eph. 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,

- Notice Paul begins with the word “so”
 - He’s drawing the proper conclusion for us
 - And there truly is just one sensible conclusion we can make given what we studied last week
 - We’re here to serve a purpose, a mission to bring light into a dark world, to expose the world’s evil by proving what pleases God
 - Our mission requires we stand apart from the world, that we look different and live differently
 - And we do this knowing our time is short and the days are evil
 - Therefore, Paul says we cannot afford to be foolish
 - The label “fool” is a strong word in scripture
 - It means to act without reason, to act without sense
 - And given the importance of our mission and the limited time we have, we must act sensibly, not foolishly
 - A lot of Christians do, in fact, live foolishly though
 - They live without proper reasoning
 - They are not thinking about what life is truly about and what they’re here to do for Christ
 - Some Christians float through life, from moment to moment, pursuing the world while keeping Jesus in a corner reserved for Sundays, Easter and Christmas
 - What’s missing for these believers?
- Paul says in the second half of v.17 that the issue is they aren’t seeking to understand what the will of God is
 - In this context, the will of God refers to God’s desires for their life
 - His will for how they live, what they are on earth to do in service to Christ
 - They aren’t asking the question, “What does the Lord want for my life?”
 - And they aren’t consumed in finding the answer
 - And therefore they can’t walk according to His plan and fulfill His purposes in their life
 - Perhaps more importantly, they don’t concern themselves with God’s will for His followers in general
 - They aren’t reading His word to learn His expectations for a called-out life
 - They aren’t aware a judgment is coming, they aren’t thinking about the day

- they stand before Christ
 - And they aren't concerned with how their choices and decisions now will impact that day to come
- Imagine a young man who was drafted into the army but he never bothered to read his draft notice when it came in the mail
 - The young man had been called into service, yet he kept on living for himself oblivious to his new calling
 - He was oblivious because he hadn't taken time to read what he knew was true, and certainly we would describe such a man as foolish
 - One day a policeman knocks on his door, and much to his surprise he's taken away
- I think that's Paul's concern for the church in Ephesus
 - He didn't want the church to live ignorantly unaware of the mission God was calling them to serve
 - Or even worse, disregarding what they already knew God expected
 - Having been distracted or deceived into following the world instead of Christ
- Paul then calls out one particular form of distraction and disobedience, one that forms the first half of a comparison at the heart of today's teaching
 - Paul says do not become drunk with wine
 - There is no mystery in the Greek words Paul is using here
 - To be drunk means simply to be inebriated, to lose control of our faculties by consuming too much alcohol
 - And the word wine refers to the fermented drink common to Paul's day just as it is today
 - Some have tried to argue that wine in the Bible isn't really wine
 - And if you are interested in an in-depth explanation of how we know the word wine in the Bible refers to an alcoholic beverage, read our article here: [May a Christian drink alcohol?](#)
 - But the Bible teaches believers have liberty to consume alcohol responsibly so long as they do so without becoming drunk
 - We are expected to recognize where the line is between enjoying wine in the way God intended
 - And crossing that line into drunkenness which is abuse and it is sin
 - Substance abuse is a particularly dangerous form of sin
 - It robs us of our senses and erects barriers between us and the Spirit's leading
 - If substance abuse becomes a fixture in our lives, it will likely give rise to other sinful practices
 - In the end, the sin of drunkenness is the abandonment of self-control
- Self-control is always the goal for the Christian

- It is the goal for all areas of our walk
 - Nothing of this world should control us
 - Only the Spirit of God should have our obedience
 - Therefore, whether we abuse wine or prescription drugs or illegal drugs or food or something else, we are sinning
- So why did Paul focus on wine?
 - First, wine was the drug of choice in his day
 - It was easily made, reasonably priced and commonly available
 - There were few other ways to sin in the same, socially-accepted way
- Today, we have a smorgasbord of choices for stimulating our body in an attempt to escape
 - So we should understand this teaching broadly as a condemnation of any kind of inebriation regardless of the source
 - It is always a lack of self-control and a giving over of our bodies to something other than the Holy Spirit
- Paul says when we demonstrate a lack of self-control and allow ourselves to become drunk, we are experiencing dissipation
 - The Greek word translated dissipation can have three meanings, and all three are applicable here
 - First, dissipation means self-indulgence or excessiveness
 - Acting in an excessive way and for selfish reasons
 - Certainly, the decision to be drunk can be understood to be an excessive act born out of selfishness
 - This definition reminds us that drunkenness is ultimately a choice, a decision
 - Christians who get drunk are making a choice, they are not victims of an outside force
 - There may be complex life circumstances that lead us to make our mistakes
 - But in the end, becoming drunk involves a decision or series of decisions made in our flesh and at the expense of others
- Secondly, the word dissipation means a squandering of resources
 - And certainly becoming drunk involves squandering resources
 - But we're not referring to the money spent on drink or drugs
 - Paul is primarily referring to the squandering of time and opportunity
 - Remember, last week Paul said we must make the most of our time, this brief period we will live on earth to serve Christ
 - In my life I counted maybe 10,000 days remaining in my life
 - Assuming that's accurate, then every day I might choose to spend drunk would be one less day I'm serving Christ and the mission

- And I don't have enough days that can I afford to waste even one
- I want to make the most of every day knowing I will face judgment one day
- Paul also said the days are evil, so we must be on our guard
 - We must make plans and adopt strategies to avoid being sidelined in our mission whether by the schemes of the enemy or our own temptations
 - And drinking excessively is one of the surest ways to get sidelined in the pursuit of Christ and His will in your life
 - So if I'm prone to drunkenness, I must take meaningful steps to avoid that temptation because the days are short and evil
- In fact, every addictive drug creates a craving in the flesh
 - So as we give ourselves over to it, we make future episodes of drunkenness all the more likely
 - We're strengthening our flesh at the expense of our spirit
 - So a choice to become drunk today means dissipation today and makes it more likely the Christian will lose more days in the future
- The only hope is to break the pattern so we can establish a new pattern
 - We must starve the flesh of its drug so that its attraction will weaken over time
 - Meanwhile, we spend time strengthening our spirit through the pursuit of Christ in the discipline of our faith
 - To do otherwise is to waste resources, and the most precious resource we have is our time to serve the Lord
- And finally, the word for dissipation in Greek can also be translated "unsavedness"
 - Because the entire existence of an unbeliever can be described as dissipation
 - An unbeliever lives a lifetime on earth opposing God and wasting their time
 - Only then to spend eternity in the Lake of Fire
 - Their life is one big self-indulgent, excessive affair that ends in nothing...and they will be forgotten in eternity
 - Then in v.18 Paul applies this same word to believers who get drunk because drunkenness makes the believer indistinguishable from unbelievers
 - Physically, a drunk believer looks exactly like the world in many ways
 - While we are drunk we sideline our witness and our pursuit of the mission
 - Because inebriation robs us of our sensibilities
 - We can't make choices that reflect Christ or show love
 - We are simply a walking display of debauchery
 - So to any observer, we simply look like the world, and lacking contrast we cannot serve the mission
 - And spiritually, the drunk believer is also like the world, at least in a sense

- Clearly believers share nothing in common spiritually with unbelievers
 - But in practical terms, the drunk believer is no more spiritually-directed than the sober unbeliever
 - Neither an unbeliever nor a drunk believer is under control of the Spirit
- While we're under the influence of any drug, our flesh takes charge and hands control over to the enemy
 - If you've ever been drunk, do you remember saying or doing things you would never normally say or do?
 - That's proof to you that you are not acting under the control of the Spirit but of the flesh and the enemy
 - The more we drug ourselves, the more our flesh gains control while our spirit becomes imprisoned
- All three meanings of the word dissipation point us to the same conclusion:
 - We're engaged in a battle between flesh and spirit so we can't afford to be foolish
 - The wise thing to do is to seek to be filled by the Spirit rather than wine, Paul says in the second half of v.18
 - It means to come under control of the Spirit, to be filled in the same way as someone may be filled with rage or joy
 - The Greek verb filled is in the passive tense, meaning this is something done to us not by us
 - So we are called to set aside anything that conflicts with the Spirit so that He is free to lead us
 - We are to be consumed by the will and desires of the Spirit
 - We are to be under His control in the sense that we yield to the Spirit's will and desires by denying our flesh its desires
 - That's how the Lord has constructed the process of our sanctification
 - We must set aside our flesh to give the Spirit opportunity to take over
 - We must say no to self before we can say yes to the Spirit
 - When we do that, the Spirit will guide us for as long as we seek the will of God
- Some believers see Paul's contrast in v.18 between being drunk in the flesh vs. being filled by the Spirit and come to a wrong conclusion
 - They assume a filling of the Spirit is like a filling of wine, something we must take in that isn't with us normally
 - As if we must take in a secondary experience of the Spirit beyond what we already received at the point we were saved
 - Secondly, they imagine that being filled with the Spirit must result in a similar physical response to being drunk with wine
 - A believer filled with the Spirit should exhibit strange or unconscious behaviors
 - Out of this thinking comes charismatic errors of one kind or another including

- the teaching that a person isn't truly saved without such manifestations
 - And that even true believers must seek after a subsequent "filling" of the Spirit following salvation
- Reading v.18 in its context makes clear the charismatic teachings are born out of a wooden interpretation of the text, one that misses Paul's point entirely
 - We can see Paul is contrasting slavery to a physical addiction with submitting to the Spirit
 - And these things work in opposite ways, not in similar ways
 - One is a barrier to serving Christ while another is a means to serving Him
 - One causes us to lose control over our flesh, while the other puts our flesh in subjection
 - One is giving in to self while the other is yielding to the Spirit
- In fact, Paul goes on to clarify what walking in the Spirit looks like in the life of a believer

Eph. 5:19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;

Eph. 5:20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;

Eph. 5:21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

- In this list we find four behaviors that typify a believer walking in the Spirit
 - Each of these believers has a parallel to the earlier contrast with drunkenness
 - In contrast to the counterfeit joy that comes from feeding the flesh with wine or any such thing, Paul's examples illustrate true joy among believers walking in the Spirit
 - These things enhance fulfilling the mission, in contrast to the dissipation of feeding the flesh
- First, Paul says a believer walking in the Spirit with a mind set on the mission speaks to other believers in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs
 - He's talking about public expressions of joy
 - A psalm is a poem of praise taken from the Old Testament book of the same name
 - A hymn is a song of praise sung to the glory of God
 - And spiritual songs are simply any other joyful expression of spiritual truth (we might include Christian pop music here)
 - When you see someone singing in public, they appear joyful and exuberant
 - Ironically, you might wonder if they are drunk
 - And that's Paul's point of comparison, of course

- If you want to get a little silly in public, then do it in the Spirit rather than the flesh
 - Rather than getting drunk, standing on tables and singing your school fight song, sing songs of praise to the Lord by the Spirit
 - That's an expression of joy that serves the purpose of the mission
- Secondly, a believer in the Spirit directs their joy to the Lord in private praise
 - Paul says we are to sing and make music to the Lord in our hearts
 - This is inward praise and joy before the Lord
 - So find joy in knowing what you have eternally in Christ and carry that joy in your heart praising Him continually
- This is in contrast to those who run from God into their addiction
 - We can't show God joy in our heart if we're so drugged we can't think straight much less praise Him sensibly
 - Furthermore, the desire to be drunk is inherently an act of running from God, not toward Him
 - Of denying Him rather than praising Him
 - Like the Prodigal Son, we're saying we want to run away to enjoy our inheritance now rather than remaining patient under the Father's authority
- Thirdly, Paul says give thanks for all things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to God
 - Those who abuse wine or other drugs are usually seeking an escape
 - At first, we may turn to a drug to numb ourselves from pain or disappointment in our life
 - Eventually we come to rely on the drug, and then the addiction takes on a life of its own
 - Seeking to escape from disappointments and trials in life is the opposite of giving thanks to the Lord for all things, including for trials
 - The Bible teaches we are to thank the Lord for the trials we face knowing they are opportunities for spiritual reward

James 1:2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,

James 1:3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

James 1:4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- James says trials are cause for joy because they present opportunity for eternal reward
 - But of course that assumes we endure them properly
 - We must face them soberly, prayerfully, seeking counsel and support from our brothers and sisters

- Asking what good thing is the Lord trying to accomplish through this trial and how should I respond to it in godliness to ensure a reward?
- If we bring that mature perspective to our disappointments, we can learn to count or consider our trials as a source of joy
- Therefore, we thank the Lord for everything, both the things that please us and the things that try us
 - But if we escape into a bottle or a needle, we won't be thanking the Lord for a trial
 - We'll be too busy trying to forget the trial is even happening
- Finally, Paul says Christians led by the Spirit will be subject to one another in the church out of fear of Christ
 - Paul isn't saying that we are to obey everyone and everyone is to obey us
 - That's a recipe for anarchy in the body
 - Paul will go on to explain what he means specifically in the following passages on wives, husbands, children and others
 - In short, Paul is saying we are to willingly submit to those spiritual authorities in our life whoever they may be
 - And everyone has one or more spiritual authorities in their life
 - Children have fathers, wives have husbands, workers and slaves have masters
 - And everyone has elders and teachers in the church
 - Collectively, these people (when they rule properly) help ensure godly outcomes in our lives
 - Therefore, a Christian led by the Spirit will recognize the benefit of these positions and respect them and turn to them in times of need
 - As we allow God to work through those relationships, we are the beneficiaries
 - As the writer of Hebrews said:

Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

- Those in authority over us are there to help us be more godly
 - The Lord even considers them responsible for the outcome to a degree, such that they will give an account one day
 - We can make their lives easier or harder as they seek to guide and teach and admonish us
 - We can fight against the spiritual authorities in our life, or avoid them or lie to them or even dispute their right to have authority
 - But if we make it harder for them to serve us in these ways, then we're only hurting ourselves

- Because we're the ones who fail to profit by their leadership Scripture says
- So Christians who walk in the Spirit will be those who show a sincere willingness to be led by others in spiritual matters and they will submit
 - By contrast, those who turn to wine or other escapes to deal with their spiritual issues are in effect failing to submit to leaders
 - First, they are escaping from a trial rather than turning to the church for assistance and guidance through the trial
 - Secondly, by becoming incapacitated they erect barriers to fellowship that prevent those leaders from correcting or encouraging them through the trial
 - Thirdly, they are disobeying the spiritual counsel of those in authority and of the word of God
 - In all three ways, they are not submitting to one another but are engaged in dissipation
 - Paul goes forward from here into an extended discussion of submission in the body, since it is a key to walking in the Spirit and accomplishing the mission
 - So we have a lot more to say on this topic
 - Today we stop here reflecting on the importance of sobriety in our walk, regardless of how our life circumstances may turn
 - If you are facing difficulties in your life that feel overwhelming, don't escape into a prescription bottle or wine bottle or something similar
 - Ask the Lord to help you understand why this trial was necessary in your life
 - Ask Him what eternal good work will be accomplished through your endurance
 - Ask Him to comfort you through the church body and to bring relief soon
 - But don't try to escape and thereby lose the benefit the Lord is working to bring to you
 - Walk in the Spirit, giving thanks for everything, praising the Lord in your heart

- As the Lord would have it, we are studying the last part of Ephesians 5 on Easter Sunday
 - Most years when Easter rolls around, I suspend my teaching of whatever book we're studying so I can focus on the meaning of the day
 - This year my travel schedule necessitates I stay in the text of Ephesians so I can finish the book before I depart
 - But the Lord's sovereignty doesn't care about my schedule
 - So He saw fit to leave us at an appropriate point in the book on this special day
 - So as we move forward in the study today, we find a topic that I'm pretty sure has never been preached on an Easter Sunday
 - But it's a topic that's quite appropriate on Easter, though it may not seem that way at first
 - Paul introduced our topic for today in v.21 where we ended last week
 - Paul told the church to be subject to one another in Christ
 - Meaning to live in subjection to the spiritual authorities in our lives, whoever they may be
 - This is a continuation of Paul's earlier teaching in v.17 that we should live wisely making the most of our time knowing the days are evil
 - We live to serve a mission for our Lord
 - Our time on earth isn't very long, and the evil in us and the world is constantly working against us
 - So we don't have time to be foolish, to waste even a single day on foolish pursuits of one kind or another
- And the Lord provides spiritual leadership in every believer's life to counsel us away from wasting time or being foolish
 - Nowhere is this more evident than in the home, where the Lord has structured relationships for the benefit of everyone concerned
 - Having introduced the need for submission in the lives of wise Christians, he begins to elaborate on how to apply this principle in a Christian home

Eph. 5:22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

Eph. 5:23 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.

Eph. 5:24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.

- Paul's teaching on submission runs from v.22 to Ephesians 6:9
 - In this section of the letter, Paul addresses submission of wives to husbands
 - And submission of husbands to their wives
 - Submission of children to their parents

- And submission of parents to their children
- Submission of slaves to masters
- And submission of masters to their slaves
- If that summary of this section surprised you, then it's probably because only one of these relationships gets any attention these days
 - That being Paul's opening command that a wife submit to her husband
 - This unbalanced view of the text is unfortunate for several reasons
- First, it overshadows Paul's larger point that everyone is to be subject to one another, though in different ways
 - Everyone is to concern him or herself with the needs of others
 - So that no one is sacrificing more than another and all are being served
- Secondly, the negative perspective many bring to Paul's instructions to wives turns history on its head
 - Paul is portrayed as having something against women, when in reality the truth is exactly opposite
 - Leon Morris put it this way:

After centuries of Christian teaching, we scarcely appreciate the revolutionary nature of Paul's views on family life set forth in this passage. Among the Jews of his day, as also among the Romans and the Greeks, women were seen as secondary citizens with few or no rights. The pious male Jew daily said a prayer in which he thanked God for not making him a woman. And he could divorce his wife by simply writing 'a bill of divorcement' (which must include the provision that she was then free to marry whomever she wanted). The wife had no such right."

- Paul is teaching that a wife is equal to her husband in the sense of submitting and receiving submission within the family
- Finally, if we hold Paul's teaching in contempt, we are holding God's word in contempt
 - Let's not pretend otherwise...the book of Ephesians is in the Bible for a reason
 - Paul's instructions on submission in this letter are scripture every bit as much as the Gospel of John or the letter of Romans
 - Therefore, we can no more dispute or ignore Paul's words here than on any other subject in which he was inspired to write
- Turning to his instructions, Paul says wives are to be subject to their own husbands
 - Before we look at what Paul is asking a wife to do, let's take note of what he didn't ask
 - Paul said a wife is to be subject to her own husband, not to all men
 - Paul is not calling for male dominance in every area of society

- His only concern is for the relationship between a married couple
- So a Christian woman may aspire to any opportunity that life offers
 - She may lead large organizations and command many under her charge, including men
 - Biblical Christianity puts no limits on a Christian woman's authority save two things:
 - First, scripture commands that a woman may not assume leadership over men in the Church
 - Second, a wife may not assume leadership over her own husband
- Specifically, Paul instructs wives to be subject to their own husbands as to the Lord
 - The Greek word for subject is a military term meaning under the authority of another
 - It describes a voluntary subjection to a higher authority
 - Like a soldier enlisting in the military, he willingly subjects himself to the authority of his superiors
 - He entered willingly, but once in the role he becomes obligated to submit
 - A husband is the authority figure in the home
 - God has appointed a husband to rule over his family in all matters, and wives are to respect and support that authority
 - In a healthy marriage, a godly husband and wife will partner together in making decisions and running the household
 - And if you were to visit such a home, you might not even notice the husband's authority
 - The home would simply reflect the harmony of a family operating in submission to authority
- But we all know that sooner or later differences of opinion are inevitable in every marriage
 - A wife's preference concerning some matter will conflict with her husband's counsel
 - Under these circumstances, the word of God declares that the husband is the final authority in the home
 - Therefore, a wife must submit to a husband's authority in circumstances where they disagree
 - Understandably, it's tempting for any wife to hear these words and seek for exceptions or qualifications
 - A wife might say she will gladly submit to her husband when he is making wise decisions
 - Or is living a godly example
 - Or treats her opinion with equal weight or speaks to her in kindness
- While these qualifications seem reasonable to our ears, they do not stand the test of

scripture

- First, such thinking defies the call to submit
 - If a wife only ever respects her husband's authority when she agrees with him, she has never practiced submission
 - It's merely "agreement"
 - True submission means obeying when you *don't* agree with the request
- Secondly, Paul rules out all such exceptions by how he qualifies his instruction
 - At the end of v.22 Paul says that a wife's willingness to respect her husband's authority is comparable to her willingness to obey the Lord
 - Obviously, Paul isn't putting husbands on the same level of authority as the Lord
 - Paul is speaking in relative terms
- His point is that a husband's authority is his by virtue of his identity as husband, not a position he must earn daily
 - Just as we obey Christ because He is the Lord
 - So shall wives respect and obey husbands because they are the head of the household
 - That authority doesn't turn on whether they make good decisions or even if they are walking with the Lord
- The Scriptures seems to acknowledge a wife's concern through the happenstance of language
 - In v.22 the Greek word for "own" is the word *idios* from which we get the word idiot
 - So more than a few students have taken note that the Lord tells wives to obey their idiot husbands
- Thirdly, in v.23 Paul says a husband's authority in the home serves as a model of Christ's headship over the church
 - As Christ is the head of the Church, so is a husband over his wife
 - Paul's point is that there is something more going on in Christian marriage than meets the eye
 - When husbands and wives observe their God-given roles, they are living out a testimony
 - We know that scripture calls Christ our Groom and the Church is His Bride
 - In other words, the Lord has designed the institution of marriage to picture the relationship we have with Christ by grace
 - We'll learn more about that relationship as we look at Paul's commands to the husband
 - But already it's clear that we're supposed to live out our marriages in a way that testifies to our faith

- This chapter is Paul's call to missional living
 - So we're supposed to bring everything in our lives into conformance with our purpose in serving Christ
 - We can't afford to be foolish, to be short-sighted about anything, including how we approach marriage
 - So we should ask ourselves how do we make the most of our days in serving Christ?
- For wives that means respecting your husband's authority in your marriage as a testimony of your relationship with Christ
 - That's Paul's argument in v.24
 - When the church lives in subjection to Christ, He is glorified
 - The world comes to know what pleases Christ by seeing how we live in obedience to His word
 - And a church that obeys Christ is a church being sanctified, becoming more like Christ
 - Likewise, as a wife submits to her husband, even when he is foolish, she testifies to her relationship with Christ
 - She testifies that she obeys as a matter of faith, not based on personal desires or reason
 - And as a result, she moves in the direction of holiness and sanctification
 - Remember, God's goal for us in this life isn't necessarily our happiness; it's our holiness
 - The Bible tells us that when we're in Heaven praising the Lord before His throne, we won't be saying love, love, love or joy, joy, joy
 - We will be saying holy, holy, holy because holiness is the defining characteristic of God
 - And it's our holiness that pleases our Lord
- Of course, a wife's role in the marriage is just the first of six relationships in Paul's list of submission
 - Though it's the one that gets all the attention, it's supposed to be met with an equally demanding call for submission on the part of the husband
 - That just as the wife submits to her husband's authority, so also the husband has a call to submit to his wife in a sense
 - Which leads us to the next person on the list, the husband

Eph. 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,

Eph. 5:26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

Eph. 5:27 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.

Eph. 5:28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself;

Eph. 5:29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church,

Eph. 5:30 because we are members of His body.

- The husband gets twice as many verses directed his way as did the wife, and they are no less demanding
 - Paul says the husband is to love his wife
 - The Greek word for love is *agape*, which means a self-sacrificial love
 - A husband is called to place his wife's needs above his own
 - Earlier, we said the wife must recognize her husband's superior position in directing the affairs of the marriage and home
 - Now Paul says God calls the husband to recognize the superior place of his wife's needs in the marriage and home
 - This too is a call to submission on the part of the husband
 - While the wife is called to submit to the authority of her husband...
 - The husband is called to submit to the needs of his wife
 - We could say husbands are called to place their own desires in subjection to the desires of their wives
- And here again, the standard Paul gives for how this should look in practice is Christ's example with the Church
 - Paul says Christ's love for the Church is evidenced in His willingness to lay His life down on the cross for us
 - Certainly, we know Christ the Man would have preferred not to go to the cross
 - We see this clearly in John's Gospel when Christ prays to the Father that he may avoid the cross if the Father would permit
 - In the end, the Father's will was that Christ would endure the shame of the cross
 - And so Christ lay down His life obediently so that He might make the Church holy, sanctified
 - By spilling His blood on that first Easter, Christ was paying the price for sin for all who place their trust in His sacrifice
 - By His blood we may be cleansed, made holy through our faith in Him
 - Specifically, in v.26 Paul says Christ cleansed us by washing or cleansing us by water
 - The word for water could be translated baptism
 - So Paul is saying we were made clean by a baptism of His word

- As we come to believe the testimony of the word of God declaring the Gospel, we are washed clean of our sins
- Being baptized by the Holy Spirit, Who comes to live in us at the moment of faith in Christ
- In v.27 Paul says that Christ made His sacrifice so that He might accomplish this work in each of us
 - So that He may present the Church to Himself in all her glory with no defect, holy and blameless
 - In a future day, when the full number of the Church saints has been made complete, the Lord will return to claim His Bride
 - On that day, we will all be resurrected into new sinless bodies, perfect and without blemish
 - And we will enter in His glory
 - Christ's sacrifice will have made possible that perfect, glorified Bride
 - And that's the picture we husbands are supposed to reflect in our approach to marriage
 - We are to sacrifice ourselves for the goal of glorifying our wives, of making them more holy
- In v.28, Paul gives men the true mark of how to love our wives in this way
 - Most guys like to think of themselves as chivalrous, willing to do anything for the woman they love
 - We tell ourselves that we're willing to sacrifice anything
 - "I'd take a bullet for my wife," we say
 - "If a bad guy broke into my home in the middle of the night and tried to kill my wife, I would die to save her."
 - Which sounds very self sacrificial
 - And yet that same guy won't pick up his underwear or do the dishes or the many other things his wife asks
 - That's sacrificial living in an everyday sense, and it's the one that truly matters for our testimony
 - Regardless of how godly or respectful our wives may be, we are called to sacrifice continually for her as a testimony of what Christ did for the church
 - It's the way a husband is called to show submission, first to Christ and secondly to his wife's needs
 - This is a real stumbling block for many Christian husbands
 - Men who think leadership is being a tough guy or a good provider or a doting father
 - Those things may be helpful and even preferable at times, but they are not loving your wife as Christ loved the church

- They are loving yourself first and then loving your wife as it suits you
- Paul says we ought to love our wives as much as we love our own bodies
 - When he says our body, Paul means all that we desire for ourselves
 - Usually, men are thinking about what pleases us, that is our body
 - But Paul says husbands ought to strive to love their wives as they would their own bodies
 - Which means we stop asking what we like and start asking what our wives would like in all areas of life
- In v.29 Paul says the husband who cares more for his wife's needs over his own is nourishing his own flesh, loving himself in better ways
 - He's speaking both in practical and spiritual terms
 - First, practically speaking, a husband who sacrifices for his wife in everyday ways sets the conditions for greater love in his marriage
 - He will see fruit in his relationship with his wife as she takes note of his sacrificial leadership in the home for her sake
 - Over time, her appreciation for his selflessness will increase her love for him
 - Her joy in him will leave him finding greater satisfaction in her
 - Ironically, a selfish husband who lives only for himself finds less happiness and contentment in his marriage
 - His relationship with his wife becomes a contest of wills, a scramble for resources and source of constant conflict
 - The more a husband seeks for himself over his wife, the unhappier and unhealthy his marriage will be
 - And as a wiseman once said, "If mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy"
 - So husbands, if you truly want to love yourself more, begin by loving your better half first
- More importantly, a husband who loves his wife in this way gains spiritually
 - Paul says Christ cherished us because we are His Body corporately
 - It was in Christ's own best interests that He cared for us, to strengthen us and make us into His image
 - Because the Church will be a product of His sacrificial work
 - So in that sense, we reflect His own glory back upon Himself
 - Had Christ neglected His Church, then He would only be robbing Himself of glory in the end
 - Likewise, Paul says a husband who nurtures his wife through sacrificial living will achieve greater glory for himself in eternity
 - The key to understanding this point is to remember that your believing wife is your sister in the Lord

- Long after you are no longer married to each other, you will still be brothers and sisters in the body of Christ
- And that eternal relationship is more important than your marriage relationship
 - How a husband lives with his wife has eternal implications for both of them
 - The husband is comparable to Christ, we are the ones in leadership position in the family
 - As we serve her in marriage we are in a position to influence her sanctification for better or worse
 - And since you're both part of the body of Christ, Paul says you are impacting the sanctification of your own body
- Peter says it this way:

1Pet. 3:7 You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

- Peter says we are to live with our wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker
 - Peter means weaker in the sense of someone with less power in the marriage, someone under our authority
 - As a leader, you should understand that your decisions impact the spiritual walk of those under your care
- So Peter says show her honor – not as a wife – but as a fellow heir of grace
 - Think about how your relationship will be reflected in your testimony in the coming Kingdom
 - Will you be known as a husband who furthered your wife's walk with the Lord or detracted from it
- If you hold your wife in contempt or take advantage of her or abuse her or fail to lead her into godliness, Peter says you are hindering your own prayers
 - You are working against your own best interests where God is concerned
 - While you seek the Lord's favor in your prayers, you are distancing yourself from him in your conduct
- But when a husband and wife live according to scripture, three good things happen
 - First, both become a perfect compliment to the other in marriage
 - The wife respects her husband's authority, offering her counsel while honoring his opinions and submitting to his decisions
 - While the husband seeks what's best for his wife, sacrificing his own desires for her sake, and enabling her to become more holy
 - Both picturing the relationship that exists between the Church and Her Groom,

Christ

- Secondly, when husbands and wives in the Church play their assigned roles, we get more sanctified followers of Christ
 - A wife who encourages her husband's leadership and respects his authority is likely to get a more godly husband
 - A husband who encourages his wife's submission to his authority by living self-sacrificially putting her needs first is likely to get a more godly wife
 - Each one working for the needs of the other so that both are encouraged to obey the Lord more so that both are sanctified
 - In the end, each lives as holy a life as possible, arriving before the judgment seat of Christ with the best possible testimony
- Finally, and most importantly, a godly marriage serves its missional purpose of reflecting Christ to the world, as Paul explains:

Eph. 5:31 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.

Eph. 5:32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

Eph. 5:33 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.

- You may remember in the Garden that God said it was not good for man to be alone
 - The Lord meant that it would not be good for Adam after the Fall to live in a world of sin on his own
 - He needed a partner, a wife to help Adam fight the enemy and his flesh
 - She would encourage him to greater obedience and support him in his walk of faith
 - Likewise, Adam would lead her in the same way
 - In quoting from Genesis 2, Paul reveals this New Testament mystery
 - That God intended the union of man and wife to be a picture of the union of the Church with Christ
 - We've been speaking of this picture throughout today's teaching, but we only know of it because Paul revealed it here
 - So the Christian's mission in marriage is to show the world the Church's relationship to Christ
 - This picture works both ways
 - The world can learn about Christ's relationship with the Church by observing a godly husband's relationship with his wife
 - Likewise, the world can learn about godly marriage by observing the Church's relationship with Christ

- When marriage in the Church operates properly in this way, you see a beautiful reflection of Christ and the Church
 - That's a missional focus on marriage
 - Where our goal is happiness through holiness
 - So that we may proclaim a Savior Who died to make us holy

- Today we reach the 24th lesson in the letter of Ephesians
 - We'll finish our study next Sunday, which means we have two weeks to study through Chapter 6
 - That's a little faster than I preferred but we'll make it
 - Today we're going to wrap up Paul's teaching on submission
 - Paul is in the midst of teaching the church about six relationships where submission is required
 - Everyone in the body of Christ will find themselves somewhere in this list
 - Paul moved into the subject of submission as part of his call to missional living
 - As we've learned, believers are called to get serious about living for Christ by serving Him through our godliness and service
 - The days are evil and the end is coming soon, so we don't have time to waste in foolishness or dissipation
 - And then Paul said God has placed spiritual authorities in our lives to help us stay on track
 - God places these authorities in our lives to teach, correct and encourage us to make the most of our days
 - The Lord works through these authorities regardless of whether they themselves are obedient or godly
 - Remember, the Lord causes all things to work together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28)
 - So we are called to respect these authorities as a matter of faith and obedience to the Lord, even when we can't see how it will profit us
- We began this topic last week on Easter looking at the first two relationships: husbands and wives
 - It made for a rather unorthodox Easter sermon, though we did see the message of Easter reflected in Paul's teaching
 - Paul said wives must submit to a husband's authority in the home
 - While a husband must subject his desires to the needs of his wife
 - Both are submitting to each other, though in different ways
 - These relationships serve to picture the relationship between Christ and the Church
 - Christ sacrificed everything to bring us to holiness and so we obey Him faithfully
 - And Paul said we must live our respective roles in the marriage thinking of the mission, seeking to witness for Christ
 - So that marriage wasn't intended as an institution we would manipulate to suit our desires in life
 - Rather, it's an institution God designed to serve our holiness and testify to His grace in Christ
- And so now we move forward to the last four relationships in Chapter 6

Eph. 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Eph. 6:2 Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise),

Eph. 6:3 so that it may be well with You, and that you may live long on the earth.

- If last week we began with the most controversial relationship in Paul's list, that of wives to husbands, then surely this week we move to the least controversial relationship
 - Children are called to obey their parents
 - Obedience means to heed the instructions
 - A child should take any instruction they receive from a parent and heed or obey that instruction
 - And in case adult children are wondering about their obligations to their older parents, the word child refers to someone under the parent's authority
 - After all, we're talking about submitting to spiritual authorities
 - A son is under the parent's authority until he establishes his own household at marriage
 - And a daughter is under a father's spiritual authority until she marries
 - Our obligation to honor our parents never ends, but our responsibility to obey them lasts until we move into a marriage relationship
- So children are to obey parents
 - But notice Paul adds "in the Lord"
 - That phrase modified the word obey, not the word parents
 - So Paul is saying "obey in the Lord"
 - He means obedience to parents is a directive from the Lord to all children
 - And he quotes the fourth commandment of the Law in v.2 to remind us that the Lord Himself has called all children to obey parents
 - As with the case of wives obeying husbands, the rule doesn't turn on whether the parents are believing or even godly
 - The law given to Israel didn't stipulate that children only obey godly or believing parents
 - God expects all children to obey their parents
 - Certainly, we can imagine exceptions to this rule, situations where disobedience to a parent's instructions might be necessary
 - But Paul doesn't raise any exceptions in this teaching
 - Because that would merely distract us from his larger point
 - Parents deserve the respect and obedience of their children
- This is an important testimony of any Christian home for both the parents and the children

- First, Christian parents are living out a witness to Christ as they teach children to be obedient
 - The Lord has set parents as spiritual authorities over children much in the same way that our Heavenly Father is our spiritual authority
 - So like the Father in Heaven, we're called to provide our children spiritual direction and to correct as needed
 - Our goal is to instill in the child an obedient and submitted heart
 - So that even before we begin teaching our children to read the Bible or to pray, we're teaching them to obey a parent's word without question
- Obedience is a matter of training, for no child obeys a parent naturally
 - The natural state of every human heart from birth is rebellion
 - Anyone who has raised a child past the age of two knows this to be true
 - Children need to be disciplined...against themselves
- By the grace of God, every parent has the potential to raise a child who will be obedient if not believing
 - As Proverbs says:

**Prov. 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go,
Even when he is old he will not depart from it.**

- Parents leading children is perhaps the clearest example of how God can use a spiritual authority to bring a person to greater holiness
 - Parents shape a child's heart at least to an extent
 - And the Lord promises that a faithful commitment to raising the child in this way will be met with a heart to accept authority
 - This is true regardless of whether a child ultimately comes to know the Lord by faith
 - Proverbs 22:6 is a call for all godly parents to train their children as a witness
- In our days, raising obedient children has become an even greater opportunity to witness to the world, because the world is moving in an opposite direction
 - Because Paul says in 2 Timothy 3 that disobedient children will become a mark of the ungodly in the last days
 - As the world comes to tolerate rebellious children, our relentless pursuit of obedient children will become all the more notable
 - But we lose that opportunity if we don't make obedience a priority
 - Parents, we must see our determination to raise obedient children as part of our mission to serve Christ
 - When you have to beg or negotiate with your young child to do as you require, you are forfeiting a piece of your Christian witness

- When you turn a blind eye to a child showing you disrespect or ignoring your instructions, you're moving in the direction of the world rather toward Christ
 - I know parenting isn't easy, and I also know we can't punish every infraction or react to every minor incident of disobedience
 - As my wife frequently counseled, we have to pick our battles
 - But the goal of obedience is unchanging and non negotiable
 - Don't let the world convince you that rebellious children are an inevitability
 - Or that once they hit teenage years, you can't expect them to do what they're told
 - Perfection isn't the expectation, but consistency is possible
- Secondly, obedience is an important blessing for our children, regardless of whether they are believing yet or not
 - Paul says in v.2 that as children keep the fourth commandment to honor parents they become eligible for a blessing
 - In the Law we read this:

Ex. 20:12 “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

- For Israel, obedient children would become cause for Israel to remain in the land of Israel longer
 - That promise refers back to warnings Moses gave Israel before they entered the land
 - Moses warned Israel that their disobedience to the Law would be cause for the Lord to set them outside their land
- Then in the fourth commandment, the Lord said that children who obeyed parents would be prolonged in the land, meaning they would remain until the end of their generation
 - This promise has a self-evident quality about it
 - Naturally, if children learn not to rebel against parents then they will also be less likely to rebel against the Lord
 - And if a generation of Israel were raised to obey the Law, that generation of Israel would escape the consequences Moses described
- But there is also a supernatural component to this promise
 - As the parents of Israel endeavored to raise obedient children, the Lord is promising to shine His favor on that generation
 - That's the way we should understand this promise to families today
 - We are not Israel and we don't live in the land
 - Nevertheless, when we serve God by raising obedient children, He delights to bring favor to our children

- And since Paul has repeated it to the church in this letter, we know it is also a command to the believer as part of the Law of Christ
- Therefore parents, explain the biblical reasons for obedience to parents
 - Obedience is both right (righteous) and leads to opportunity for blessing
 - Children who obey parents will see peace and contentment in their life and in the home
 - And they are likely to see the Lord showing them favor in their lives
 - While children with rebellious hearts will see the consequences of that rebellion over time
- Finally, for believing children, obedience to parents is a part of their own witness for Christ
 - We should emphasize this fact to our believing children
 - As we encourage them to obey us, remind them that they too are called to missional living, making their lives a testimony for Christ
 - They need to understand that even if a child attends church regularly, witnesses to friends, serves in the worship band, takes missions trips, etc....
 - But then routinely disobeys his or her parents, that child has no credibility in their witness
 - And they can become a negative reflection on the witness of the parents
 - Have you heard the term “pastor’s kids”?
 - It’s a term coined to describe a common problem seen in the church where the pastor’s kids are often the most rebellious in the church
 - It’s a stereotype, so it’s not always true of course
 - But if it has any truth, it’s only because men and women in pastoral ministry often get too busy solving other families’ spiritual problems at the expense of attending to their own
 - More importantly, it’s a good example of how failing to raise submitted children can detract from an otherwise good witness
 - So if you won’t discipline your children for their sake, do it for your own sake
 - Both for your sanity in the home and for your testimony into eternity
- As I said last week, each of these relationships has a reciprocal form of submission
 - So as wives submitted to husbands, so did husbands submit to wives
 - And here again, we find Paul asking parents to submit to their children in a sense

Eph. 6:4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

- Obviously, we won't expect Paul to direct parents to obey their children, but that doesn't mean there aren't other ways in which parents have to show submission
 - In this case, Paul says a Christian father (parent) must show self-restraint in the way they chose to instruct and discipline their children
 - The father is not to provoke their children to anger
 - The words "provoke to anger" are a single word in Greek that simply means to make someone angry
 - We might say don't aggravate your children
 - You remember I said that Paul's instructions to husbands and wives were revolutionary for his day
 - Though some portray Paul as biased against women, in reality Paul was the true progressive
 - He elevated women in a Christian home to an equal with her husband in worth and honor
 - And here Paul is doing something similar with children
 - In both Roman and Jewish societies, a father had absolute, unchallenged authority over his children
 - He could discipline his children as he saw fit
 - Including taking actions that today we would consider abuse
- But Paul says parents can't provoke their children to anger
 - Paul is setting limits on parental authority in childrearing
 - A father may be the authority figure in the home, but he doesn't have absolute authority
 - His authority is checked by what is best for the child
 - So just as a child submits to the authority of a parent
 - So a parent submits to the best interests of the child
 - The goal of every Christian parent is to raise a godly child, hopefully one that comes to know the Lord
 - To do that, we must guard against anything in us that would be counterproductive to encouraging the respect and obedience of our children
 - We're restricting our own authority in the sense that we exercise self-discipline and make sacrifices so we can focus on producing a godly child
 - That's missional living as a Christian parent
 - It means thinking carefully about the best ways to raise up children who will reflect Christ to the world
- Instead of putting roadblocks in your children's way, Paul commands parents to bring up children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord
 - Proper childrearing means first discipline and then instruction

- You simply can't do the second without the first
- A child that won't pay attention, sit still, and respond obediently to a parent or teacher isn't going to receive instruction very well
- Certainly, your approach to discipline may vary from other Christian parents
 - But regardless of your method, every Christian parent must arrive at some form of discipline that results in obedient children
 - Permissive homes are a fast path to ungodly children
- Then secondly, notice Paul says that the instruction is "of the Lord"
 - That is, Christian parents are called to teach children about the Lord
 - Chiefly, that means instruction in the word of God, regardless of whether they are believing or not
 - Start from an earlier age, even as they're still learning to talk
 - Make it a daily routine
- In fact, I challenge every Christian parent to make a goal for the entire family to study (or at least read) the entire Bible while all children are still in the house
 - Families that study the Bible together are families growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ together
 - Paul says that's the core mission of a Christian parent
- Certainly, a parent's approach to parenting has an influence on a child's character
 - Generally speaking, abusive parents will be more likely to raise troubled children rather than raising godly children
 - The same can be said for absentee parents who neglect their children
 - And overly-permissive parents who fail to discipline or set restrictions
 - Conversely, a parent who places the spiritual needs of a child above his own personal needs...
 - Who takes time to patiently teach his children the scriptures...
 - Who disciplines and encourages and counsels the heart of his child...that parent is more likely to raise a godly child
 - That's missional living as a Christian parent
 - Subjecting our personal desires to the needs of godly children
 - Not provoking our children to anger by seeming to care more about our career or hobbies or even our ministry outside the home than we do about their needs
 - Sacrificing the time and energy necessary as we invest spiritually into their lives
 - Like the account of James Dobson from Focus on the Family

When he grew up, James Dobson Sr. was a traveling preacher. He was pretty popular and requested to speak a lot. But that meant he was on the road a lot too. But because he was gone so much, James Dobson's mother asked the

father to stay home and help raise their kids, which the father did. Over time he lost contact with his preaching world, and they forgot about him too. Later once the children were grown and he could go back to preaching, there was no ministry he could go back to.

Some might see that Dobson Sr. sacrificed his opportunity to be involved in ministry simply for the sake of doing what his wife wanted. However the effect of that decision was he had a hand in raising James Dobson, who later started his own ministry whose reach far exceeded anything his father was doing. Dobson Sr. invested in his child's spiritual development, which resulted in God magnifying the ministry of James Dobson.

- So how much responsibility do Christian parents bear for how their children turn out as adults?
 - Certainly, it's wrong to suggest that a parent is completely responsible for a child's path
 - But I think it's equally wrong to believe that a parent's methods have no bearing on their children
 - Then we'd be saying that good kids are like hitting the lottery
 - Everyone plays...only a few win
 - But common sense tells us that parent style does matter
 - In fact, Paul's advice to parents is predicated on that principle
 - In fairness, all parents deserve more credit than we typically receive
 - And we deserve some blame for our children's shortcomings
 - Paul's asking parents to be submitted to the greater goal of raising a godly family because that glorifies Christ
 - And when children obey parents and parents submit themselves to serving the needs of their children, you find a peaceful home
 - You also have the best possibility to raise godly children who hopefully come to know Him personally
 - Our homes are our first mission field
 - And like any mission field, we must live with a purpose and in keeping with God's word if we hope to serve Christ well
- To end Paul's teaching on submission, we leave the family and move to societal relationships, specifically masters and slaves

Eph. 6:5 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;

Eph. 6:6 not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing

the will of God from the heart.

Eph. 6:7 With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men,

Eph. 6:8 knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.

Eph. 6:9 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.

- Paul includes this relationship in his address to Christian families, because in his day most slaves served in homes
 - Slaves in this day were indentured servants, and therefore they were seen as an extension of the family though obviously they didn't share the same privileges
 - Some historians have estimated that upwards of one-third of the 180 million residents of the Roman Empire were slaves
 - They represented the lowest cast of society, and like women and children, they had no rights in society
 - Greeks and Romans thought of slaves as little more than "living tools"
 - While we don't have this kind of slavery around us today, we could equate slaves of this kind to anyone working under authority
 - Perhaps laborers in the field or in the factory
 - Or Christians incarcerated in prison
 - Or perhaps Christians in the military
- Once again, Paul raises the bar for this group as he addresses submission by and to slaves
 - First, Paul says those under a master's authority are to be obedient, with fear and trembling
 - Paul calls them "masters according to the flesh"
 - He simply means that no earthly master commands our spirit
 - So our ultimate obedience is to the Lord
 - But we are obligated to obey our earthly masters so long as their commands don't contradict with the Lord
 - The requirement to submit to our masters' authority is hardly revolutionary, but Paul adds an extra element
 - He says our obedience must be in fear and trembling
 - To be in fear means to be respectful of a master's power
 - And trembling means with great care and concern for failing to please the master
 - He means obey with genuine respect for their authority, not merely with eye service

- Not merely as man-pleasers, which means seeking to win favor for our own benefit
 - We all know what this looks like, especially where children are concerned
 - It's a manipulative type of service
 - There is no true obedience to authority when our hearts aren't fully submitted, as Paul says
- Moreover, our submission to our masters must be in the same spirit and with equal fervor as we should serve Christ
 - Paul says to the slave, don't consider yourself a slave to a master but a slave to Christ
 - And therefore serve in your earthly capacity knowing you are doing the will of God
 - Paul's teaching a basic principle of Christian service, which is that all of us are ministers serving Christ
 - In your workplace, school, home or wherever, we serve Christ
 - Vocational ministry is no more service to Christ than serving Christ by doing your job well
 - Therefore, Paul says in v.7 that with good will we are to render our service as if we were employed by the Lord and not by men
 - This verse should come to mind as you work in any position under authority
 - As you complete a work task, ask yourself would you do the job differently if your manager or sergeant were Christ Himself?
 - In a very real sense, Christ is your boss
 - You're serving Him in your job as a witness in that place
 - And what kind of witness will you project if you do sloppy work or demonstrate a disrespect for management authority?
 - You are serving Christ with your entire life
- Once again, Paul is talking about missional living in your role as an employee
 - Serving in excellence is a part of your witness
 - Because as you show that excellent work in submission even to evil masters, you show Christ's love
 - And you bring honor to Christ's name
 - And then to add extra incentive for doing a good job, Paul adds that those who serve Christ well will receive back from the Lord regardless of our station in life
 - Paul is alluding to our rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ
 - He's reminding us to live with eyes for eternity
 - Don't seek for your own benefit in your current job, but rather serve selflessly expecting a reward in Heaven

- That's the proper attitude of a believer serving a master
- It benefits the master, it will benefit you and it glorifies Christ
- Finally, the last relationship of submission is the counter for slaves and masters
 - In v. 9 Paul says do the same things to them, meaning seek also to please the Lord in how you manage those under your care
 - A slave submits to a master's authority and a master submits to the dignity of those under his care
 - Notice Paul tells masters to no longer even threaten slaves
 - No longer use intimidation or force to motivate
 - The Lord will not show favor to masters simply because they were powerful or rich, so they had better not depend on such things
 - This is the most countercultural command of Paul's entire teaching
 - Imagine a slave owner no longer being allowed to threaten slaves
 - Yet that's the expectation Paul says the Lord places on His people when they are in a position to control others' lives
 - So if you have charge over others, consider that you too serve Christ
 - Execute your responsibilities knowing you too will be judged
- As we've looked at all these relationships, there has been one common denominator throughout: submitting to authority to accomplish a mission
 - Respecting the authorities in our lives whoever they may be so that we stand the greatest possibility of serving Christ well
 - If you remember nothing else about this section of Paul's letter, remember that
 - You are called to live out a mission
 - And you do that best when you're serious and focused about it
 - Obeying the authorities in your life, wasting no time, living with eyes for eternity

- Our seven-month study of Ephesians is coming to an end
 - So it's only appropriate that we reach the climactic part of Paul's letter
 - We've been learning about ways the Lord strengthens us so we are in the best position in our mission of serving Him
 - Our goal is to stand before Christ at our judgment and receive a good report
 - I've labeled this outlook missional living, and it's the call of every Christian
 - In 2 Timothy Paul compares the Christian mission to that of a soldier in military service
 - Like the military mission, ours requires preparation, sacrifice, submission to authority and the right equipping
 - And like soldiers we too are engaged in battle against an enemy intent on preventing our success
 - That final comparison leads us into the final instructions of Paul's letter
 - Today Paul addresses the nature of *our* battle and the formidable enemy set against God's people

Eph. 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

Eph. 6:11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

Eph. 6:12 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.

- We see Paul moving to his final point as he opens with “finally” or more literally, “as to the rest...”
 - Paul asks that the church be strong in the power of God's might
 - Earlier in this letter Paul used the metaphor of a walk to describe the Christian life
 - Because the life of a disciple is a journey of sorts
 - We start the journey at the moment of faith and we move forward in a new spiritual destination
 - We are called to pursue our journey without distraction or retreat
 - Now Paul says our life in Christ is not going to be a walk in the park; it's more like a march across a mine field
 - As we serve Christ, we are engaged in a battle, a war with a powerful enemy who opposes God and us
 - So Point #1 today is that whether you knew it or not, the Bible says you are in a war that will last your entire life on earth
- There is a battle raging around us, and we must prepare ourselves for that fight or else

suffer losses

- Like any war, on some days everything will be calm on the front, as if a truce had been signed
 - But then other days you'll feel like all hell has been set loose, literally
 - Which just reminds you that no truce is possible with this enemy
- Every Christian experiences ups and downs in life, but many Christians don't recognize that this pattern is evidence of a spiritual battle
 - They attribute their ups and downs of life to happenstance, good luck or bad luck
 - Or they never give it much thought at all
 - So as a result, they move through the battlefield unequipped and unprepared to engage in the fight in a productive way
 - Therefore, they can't fulfill their mission
- After all, how effective is a soldier who doesn't even know a war is underway?
 - Imagine a young man walking through a field alone, wearing just shorts and a t-shirt, enjoying a summer day
 - Across the field stands an enemy thousands strong, wearing shining armor, carrying battle axes and swords, riding war horses, preparing to attack
 - On this day, the enemy declared war, but this young man hasn't heard the news
- How long would that young man survive the battle?
 - Would it matter how strong the man was? He's not stronger than steel swords and armor
 - Would it matter how fast he was? He can't outrun a horse
 - Would it matter how smart he was? He can't outthink a vast army
- He would be like the soldiers and sailors who lost their lives at Pearl Harbor in 1941
 - They were caught off guard and were largely defenseless
 - Because they didn't know the war was headed their way
- So no matter how strong you are, you are overmatched for the war that's underway, and so your first defense is simply awareness
 - That's why Jesus said this to His disciples:

Luke 10:3 “Go; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.”

- Jesus said “behold” which means pay attention
 - Recognize that we entered a battle field in which the enemy has the strength of a wolf and we have only the strength of sheep
 - In fact, the enemy you and I face in this war is far too powerful for us to face alone

- In 6:11 Paul says we are to stand against the schemes of the enemy
- The Greek word translated schemes could be translated craftiness
- The enemy who is set against us is crafty, smart
- He knows how to test the wall of our resistance to sin, looking for weaknesses so he can exploit them
- He's smart and determined, but more than that, he's powerful
 - The Bible teaches that all angels are more powerful than any human being
 - But Satan is the most power of all angelic beings
 - In fact, he's more powerful than any other created thing
- His power and importance were the reasons he rebelled against God
 - We read this in Ezekiel:

Ezek. 28:14 “You were the anointed cherub who covers,
And I placed you there.

**You were on the holy mountain of God;
You walked in the midst of the stones of fire.**

Ezek. 28:15 “You were blameless in your ways
From the day you were created
Until unrighteousness was found in you.

Ezek. 28:16 “By the abundance of your trade
You were internally filled with violence,
And you sinned;
Therefore I have cast you as profane
From the mountain of God.
And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub,
From the midst of the stones of fire.

- Satan's original job was to stand guard over the Shechinah glory of God on the mercy seat of the heavenly tabernacle
 - The abundance or greatness of his trade (or his profession) cause Satan to be filled internally with pride and violence against God
 - And as a result he sinned by trying to assume the place of God on the mercy seat
 - And so he was cast down from his heavenly place of glory
 - Which means that today the most powerful created being in all the universe is among us
 - And he has a serious grudge against God
 - He has made himself God's enemy as well as any who are aligned with God
 - So how do you think your battle with Satan will go if you try to fight him on your own?

- That would be a foolish strategy
- Even other angels refuse to fight Satan...they won't dare to even rebuke him, the Bible says

Jude 9 But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

- Michael the archangel, the most powerful angel apart from Satan, dared not to fight Satan by his own power
 - Instead, Michael relied on God's power to defeat the devil
 - If the archangel Michael cannot defeat Satan by his power, then clearly you and I have no hope whatsoever to battle on our own
- To be forewarned is to be forearmed, so in v.12 Paul, explains what the war against Satan will be like for any Christian
 - First, it's our struggle
 - Paul calls it "our" struggle because this is the shared experience of every believer
 - No one is exempt from the battle, the enemy overlooks no one, forgets no one, gives no one quarter
 - The only question is how much each of us are fighting back
 - The Greek word struggle could also be translated wrestle
 - And if you have ever wrestled someone, whether in a sport competition or just against a sibling on the living room carpet...
 - Then you understand that wrestling is a constant struggle
 - If you stop resisting even for a second, your opponent will put you in a hold from which there is no escape
 - That's why we're called to understand and accept that Christian life is a struggle
 - Because our enemy never gives up and doesn't get tired
 - Even worse, the Christian struggles against an opponent that's invisible
 - Our opponent doesn't possess flesh and blood, Paul says
 - Meaning, our enemy is a spiritual being, not a physical being
 - Nevertheless, the enemy will use the physical world as pawns in his fight
 - The neighbor's dog who starts barking as soon as we put our head on the pillow...that's not all it seems to be
 - The dishwasher that breaks down right before a party for 50 people...not a coincidence
 - The spouse who tests our patience, the children who resist our authority, the

coworker who pushes our buttons

- So the many trials and disappointments we face in everyday life aren't always what they may appear to be
 - The enemy can insert himself into everyday situations to rattle us or tempt us or enrage us
 - He's working to steal, kill and destroy, Jesus says in John 10:10
 - And he uses anything we give him to accomplish that goal
 - He wants to steal our peace, our confidence, our joy, our time, our perseverance, our faithfulness
 - He wants to kill the mind and body with drugs, alcohol, pornography, debauchery, violence, hatred and jealousy
 - He destroys testimonies, relationships, ministries, marriages, families, churches
 - He seeks to eliminate away anything that stands in his way of replacing God
 - If he can neutralize us, discourage us, tempt us into sin or distract us with silly earthly pursuits, then we're one less soldier on the battlefield
 - He knows he can't change your eternal destiny, so that's not his goal
 - He's not fighting against our salvation, or even against us personally
 - He's fighting God, so if he can neutralize us on the battlefield, then he's a step closer to ultimate victory, or so he assumes
- But the situation is even worse than it seems, because Satan isn't fighting by himself
 - In v.12 Paul says we are fighting rulers, powers, and the world's spiritual forces
 - Paul is referring to the hierarchy of demons that serve Satan in an army opposed to God
 - The Bible says in Revelation 12 that a third of the angelic realm decided to follow after Satan when he fell into sin
 - They elected to worship him as their leader rather than remain aligned to God Almighty
 - So now those countless demons share Satan's fate and they share his mission to defeat God's people
 - They are rulers because they are responsible for some portion of the earth
 - Remember, Satan is a created being, so he can only be in one place at a time
 - Satan is finite, so he needs help to accomplish his work, and the fallen demons are his lieutenants
 - They are powers because like all angels they have true power and spiritual authority under Satan's direction
 - We can suppose Satan has assigned certain demons responsibility for regions of our fallen world, which Paul calls "this darkness"
 - They have some degree of autonomy

- They know their mission and they have their orders
 - They are a force of wickedness, Paul says
 - The church of Ephesus was probably well acquainted with these forces
 - The book of Acts and other sources show there was an unusually high degree of demonic activity in Ephesus
 - The pagan temples that dominated the city brought with them demons who were extremely active in opposing Paul and the church
- But these demons weren't visible to believers in Ephesus, just as they aren't visible to us today, not directly
 - Paul says they exist in heavenly places, which means they occupy the spirit realm
 - This realm is a place outside our human experience or perception
 - They are moving around us, perhaps in your home or even in this building
 - They can prey on your thoughts or emotions and they can influence the physical world for calamity
 - They use the physical world, physical things including people, to do their bidding
 - That's why Paul wants us to understand that though we contend with flesh and blood at time, we don't war against flesh and blood
 - They are not our true enemy...they are unwitting pawns, collateral damage in the war
 - So on that day you make a pledge to study your Bible at lunch, your boss decides to schedule a lunchtime meeting...he's a pawn of the enemy
 - Or as you decide to get the family up early to make it to church on time, for some reason the children are unusually bad tempered...they are collateral damage
 - In fact, have you ever wondered why fights with your spouse are more likely to happen in the car on the way to church?
 - It's a spiritual war, and sometimes even we play into the enemy's hand
 - Paul says we can't see the enemy coming – he works in a heavenly place – but we can see the effect of his work
 - So we need to respond to those moments with spiritual insight
 - Otherwise we will walk into Satan's trap and give him exactly what he wanted
 - By the counsel of scripture, we can know how to respond
- So Point #2 is that we face a specific, powerful enemy who commands a vast force of wickedness
 - He operates in ways we barely understand and he possess capabilities vastly superior to our own
 - Therefore, we have no chance whatsoever in this battle if we enter the fight ignorantly or depending on our own power
 - Still, scripture calls us to stand firm in our walk of faith, to resist him

- And we do so by standing in the Lord's power

Eph. 6:13 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.

Eph. 6:14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

Eph. 6:15 and having shod Your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

Eph. 6:16 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.

Eph. 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

- Paul says take up the “armor of God”
 - Armor refers to the spiritual protection afforded by God through certain spiritual disciplines
 - By relying on these spiritual disciplines in the midst of battle, we gain a measure of defense and protection from the enemy
 - The power is God's power made available by His Spirit working in and through us
 - Since we're talking about God's power, then we must also acknowledge that God's will determines how the battle goes
 - The enemy's attack, his degree of success and the extent of the damage is all in God's hands
 - The only thing in question is our response and whether we gain the benefits God intended
- It's helpful to remember the story of Job in the Bible
 - He was an upright man, righteous and God-fearing
 - And it was for that reason that the Lord suggested Satan direct his attacks in Job's direction
 - As a result of Satan's attacks, Job's family died, he lost all his wealth and he was personally afflicted with illness and distress
 - Clearly, Job's righteousness didn't prevent Satan attacks...in fact they led to the attacks
 - God allowed Satan these victories so that Job would be tested
 - So that Job could show himself faithful through his response to these circumstances
 - How did Job respond to this test? He expresses his attitude in a single verse

Job 13:15 “Though He slay me,

**I will hope in Him.
Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him.**

- Even if God should allow Satan the victory of taking Job's earthly life, still Job said he would hope in Him
- He would argue his ways before Him, which means Job was confident he would be vindicated before God in the end
- Remember, no matter how much ground the enemy gains in this world, he can't take your eternal hope
 - The Bible says that the enemy has no potential to take that from you
 - 1 John says the Spirit in you is more powerful than the spirit in the world, speaking of Satan
 - And Jesus declared that nothing can pluck you out of His hand
 - So we head into battle knowing that Christ has already won the ultimate victory for us
 - That's the spiritually mature perspective we must bring to life's trials
 - The Lord allows the enemy a degree of freedom to prosecute his attack and any ground he gains is ground God gave him
 - But the Lord does so to test our hearts giving us opportunity to show ourselves faithful
- Notice at the end of v.13 Paul says we are to resist the devil in the evil day
 - The evil day refers to all the days we live on earth
 - These will be days of testing, each and every one of them
 - So we can't make our goal avoiding the battle...our goal needs to be spiritual victory in the battle
 - During these days, Paul says, we want to have done everything to stand firm
 - This English translation obscures Paul's point somewhat
 - Paul mentions standing in the sense of standing for judgment
 - He's saying we resist the enemy during our days on earth so that at our judgment we can testify to having done everything we could to win the battle
 - Like a soldier returning from the front, we want to report that we executed our battle plan as ordered
 - So Point #3 is we are fighting for a good report at our judgment
 - Going AWOL in this battle has consequences for now
 - And it may bring consequences in the kingdom
- But in order to have a good testimony, we need to be properly equipped for that battle
 - Paul used a convenient cultural reference of his day to illustrate that equipping
 - As Paul wrote this letter, he was imprisoned in Rome, guarded by Roman

- soldiers
 - And everyone in the empire was familiar with the uniform of a Roman soldier
 - So Paul borrows details from the soldier's uniform to explain the armor of God available to every Christian soldier
 - Paul mentions six articles of clothing: the first five are for defense, while the last one was for offense
- Paul's list proceeds in the order in which a soldier would have dressed himself, starting with girding loins with truth
 - Paul's referring to the sturdy belt that went around the waist over a linen tunic
 - The belt carried the weight of the breastplate and the sheathe that held the soldier's heavy sword
- Paul compares this belt to the truth, which is a reference to the word of God
 - So likewise, our Christian armor starts with the word of God
 - Our fight in this spiritual battle depends on spiritual understanding from God's word
 - It's the ultimate defense against the enemy, who is the father of lies
 - Every other spiritual protection depends on this first element of armor
 - If we lack an understanding of God's word, and we're defenseless against the enemy's schemes
 - We're like that young man in the field with just shorts and a t-shirt
 - And remember this is God's armor, not your own
 - You're seeking to put His truth in your heart so you can respond properly to each trial
 - We'll need His counsel to give us patience, love, peace and forgiveness when the enemy strikes, so that we will pass the test
 - So if you're feel like you're losing battles lately, get back into God's word so you can prepare for the next attack
- Next, the soldier put on a breastplate
 - This breastplate protected vital organs, ensuring a soldier could survive a frontal assault
 - Paul uses the breastplate to picture righteousness, which is our life's testimony of obedience to the word
 - All Christians possess Christ's righteousness through our faith in Him, and that righteousness saves us
 - But having been saved by our faith, now we're called to display righteousness through obedience to the word of God
 - Our personal righteousness is our next greatest defense in battle
 - If we harbor personal sin, then we are concealing a weakness

- If we let sin maintain a place in our walk, you can bet the enemy will discover and exploit that weakness sooner or later
- He'll mount a frontal assault at that point, whether to tempt us into a fall or to expose our weakness so he can ruin our testimony
- So often Christians suffer needlessly at the hands of Satan because they leave their breastplate on the ground, they set aside their obedience
 - Their sin leaves them vulnerable to spiritual attacks
 - And when they come, the Christian may raise their fist to God and declare life is unfair
 - But in reality, that person gave the victory to the enemy the moment he or she decided to make room for sin in their life
 - Yield to the Spirit, and as you do you're taking up a breastplate of defense against the enemy's accusations
 - This was Job's chief defense, that he was an upright man which meant Satan's schemes could not discredit the man of God
- Thirdly, the soldier put shoes on his feet
 - The sandals worn by Roman soldiers were extra tough
 - They were studded with sharp nails to increase traction
 - They made it possible for armies to march long distances to bring victory to any corner of the empire
 - For the Christian, Paul says these shoes represent the preparation of the Gospel
 - The word for preparation could be translated equipment or readiness
 - He's talking about being ready to bring the Gospel message anywhere we go
 - Like a soldier's marching shoes, the Gospel equips us to reach anyone, anywhere
 - Remember we said earlier that the enemy isn't flesh and blood but he uses flesh and blood to accomplish his attacks
 - So then a Christian armed with the Gospel message can be prepared to potentially neutralize an enemy combatant
 - When we share the Gospel with those who seek to persecute us, perhaps the Lord will win over their hearts and turn them to our side
 - Perhaps the boss who makes it difficult for you to pursue your faith might one day become a believer who worships with you
 - Think about Paul himself...the Gospel took him from chief persecutor to chief evangelist of the church
- Our fourth defense is our shield of faith
 - Soldiers carried a wooden shield covered with leather to resist flames
 - It was strong enough to absorb the impact of an arrow
 - It was large enough to protect a soldier's entire body from arrows or other

- projectiles
- Paul says our faith serves a similar spiritual purpose
 - Faith in this context is not saving faith but abiding faith
 - Abiding faith means living with confidence in the promises of God and our eternal hope for glory with Christ
 - Our confidence, our faith, is a shield against the enemy's flaming arrows
- What are these arrows? We're talking about any satanic assault intended to rob us of our confidence or hope in Christ
 - For example, a false teaching that causes the believer to fear the future, to worry about their eternal security or coming tribulation is a flaming arrow
 - Or world calamities or personal losses that disturb our confidence in God are arrows
 - Think again of Job...his entire family died in a disaster...that's a serious flaming arrow
 - Such things have the potential to wound a believer's faith in the promises of God, leaving them questioning His promises
- But abiding faith – confidence in the promises of God – extinguishes those arrows
 - The arrows still come our way and we still feel their impact
 - But they do not harm us in the end because our faith reminds us that our eternal future is secure
 - Job despaired in his grief, yet his faith in God's promises brought him hope and confidence in the face of his great losses
- Finally in v.17, a soldier donned his helmet as he entered battle
 - The helmet protected his head, obviously
 - But Paul makes this comparison in a different capacity
 - He says our helmet is our salvation
 - Paul's speaking about cover, something over us that provides spiritual protection
 - Our salvation is our spiritual cover
 - Christ's sacrifice for our sake assures us of eternal life
 - No matter what comes at us, we have an assurance of resurrection, of a new sinless body and of an eternity serving the Lord in His Kingdom
 - With these things assured, we can have great confidence to face the enemy without shrinking back
 - So when you face the risk of losing your job or your friends or even your life because you dare to share Christ with another person, remember you already have everything in eternity
 - You can't lose anything, because everything you have here will be left behind anyway...so what good is it?

- You have nothing at risk and everything to gain as you enter the battle
- That's a true defense
 - They always say the toughest opponents to beat in war are those who have nothing more to lose
 - They throw caution to the wind and fight with all their strength
- So it must be in our warfare with the enemy
 - You are covered by a helmet of salvation that means you can't lose
 - We need not fear anything...not fear of failing, nor fear of embarrassment, not even fear of dying
 - Those things are nothing in comparison to what we have assured by faith
 - As Paul said:

Rom. 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

- Finally, a soldier picked up his only weapon of offense, his sword
 - The sword pierced and cut at the enemy to incapacitate him
 - Likewise, we have a sword Paul says: the word of God
 - Do you notice that the word of God began this list, and now it ends it too?
 - The word of God prepares us to defend ourselves against the enemy's attacks
 - And it becomes a tool in the hands of the Spirit to neutralize our enemy
 - Remember Jesus' example in the wilderness as He fasted 40 days?
 - He endured the attack of the enemy by living according to the word of God
 - That's the belt of truth upholding us in the battle
 - But then at a certain point Jesus went on the offense against Satan
 - He responded with the word of God to defeat the enemy
 - Eventually the enemy fled having been rebuked by God's word
 - That's what we can do too
 - The enemy is far more powerful than we are, but he is nothing compared to the word of God
 - So when the enemy lies to you, quote the Bible
 - When the enemy tempts you to seek for wealth instead of serving Christ, let the word of God remind you that you can't serve two masters
 - When he causes you to doubt God's love, remember that scripture says love is laying your life down for another
 - Resist the devil and he will flee

- At this point, you may have noticed that one essential element was missing from Paul's list...

Eph. 6:18 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,
Eph. 6:19 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,
Eph. 6:20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Eph. 6:21 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.

Eph. 6:22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts.

- Paul's instructions in v.18 are actually part of the prior verse
 - In fact, vs.14-20 are one long sentence in Greek
 - So we should read the need for prayer as part of the description of the helmet and sword of v.17
 - Therefore, prayer could be considered the seventh and final part of our armor
 - Probably like every soldier facing battle, we need to pray a lot
 - We pray and place requests (petitions) before the Lord at all times
 - We are soldiers on a battlefield, but Christ is the general and He knows where all the pieces are
 - So we need to put our concerns before Him, asking Him to rebuke the devil and seeking His strength
 - I admit, this is my biggest challenge
 - My first instinct is to fight battles in my own power
 - But I think the Lord is working to teach me to let Him fight the fight
 - Which may explain why I see the fight coming back time and again...it just offers more opportunity to pray
- So if it's His armor and His power to fight the battle, what's our role?
 - Paul says in v.18 the Lord asks of each of us to persevere and be alert
 - He says it's especially important to remain alert so that we can intercede on behalf of other believers
 - You can't pray for other's battles if you don't notice what's happening around you, if you're ignorant that a spiritual warfare is a real thing
 - There is a battle raging around us so we need to be like a soldier on watch, ready to pray at all times for one another

- Pray for victory, protection and peace
- Finally, Paul asks the church in Ephesus to pray for him, since he was in chains
 - He wants to make known the mystery of the Gospel to his oppressors despite the danger it would bring to him
 - He wants boldness to speak and so he needs prayer to bring him that boldness
 - Even as a prisoner, Paul said he was still an ambassador
 - Chains weren't preventing him from serving Christ
 - Imprisonment in Rome was just a new way to witness to Christ
 - In fact, Paul did eventually speak the Gospel to Nero himself
 - That's missional living, turning imprisonment into a mission field
- Finally, Paul closes his letter with a few personal thoughts
 - He sent a man, Tychicus, back to Ephesus to report on his condition
 - Paul wanted the church to understand his suffering in chains
 - But also his godly response to his situation
 - As much as he was a witness in his life, Paul dearly wanted to be a witness in his death
 - Sometimes, missional living as a Christian includes missional dying
 - Making the most of every moment because the days are evil
 - May Paul's last words to the church become our daily prayer

Eph. 6:23 Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph. 6:24 Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.