

Riches In Christ
by
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A Study of Ephesians, Chapters 1-3

THE DOCTRINE OF SAINTHOOD

Ephesians 1:1, 2

I invite you to join me in a review of one of the most inspiring books in the Christian scriptures. I refer to "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians." Composed of only six chapters of 165 verses, it is a brief book. Yet no other book presents the doctrine of the church as beautifully as it is set forth here. A key verse to the epistle is the 22nd verse of the 2nd chapter, which reads, "*Ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*"

The Epistle to the Ephesians was written by Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ. It is not necessary for us to go beyond the epistle itself to certify the author. "*Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God*" is the opening statement (1:1). His name occurs again in 3:1, "*For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.*" Besidesthose personal names, the doctrine agrees

with Paul's other writings, and the style of writing is evidently Pauline. Here was a man so opposed to the Christian way that he persecuted to prison and death those who believed in Jesus. Yet, he was converted when Jesus appeared to him in a vision (Acts 9) and became a fervent follower of the Christ. He wrote by direct revelation, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. What he has written in this epistle is worthy our attention.

Who received this epistle in its original address? Our text says "*to the saints which are at Ephesus*" (1:1). One ancient collection of Paul's epistles has it addressed "*to the Laodiceans*" instead of the Ephesians. Many of the old and reliable manuscripts do not have the definitive place "*in Ephesus*." Many believe that the letter was addressed to the church in Ephesus originally. But, as it was a letter to be circulated among other churches, the designation was left blank so that each church might **put its own name** there. Since the church in Ephesus received it and preserved it, we accept the testimony of an old tradition that the title correctly reflects its recipients, "*the saints which are at Ephesus*."

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians was written while he was in prison in Rome, Italy. The date was about A. D. 62.

The Epistle to the Ephesians falls into two natural divisions. Chapters 1-3 are doctrinal. "They deal with the great foundation principles of our faith the doctrine of the unity of mankind in Christ and the purpose of God for the world through the Church" J. A. Robinson. Chapters 4-6 are practical. They discuss the demands of Christian living in a hostile society. Our discussion is designed to follow those natural divisions, the first consideration being given to doctrine we believe and the second to practices we follow.

Hear these words from Ephesians 1:1, 2, "*Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*" Beautiful, isn't it? I call your particular attention to what Paul called the believers in Ephesus: "*saints ... faithful in Christ Jesus.*" Such a salutation raises the issue of sainthood as it applies to Christians. Let us ask and seek a biblical answer to several questions concerning saints of God.

Who are the saints?

In the Old Testament, the saints were the covenant people of God. In the New Testament, they are those who are in the new covenant of grace. Nowhere in the Bible is "saints" a term indicating superior holiness in one believer over another believer. On the contrary, "saints" is a common designation for all those who trust Jesus Christ. They are saints because they have been sanctified by personal faith in Jesus (I Corinthians 6:9-11). He has been "*made ... sanctification*" for them (I Corinthians 1:30). Sainthood is not an elevated status toward which a Christian strives, but a state into which he is placed by grace. The Christian starts out his spiritual life as a saint of God (Colossians 3:12; Hebrews 3:1). The saved person IS a saint; he does not BECOME a saint sometime after his conversion. "Saint" is the same as "Christian" or "believer" in New Testament vocabulary (Acts 9:13, 32, 41; Hebrews 13:24; Revelation 5:8).

What makes one a saint?

One becomes a saint by the act of God's grace in making the repentant and believing sinner a new child of God through faith in Jesus Christ. The emphasis on "*saint*" in the Bible is on relation with God. To be "*In Christ*" is to be sanctified by having received the divine nature (II Peter 1:4), and that makes one a saint of God. Guard against any idea that New Testament sainthood was in any way the result of personal attainment by human effort. No! It comes solely

by our union with Jesus Christ who lives His life in us (Galatians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 30; 6:11).

How is the term "saint" used in the New Testament?

The term "*saint*" is not used ordinarily to refer to individuals but to the whole company of the saved. "Saint" occurs 62 times in the New Testament and only in Philippians 4:21 does it refer to individual persons. So you are individual "saints," not "saint," in the New Testament.

The term is never used as a proper noun or title for a person. You do not find one reference to "Saint Paul, Saint Peter," or any other. The common New Testament term for a Christian believer is "brother" or sister." In a group the believers were called "disciples" in the gospels and "saints" in the epistles.

The term is used in the New Testament to refer to Christians while they are alive on earth, not commonly to those who have died. There are two references to Jesus' return with His saints (1 Thessalonians 3:13; Jude 14), but those are the only two occasions when dead believers are called saints. It is a term for the living.

The term gives no basis for the belief that some of superior holiness, called saints, make intercession for us after their death. There is no example of such intercession in the Bible, and the clear statement of Holy Scripture teaches that we are to pray for the living saints and neither for nor to the dead saints.

Apply this truth to yourself personally. If you are trusting Jesus, you are a saint of God. You are a saint right now, not because you have attained it by works but because He has established it by grace. Be what you have become. Since you are a saint, live like a saint in this present world. That is your spiritual birthright. You are a saint because you are trusting Jesus, and every other person who trusts Him is a saint of God, also.

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

Ephesians 1:3-6

Ephesians 1:3-14 is a doxology, a statement of praise to God for the salvation of sinners. In the Greek text it is one sentence of 202 words. The subject is redemption. The praise is extended to all three persons of the Holy Trinity.

Ephesians 1:3-6 ascribes praise to God the Father for planning and performing the way to save lost sinners. What God the Father did may be summarized in the word "*election*."

Ephesians 1:7-12 ascribes praise to God the Son for executing the plan of salvation for lost sinners. What God the Son did may be summarized in the word "*redemption*."

Ephesians 1:13, 14 ascribes praise to God the Spirit for applying salvation to repentant sinners. What God the Holy Spirit did may be summarized in the word "*sealing*."

I propose that we give thought to the work of each Person of the Holy Trinity in order to magnify in our minds the great work of God in the saving of lost and guilty sinners. You will value your salvation the more as you understand more fully what He has done to save you.

The work of God the Father in the saving of sinners is stated in these words: "*He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved*" (Ephesians 1:4-6). Our finite minds cannot fathom the great

doctrines included in that statement. But we can grasp it enough to worship Him who planned and provided salvation for us while we were yet sinners.

Selection

"He hath chosen us. " That simple clause introduces and summarizes the doctrine of divine election. Election is God's act of selection of persons so as to bring them into His divine will to execute His eternal purpose. It may be described from three viewpoints.

(1) Election is a sovereign act of God, dependent on nothing outside His own will. Jesus said to His disciples, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have *chosen you*, and ordained you ... I have chosen you out of the *world*" (John 15:16, 19). So God's choice is always His own, not ours.

(2) Election is according to God's foreknowledge. We are "elect according to the *foreknowledge of God the Father*" (I Peter 1:2). He knows intimately the whole course of human events past, present and future. He acts according to what He knows has been, is and shall be under His sovereign direction.

(3) Election is wholly of grace. Ephesians 1:4 says we were chosen before the foundation of the world, so it surely was not meritorious works which caused Him to choose us. He chose us because He chose to choose us (Romans 9:11; 1:5, 6).

There is so much about the doctrine of election we do not understand. God does not explain to us the basis of His choice. He simply announces that He did it, and we are responsible for our response to it. Beyond that it is not necessary for us to go. We can believe and behave, and God's purpose in us will be realized.

Time

We were chosen "*before the foundation of the world.* " God's plan is not changing according to the changing times. His plan is from eternity to eternity. He knew from the beginning all He would do all the way to the end. He foreknew, predestinated, called, justified and glorified all who trust Jesus (Romans 8:28-30). And He did it all, writing our names in the book of life from the foundation of the world (Revelation 17:8). As Jesus' redemptive deed was "*foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifested in these last times*" (I Peter 1:20), so our salvation was settled in the divine purpose from eternity and received by us in time. If you do not understand it, do not fret over it. Rejoice instead that you are sharing in an eternal purpose of God. Your saving relation with Jesus Christ today was planned of God in eternity. Rejoice!

Purpose

"We should be holy and without blame before him in love. " God's great purpose was moral: "*we should be holy and without blame.* "It was spiritual also: "*before Him in love.* " How can we be holy, without blame, before Him? It is possible only when one is in Christ through repentance from sin and personal faith in Him. God's purpose, therefore, was our salvation through trusting Jesus.

Predestination

God has "*predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ.*

Do not let that word "predestination" disturb you. It simply means that God is doing what He purposed before to do. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (election) and carried His choice to fulfillment (predestination) by adopting us to Himself by Jesus Christ.

What God has planned to do, He will do. It is as certain as what has already happened. He has

received us as His dear children because that is what He intended to do. *"Adoption of children"* means that He took us when we were outside the family of God and brought us in to give us the position of children before Him. Praise God for such grace!

Motive

All God has done and all He plans to do is *"according to the good pleasure of His will."* There was no external compulsion which moved God to do what He has done or what He will do. Do not be afraid of His sovereign will. He has chosen us *"in love"* (verse 4). That was His sole motive. The saving of sinners is not an act of His sheer determination but of His supreme delight. *"The good pleasure of His will"* is the source of His grace as we experience it today. He does not act arbitrarily but on the basis of infinite wisdom. The ultimate end of His purpose is revealed in Ephesians 2:7: *"That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."*

Goal

And God does works out *"to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."* The immediate goal is that as the holy people of God we will be blessed (verse 3), holy (verse 4), accepted (verse 6) and redeemed (verse 7) to the glory of God. Who would fear such a great plan working out in his personal life? God's plan is for the highest possible good to us.

Here is the divine work in saving sinners. The Father made a plan in which He chose us. The Son effected the plan by which He redeemed us. The Spirit executed the plan whereby He sealed us. God is on our side. Our salvation is certain. Rejoice in Jesus the Savior!

THE DOCTRINE OF REDEMPTION **Ephesians 1:7-12**

God drew up a plan in eons past in which He would save sinners and lavish his blessings on them in Christ. On the basis of what He purposed to do, He effected a way of salvation for guilty sinners through the atoning death of His only begotten and sinless Son. Ephesians 1:3-14 makes it quite clear that what God the Father planned in eternity before time God the Son performed in time.

I point you to Jesus, *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ"* (Ephesians 1:7-12). There is a summary of the doctrine of redemption.

Meaning

What does "redemption" mean? To redeem means to purchase. It was used commonly to refer to the purchase of a slave in order to give him freedom. The term came to mean to buy in the market place, to purchase by the payment of a price, to purchase so as to set free. All of that is

involved when we say Jesus is our Redeemer or that Jesus paid the ransom for us or that Jesus has redeemed us. It means Jesus has set us free by the payment of a price. Do not think of your salvation only as the way by which you can go to heaven when you die, Think of your condition before you were saved and the great act by which you were redeemed by Jesus.

Price

Through Jesus "we have redemption through his *blood*" (verse 7). We are not saved by our works of merit or by traditions of religious systems but "*with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you*"(1 Peter 1:19,20). Jesus bore our sins in His own body when He went to the cross to die (I Peter 2:24). He suffered there, the Just One for us unjust ones (I Peter 3:18), in **order to bring** us to God. We are saved today on the simple terms of repentance from sin and personal faith in Jesus. But the price paid to make it easy for us was a terrible and costly price. It was so great none but God could pay it. Since "*without shedding of blood is no remission*" (Hebrews 9:22; Leviticus 17:11), and since our sins were so great, only by the shedding of the blood of the sinless Son of God is forgiveness possible. He did that on the cross. So today "we have redemption through his blood.

Proof

The evidence that salvation comes through the shed blood of Jesus is in our having "*forgiveness of sins*" through Him, We sing, "What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus; What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Oh! precious is the flow, That makes me white as snow; No other fount I know, Nothing but the blood of Jesus" Robert Lowry. Do you have assurance of forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus? If so, you have personal proof that redemption is through His blood, that He is God's anointed Savior for whom the world has waited.

To forgive means to lift up and bear away. It has the idea of removing so the thing removed never faces us again. That is what God does with the sin of any person who trusts Jesus. That is what He does with your sin when you trust His only begotten Son as your personal Savior. You will be saved and know it!

Scope

Our forgiveness is "*according to the riches of his grace.*" Notice that the text does not say God forgives us because of His grace, or out of His grace, but according to His grace. What a difference that makes! "*According to*" means in proportion to. Our forgiveness is in the same abundance as His grace. And He has "*abounded*" to us in expressing His grace and love. "*Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*"(Romans 5:20). The result is that grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:21). When God forgives, He does not forgive in limited measures. He forgives freely and totally, "*having forgiven you all trespasses*" (Colossians 2:13). He will forgive you, too.

Revelation

God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ has made known a "*mystery.*" Remember that "*mystery*" in the New Testament does not mean some thing unknown or difficult to understand today. It refers to something which was not known in time past, but is now clearly revealed. What is the mystery made known to us by the redemptive deed of Jesus Christ? It is "*that in the dispensation*

of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth " (verse 10). All things will be gathered together in Jesus Christ. That is the mystery.

A time will come when Jesus will be proclaimed "*King of kings and Lord of lords*" (Revelation 19:16). A time will come when He will rule over all persons and things (I Corinthians 15:25). It is assured by, the eternal purpose of God and is certified by His death and resurrection from death.

All that will happen according to "*his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself " (verse 9). What God has purposed, He is willing and able to perform. That is why we are so sure of our inheritance. God has willed it, and Jesus has died to secure it for us. Rejoice in the assurance of it.*

Goal

God's purpose in our salvation is our benefit and His glory. "*We should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ*" (verse 12). I find that to be the greatest purpose in our salvation. But for God to be praised and for us to be profited is reason to rejoice, indeed.

We tend to think of personal benefits received through Jesus Christ. We think of forgiveness of sin, the privilege of prayer, fellowship with God, unity with the saints, indwelling of the Holy Spirit and so many more blessings. But look at your salvation as it relates to God. It vindicates His plan, fulfills His purpose, honors His son, exhibits His grace and brings glory to His name. Salvation of sinners is of great concern in heaven and on earth.

Salvation is available today. God the Father planned the way. God the Son paid the price. God the Holy Spirit calls you to repentance and to faith. Make sure you are saved. Make sure this very hour.

THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

Ephesians 1:13,14

The saving of sinners is the direct work of the Holy Spirit of God. His part in salvation is summarized in Ephesians 1:13, 14. Reference is to faith in Christ, "*in whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. "*

God the Son as redemption, so it speaks of the work of God the Spirit as sealing. What a comfort to know all three persons of Holy Trinity are involved in the saving of sinners. What is involved in the sealing ministry of the Holy Spirit? Look carefully at Ephesians; 1:13, 14 for the answer.

Prerequisite

We think of faith as being the way to be saved, and that is Bible teaching. However, the Bible says that there is something which must come before faith. Romans 10:14 asks the questions: "*How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?*" It continues, "*Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" Romans 19:17. What is it, then, that must come before faith? There must be a hearing of the gospel message. Our text makes that very dear. "You trusted in Jesus," it says, "after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." Notice the order is hearing, then

believing, then sealing with the Holy Spirit.

No one can be saved without hearing the message of Jesus. That is why we Christians are commanded by our Lord to take the gospel into the personal hearing of every person in the entire world (Mark 16:15). We go and speak that they may hear in order that they may believe.

Occasion

When does the sealing with the Holy Spirit occur? The King James version says, "*After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.*" Do not interpret that to mean you believed at one time and were sealed with the Holy Spirit at some later time. The sealing comes at the same time as your believing. To be saved and to be sealed are the same, as we shall see. You will be disappointed if you expect to be saved in one great experience with God and sealed in some later great experience. Upon the occasion of your faith you are sealed with the Holy Spirit.

Transaction

But we need some definition of terms here. What does it mean to be "*sealed with that holy Spirit of promise*"? Or another way to ask the question, "What is the sealing with the Holy Spirit?" I thought of "sealed" as meaning "to fasten securely, to secure the contents, to preserve pure." I thought of it as a can of vegetables is sealed. But the Bible used the word with another meaning. Seal means "to mark, to mark as authentic, to confirm and guarantee." Think of the official seal on an important document. Or think of the brand a rancher puts on his cattle to identify them as his own.

Notice that the text does not say we are sealed "by" the Holy Spirit but that we are sealed "*with*" the Holy Spirit. It is not that the Holy Spirit does the act of sealing. It is rather that the Holy Spirit is Himself the seal. The presence of the Holy Spirit living by His indwelling presence in the spirit of the Christian believer is the Christian's seal that he belongs to Jesus.

The presence of the seal indicates a finished transaction: the salvation of God is confirmed to that person. It indicates ownership: that person belongs to God as a child to his father. It indicates security: none can break that seal except the One who placed it there. All that, and more, is involved in your being "*sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.*"

Significance

The sealing with the Holy Spirit means more than that our past sins have been forgiven. It speaks of our hope for the future. It is "*the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.*" The sealing of the Spirit gives us assurance of glory.

Notice that word "earnest" in the statement "*the earnest of our inheritance.*" "*Earnest*" means pledge, down payment, first installment. It refers to the custom of putting down "earnest money" in making a purchase. In ancient times, it was quite common. If a man wanted to buy a farm, he would make a down payment to the owner and the owner would put a clod of dirt in his hand. Each was saying to the other, "This is a small part of what you will receive in full when the transaction is completed."

That is what the Holy Spirit is today. He is God's guarantee that He intends to complete His plan of salvation (including the body, soul and spirit). If He is the down payment, how glorious will the full realization be? Glory!

Duration

The Holy Spirit is our guarantee until the resurrection of our bodies at the return of Jesus and we all stand gloriously complete before God.

That means the earnest of the Holy Spirit is a reality today. He lives in each one who is saved. It is His presence in the human spirit which makes us a child of God. Romans 8:9 says that if anyone does not have the spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

The Holy Spirit indwells each one who is saved. He indwells us from the moment of salvation until we stand before God. He never leaves us for one moment. His presence in our spirit is the "*seal*" or brand or mark proving that we belong to the Lord. Take time today to thank God for the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit as He seals you to the day of salvation.

Goal

It will all end "*to the praise of his glory*" That is the goal of all things.

Did you notice in our review of this doctrine of salvation that each section ends with a reference to the glory of God? The electing work of God the Father is "*to the praise of the glory of his grace.*" The redeeming work of God the Son is "*to the praise of his glory.*" The sealing presence of God the Spirit is "*unto the praise of his glory.*" Here is the delight of the Christian's heart: "*That God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ*" (I Peter 4:11). My heart echoes. "Amen."

THE DOCTRINE OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH **Ephesians 1:15-19**

Christian conversion is a wonderful experience. When one who has been separated from God is reconciled, forgiven and made at peace with Him, it is a glorious occasion. But one's conversion to Christ is just the beginning of his Christian experience. The Bible calls it a "birth," meaning it starts a new life in which one can grow and develop in the Lord. As important as is the doctrine of salvation, there is another doctrine of spiritual growth which accompanies it. It is to that subject the apostle Paul addresses himself in Ephesians 1:15-19. It is an important doctrine, for retarded growth in body or spirit is a great tragedy.

The passage is a prayer of intercession which Paul offered on behalf of the believers in the city of Ephesus. It gives us a guideline on how to pray for one another today to help one another grow to be more like Jesus.

Key

The prerequisite to spiritual growth is spiritual life. Paul begins by saying, "*I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints*" (verse 15). Their faith in the Lord Jesus indicates that they had spiritual life in Him. John 20:31 reads, "*These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*" - John 3:36 reads, "*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*" Those passages make it dear that faith in Jesus Christ brings spiritual life. When Paul wrote of the faith the Ephesians had in Jesus, he acknowledged that they **had life through Jesus**.

The Bible speaks of life on three planes. There is physical life, which is the breath of God

(Genesis 2:7). There is spiritual life, which is the personal knowledge of God (John 17:3). There is abundant life, which is the fullness of God (John 10:10). It is not enough just to be alive with physical life. It is not enough just to be saved and have spiritual life. We must *'grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ'* so we can enjoy the abundant life (II Peter 3:18).

Expression

Spiritual life is expressed in "love unto all the saints. Jesus said that would be a testimony to the world: *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another"* (John 13:35). The apostle John said that would be a witness to our own spirit: *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren"* (I John 3:14).

Faith is the means by which we receive spiritual life. Love is the proof that we truly have spiritual life. Growth is the privilege we enjoy in our spiritual life. That is thrilling, isn't it!

Spirit

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, *"I ... cease not to give thanks for you"* (verse 16). That indicates how often he thought of them and rejoiced in them. Thanksgiving was a major factor in Paul's prayer for other believers. He makes a reference to thanking God for fellow Christians 26 times in his writing. *"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy"* Philippians 1: 3, 4. When we have that spirit, it will be far easier to live in unity, to help one another, to intercede each for the other and to function as one body in Christ. To have that thankful spirit will cause us to help one another to grow up to full maturity in Christ. I recommend that you cultivate a spirit of thankfulness for your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Petition

The actual petition which Paul offers in behalf of the Ephesians Christians might have an accurate and thorough knowledge of their resources in Christ. He prayed *"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him"* (verse 17). Spiritual wisdom and true insight comes from an intimate and increasing knowledge of God Himself. Paul prayed that those Christians might know God more personally than they had known Him before. That is normal Christian experience, you know. *"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"* II Corinthians 4:6. It is our privilege to *"grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* II Peter 3:18. Three great blessings will come as a consequence of that spiritual growth.

- (1) We will understand more perfectly the hope which is ours as a consequence of God's call. His call for us to be like Christ is a high calling (Philippians 3:14), a holy calling (II Timothy 1:9) and a heavenly calling (Hebrews 3:1). It is a call to share God's kingdom and glory (I Thessalonians 2:12; II Thessalonians 2:14). It is a call which we received and answered on earth but which reaches its consummation in heaven. Knowing Him more perfectly, we will understand what is involved in His calling us to share His eternal glory (I Peter 5:10).
- (2) We will understand how gloriously rich is His inheritance in the saints. There are two ways to interpret the reference of *"his inheritance in the saints."* One is that the saints are His inheritance, that He looks upon us as His great treasure. That might be true after what He invested in our creation and salvation. The other idea is that the saints have a magnificent and

splendid inheritance in God. The Bible would support either understanding. We are looked upon as the special treasure of God, and we do have a great inheritance in Him. The wonder of that inheritance will become more clear as you know Him more perfectly. And you will rejoice!

(3) We will understand the vast resources of God's power which He exercises in dealing with us who believe. His power is beyond our comprehension. It is so transcendently great that it surpasses our imagination. It is so great, in fact, that Paul uses four different words to refer to it in our text. There is a reference to power (Greek, *dunamis*), working (Greek, *energia*), might (Greek, *krutos*) and strength (Greek, *ischus*). "The heaping up of words suggests the idea of power the very telling of which exhausts the resources of language and finally defies description"-Curtis Vaughn. His power was particularly manifest in the resurrection of Jesus but is active in us today.

Spiritual growth is worth all it may cost, and much more. Do not be content with things as they are. "*Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" II Peter 3:18.

THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

Ephesians 1:20-22

What has been the greatest expression of the power of God? It was not at creation, or in preserving the universe, or in saving sinners. God's greatest exhibition of power was the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus.

Paul speaks of the power of God in Ephesians 1:19 as "*the exceeding greatness of his power . . . the working of his mighty power.*" Then he shows how God's power was manifest in Christ "*when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places. . . and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church*" Ephesians 1:20-22.

That passage has an interest to us beyond what it teaches about the limitless power of God. It gives us some insight into the doctrine of Christ. Who is He? What has He done? What is He doing now? What will He do? While the doctrine is not complete in this text, there is sufficient revelation to challenge our minds and inspire our spirits. Think about what is revealed about Jesus.

He is the Christ

We speak the name Jesus Christ with little more thought than if we called a boy Billy Joe or a girl Mary Lou. But there are meanings to the names we call our Savior. Jesus means Savior. He was so named because "*he shall save his people from their sins*" Matthew 1:21. Christ means Anointed One. He was so named because the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him; God had anointed Him and had given the Spirit without measure to Him (Luke 4:16-21; Acts 10:38; John 3:34). Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit that He might fulfill His ministry on earth and show us what a Spirit filled person is like. As the Christ of God, He is also the Messiah promised in the Old Testament scriptures. It was a great and true confession made by the disciples: "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*" Matthew 16:16 Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of God.

He is resurrected

God "*raised him from the dead*" Ephesians 1:20. His resurrection is positive proof that He is "*the Son of God with power*" Romans 1:4. But why was His resurrection necessary? He had died and been buried. His death was not a miscarriage of justice as an innocent man was killed. In His

death He lay down His life for us with the express purpose to take it up again.

Why did He die? The Bible answers very clearly, "*Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God*" I Peter 3:18. His death was redemptive, paying the penalty for our sins. His resurrection was saving, Christ arising to live as the Savior of those who believe. "*When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life*" Romans 5:10.

He arose from death in spite of the opposition of political powers who sealed His tomb and stationed a guard of soldiers around it. He arose from death in spite of the fanaticism of religious powers who accused Him of blasphemy in calling God his Father and predicting His resurrection from death. He arose from death in spite of doubts by His disciples who gave up all hope when He died. He arose from death in spite of the devil's hopes that Jesus was at least destroyed. He arose from death, and with Him came hope and the offer of salvation to all. He arose from death because God the Father decreed that by the death and resurrection of His only begotten Son salvation would be effected for all who believe.

He is exalted

Look at His position as God "*set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church*" Ephesians 1:20-22. Such a description of the exalted state of our dear Savior makes one want to grasp in amazement and fall at His feet in worship.

Remember the exaltation of our Lord as described in Philippians 2:9-11: "*Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*"

That is not a description of what shall be but of what already is. Jesus is the anointed, resurrected and exalted Lord. Hallelujah!

He is exalted in name. Jesus means Savior. Christ means the Anointed One. Emmanuel means God Is With Us. Son of Man means He is the one of whom the prophets spoke. Son of God means He is fullness of deity. Praise His glorious name.

He is exalted in position.

"*He was received up into heaven, and sat down on the right hand of God*" Mark 16:19. "*Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior*" Acts 5:31. There He is today in heavenly realms.

He is exalted in power. All other powers have been subjected to Him to the extent He can say, "*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth*" Matthew 28:18. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

He is empowered

Since all things are under His feet and He is head over all things, I must say a further word about the power and authority of our Lord Jesus. All things are already under His feet. He already reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords. The earth and all that is in it belongs to Him (I Corinthians 10:26). He reigns over all, even the kingdom of the heathen (II Chronicles 20:6). He is Lord!

Since He is head over all things, He has power and authority beyond any other person or thing.

He is *"gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him"* I Peter 3:22. There is nothing which is not subject to the power of His authority.

He is the fullness that fills everything everywhere. He is complete and makes all things reach their completion. *"In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power"* Colossians 2:9, 10.

Here is the doctrine of Christ as set forth in Ephesians 1:20-23. He is the Anointed Lord. He is the Resurrected Lord. He is the Exalted Lord. He is the Empowered Lord. But most precious of all, He is my Lord!

He is my Lord because one day I turned from sin by an act of my *win* and asked Him to forgive me and be my Savior. He will become your Lord and Savior by your repentance from sin and your faith in Him as your personal Savior. I trust Him now.

THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION BY GRACE

Ephesians 2:1-10

Ephesians 2 is one of the most beautiful and inspiring passages in the Christian scriptures. It begins with a description of our pitiable and ruined condition because of sin. It continues with a statement of how God saves us from our sin wholly on the basis of His grace and not of our works. It concludes with an affirmation of the unity between us when we are in Christ. The whole gospel of salvation and sanctification is summarized in this great passage. I call your attention to the first portion, Ephesians 2:1-10.

Need of salvation by grace

Here is God's description of the person who is without Christ: *"Dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. . . fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others"* Ephesians 2:1-3. What a tragic picture!

Look at our condition: *"dead in trespasses and sins."* Consider our conduct: *"walked according to the course of this (unregenerate) world."* Comprehend our controller: *"the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience."* Be repulsed by our corruption: *"full filling the desires of the flesh and of the mind."* Stand amazed at our heritage: *"by nature the children of wrath."*

That description is not for the worst of men, but for the whole of men. It is my description before I came to Christ. It is your description until you come to Christ. The text sets forth the need of salvation. But the text sets forth also the need of salvation by grace. How can a person in such a condition as described by Paul possibly be able to produce enough good works to make himself acceptable to God? He never can. He is helpless and hopeless in his sins. His only remedy is if God will reach down and save him out of his sins and in spite of his sins. That is exactly what God has done in the person and work of Jesus, His only begotten Son. He did it so guilty and hell deserving sinners might be saved. Think of that, and rejoice!

Ground of salvation by grace

"God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved)" Ephesians 2:4, 5. Those

two verses mention three things which are the basis of our salvation by grace.

The mercy of God provides salvation by grace. He *"who is rich in mercy is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"* II Peter 3:9. Mercy is the outward manifestation of pity. It is sympathy in action. It assumes need on the part of the one who receives it and resources adequate to meet the need on the part of him who shows it. God is so full of mercy that He is called *"the Father of mercies"* II Corinthians 1:3. God sees our need and feels sympathy for us. He moves to meet that need and thereby shows mercy to us.

The love of God provides salvation by grace. His provision is on the basis of *"his great love wherewith he loved us"*. It is in describing the love of God that our human language falters. The Bible concept of love expresses ideas previously unknown and forever unfathomable apart from divine revelation. God's love is more than a feeling of good will, more than an emotion of affection. It is an exercise of the divine will in which God makes a deliberate choice to rescue man from his sin, totally apart from any merit at all in the man who is being saved. It seeks the welfare of each one, whether he deserves it or not. It is extended in order to lift and bless. This love is noted by its giving, not its receiving. Since it demands no merit on the part of the beloved, God can love sinners and bring them to Himself by the sacrifice of His only begotten Son. The grace of God provides salvation by grace. Three times in Ephesians 2 Paul testified, *"Salvation is by grace,"* He wrote, *"by grace ye are saved"* (verse 5), *"the exceeding riches of his grace"* (verse 7), *"by grace are ye saved through faith"* (verse 8). For the inspired scripture to say it three times in three consecutive verses indicates that God must mean it: "You are saved by God's grace upon the occasion when you exercise your faith in Jesus Christ." Grace is God relating to you with good will and loving kindness in spite of your guilt and unworthiness. It places you in right standing with Him and gives you delight in fellowship with Him. Look again at our text. Your salvation is dependent on the mercy of God, the love of God and the grace of God. Your salvation is totally God's deed of kindness toward you, apart from your deserving, and is offered to all others who see themselves sinners before God. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

Benefits of salvation by grace

Ephesians 2:1-10 lists three great blessings which come when one is saved by grace.

Life is God's blessing to those saved by grace. Two times the text says we have been *"quicken"* (verses 1, 5). One time it says we have been *"raised up together"* (verse 6).

The idea is resurrection from death. Spiritual death means that one is separated from God.

Spiritual life means that one is united with God. The life God gives to those saved by faith In Jesus is eternal life, everlasting life. it is the very life of God Himself which is lived in the mortal body of the believer.

Fellowship is God's blessing to those saved by grace. *"God has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"* (verse 6). The fellowship Christians enjoy is two fold. **First**, there is a fellowship established between the believer and the God whom he trusts. **Second**, there is a fellowship between each believer and every other believer. We call that "Christian fellowship." It is the desire of I John 1:3 *"that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."* God has received us in grace and mercy and love, just as He received us Romans 15:7.

Service is God's blessing to those who are saved by grace. *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them"* Ephesians 2: 10. It is no burden to serve Him who is the joy of our life and the delight of

our hearts. It is a privilege instead. It is one of the blessings which accompany salvation. Look back over the way we have come. We have seen the need for salvation by grace, for we were sinners who could never save ourselves. We have seen the ground of salvation by grace in the mercy, love and grace of God. We have seen the benefits of salvation by grace in life, fellowship and service. Now experience it!

THE DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

Ephesians 2:11-22

Ephesians 2:11-22 is the most beautiful discussion of Christian unity to be found in Holy Scripture. It is one of several passages which make this Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians so very rich and profitable to us. The passage recognizes the presence of distinctions which separate people and then explains what Jesus has done that unites us in Him. Open your Bible to Ephesians 2:11-22, and we will review the passage together.

Distinctions between men

Have you noticed how we humans group ourselves together. We think in terms of "us" and "them." It is "our side" and "their side." That seems to be a part of our human nature. Just so, men have divided themselves on the basis of religion. Verse 11 of our text speaks of some *"who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands."* That is typical of man's human identification.

Circumcision was a religious ritual which God commanded Abraham to institute and continue to all his descendants. It was a sign that those who were circumcised were in a covenant relationship with God. But through the passing of the years, some thought of the act of circumcision more than they thought of the covenant it was to portray. The elevation of a religious ritual, however good it may have been, to a place God never intended it divided Jew from Gentile in a way God never intended. Let them speak of their faith which separated them to God rather than the ritual which identified them as so separated to Him.

People still label one another based on artificial distinctions, accepting those with the right label and rejecting those with the wrong label. God looks for Christian unity in something far more significant than that.

Distinctions before God

The Lord makes a difference between people. But His distinctions are based on spiritual realities, not on physical marks. Verse 12 of the text gives five great problems faced by the Gentiles. (1) They were without Christ. (2) They were aliens from God's spiritual kingdom. (3) They were strangers from the promises God made and sealed by a covenant. (4) They were without hope. (5) They were without God in this world. What a compounded tragedy! Look at that pitiable condition and let your heart go out in sympathy for a people so spiritually destitute. There is a description of the Gentiles in Bible times and of every person today who has no personal faith in Jesus the Christ.

Jesus recognized there were some people who were *"of God"* and some who were *"not of God"* (John 8:4-7). Paul reflected that in our text. God distinguishes between people, but His basis of distinction is different from man's. God looks on the heart and receives or rejects us on the basis of what is there. How is your heart before God?

Basis of our unity

What is the principle by which God distinguishes between people? Verse 13 explains, *"In Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."* We would say, "The person who trusts Jesus is accepted before God. The person who rejects Jesus is rejected before God." So Jesus is the key. Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"* John 14:6. If you have come to Jesus, you have come to God, and He has received you.

If I am in union with God and you are in union with God, you and I are automatically in union with one another. The basis of Christian union, therefore, is being *"in Christ Jesus."* We share fellowship because we are each in Him. That is what we call "Christian fellowship" because it is based on Christ.

The price of our unity

Christian fellowship is no light thing. It cost our Lord very dearly. Verses 16-18 give two illustrations of the cost Jesus paid in bringing us to God.

First, verse 16 speaks of *"the cross."* That is a reference to the instrument of wood on which Jesus was crucified. But it speaks also of His bearing our sins on the cross and dying in our place. It is by *"the blood of his cross"* that we can have peace with God. It cost Jesus His life to provide our salvation.

Second, verse 17 speaks of Jesus who *"came and preached peace."* His coming refers to His incarnation in human flesh. It cost Jesus the glories of heaven and the personal activity of God as God when He came in a human body as a Man. We can never know in this world what a tremendous sacrifice it was for the second person of Holy Trinity to come in human flesh to bear our sins. But praise God He did. *"And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"* Philippians 2:8. There is the reason we are one in Christ. Believe it and rejoice! *"For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father"* Ephesians 2:18.

Enjoyment of our unity

There are four great blessings which attend our unity in Christ. Observe them in verses 19-22 of our text.

(1) Citizenship is ours. *"Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints"* (verse 19). This is not merely citizenship in the nation of our birth. It is citizenship in the Kingdom of God. Think about that!

(2) Sonship is ours. We are more than citizens in a commonwealth; we are children in a household, even *"of the household of God"* (verse 19). God said, *"I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people"* II Corinthians 6:16. So we look up to God and call Him "Father." He looks back at us and calls us His sons and daughters. Glory!

(3) Partnership is ours. Verses 20, 21 speak of our sharing the same foundation and being parts of the same building. To be built on the foundation of which Jesus Christ Himself is the chief corner stone and to be a part of a building which grows to a holy temple of the Lord is better than anything the earth can afford. No wonder we who share that partnership are one in our Lord.

(4) Fellowship is ours. It is a fellowship with believers and with God Himself. We share fellowship with believers because we *"are builded together."* We share fellowship with God because we *"are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."* What a blessed and inspiring fellowship that is!

The unity of which I speak is a unity based on mutual relationship with Jesus Christ. He is the source and sustainer of that unity. For that reason we do not share unity with those who reject the truth God has revealed in Christ. Jesus prayed for our unity, saying, *"That they may all be one in us"* John 17:21. So be sure you are in Christ by repentance and faith, then enjoy the fellowship.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL

Ephesians 3:1-13

Do you like a mystery? Then you will enjoy a study of Ephesians 3:1-13. It is concerning a great mystery which no man on earth understood until God made it clear. The Bible says *"in other ages (it) was not made known unto the sons of men"* (verse 5). But it is *"now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit."* What was a mystery for centuries upon centuries is now an open secret to all who know God personally by faith in Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament vocabulary, a mystery is not something unknown or beyond our understanding. It is something which was unknown before but it is now revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Open your Bible to Ephesians 3, please, and we will review *"the mystery of the gospel"* as set forth in verses 1-13.

Comprehension of the mystery

Job 11:7 asks, *"Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?"* The answer is "No!" Then how can we understand the mystery of the gospel? Our text answers. Our understanding is an act of grace on God's part. Paul refers to it as *"the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me"* (verse 2). He saw his conversion to Christ and his understanding of the truth of Christian theology as an undeserved gift from God to him. We are helpless in understanding the things of God unless the Holy Spirit teaches us. His help is a gift of God's grace.

Our understanding is the result of a revelation from God. Paul said His understanding of the hidden secret of God was by direct revelation (verses 3, 4). The revelation which God has given to chosen men has been written by divine direction in a book we call the Holy Bible. We receive no new revelations today, but we are taught by the Spirit of God that we might understand the things recorded in the Bible. The Lord reveals what He intends to do (Amos 3:7). If you want a knowledge of God, look for the written record of His revelation in Holy Scripture.

Our understanding is a previously unknown truth (verse 5). Not even the prophets or apostles knew this mystery until it was shown them in Jesus Christ. Simon Peter wrote of things the prophets *"Inquired and searched diligently"* to understand because they did not comprehend fully what the Spirit was saying to them (I Peter 1:10-12). Those secret things belong to God; the things revealed belong to us (Deuteronomy 29:29). That is *"the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but is made manifest"* today Romans 16:25, 26. You and I can know it!

Content of the mystery

Here is that mystery of the gospel: *"That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his (God's) promise in Christ by the gospel"* Ephesians 3:6. Does that surprise you?

The mystery was not that the Gentiles would be saved. Over and over God had said the Gentiles would be blessed through Abraham (Genesis 12:3; 22:18). *"All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name"* Psalm 86:9. The

Servant of Jehovah is addressed in these words, *"It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth"* Isaiah 49:6. *"And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising"* Isaiah 60:3. That is why Jesus commanded us *"that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations"* Luke 24:47. All the Bible is filled with information about the conversion of the Gentiles. That is no mystery. The mystery is that Jew and Gentile would be made one new man in Christ. His intention to *"gather together in one all things in Christ"* will include Jew and Gentile being one in Him (Ephesians 1:9-12).

When a Jew is saved, he does not become a "Christian Jew." When a Gentile is saved he does not become a "Christian Gentile." When either Jew or Gentile is saved, he becomes a Christian. The Bible says, *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"* Galatians 3:28, 29. That was a truth neither Jew nor Gentile knew until it was revealed in Jesus Christ. It is an astounding truth. Behold and wonder at the content of the mystery made known in Christ.

Communication of the mystery

The union of all believers in one new man in Christ is too good to be kept private. Everyone should know and have opportunity to enter the fold. But how is that *"mystery"* to be communicated? Again, our text answers.

(1) The gospel mystery is known by personal witness (verses 7, 8). It is a privilege (Paul calls it a "grace," undeserved favor) to be a witness for Jesus. As He sent out His disciples two by two, so He sends us out today to tell people of salvation through faith in Him.

(2) The gospel mystery is to be known by all people (verse 9). It is our privilege to make those who have been spiritually blinded to see the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ. So we are commissioned to bring the gospel into the personal hearing of every human being in the whole world (Mark 16:15).

(3) The gospel mystery is to be made known to the angels (verse 10). The apostle Peter said these are things *"the angels desire to look into"* I Peter 1:12.. So in the purpose of God the church becomes a university for angels, teaching them the manifold grace of God shown in saving sinners through Jesus Christ.

(4) The gospel mystery is according to God's eternal plan (verse 11). He has an *"eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."* He is doing all things in human history according to that plan. *"The determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God"* was involved in the crucifixion of Jesus (Acts 2:23), as well as His resurrection and ascension. The saving of sinners was on the heart of God and the plan of redemption in the mind of God before the world was.

(5) The gospel mystery is made known by the messengers of God (verse 12). We have boldness and enter confidently into God's presence. We receive His message and pass it on to people who need to receive it. We are God's workmen.

(6) The gospel mystery may be shed abroad through sufferings (verse 13). If so, we rejoice as Jesus told us to (Matthew 5:10-12). We remember that the future glory so far surpasses the present sufferings that the troubles appear as nothing.

Now you know the mystery. God's hidden secret, now made dear, is that we believers are brothers and sisters in Christ with no earthly distinctions separating us.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Ephesians 3:14-21

Have you noticed that in almost every portion of this Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians I have said, "This is the richest part of the epistle"? I say it over and over because each part is so wonderfully rich in the subject it addresses. Chapter 3, verses 14-21 is no exception. It is a prayer offered by the apostle Paul on behalf of the believers in Ephesus. And what a prayer it is!

One commentator has written that this is "the most sublime, the most far reaching, and the most majestic prayer found anywhere in Paul's Epistles, or possibly in the whole Bible. It reveals not only the requests of Paul for the Ephesians, but also the desire and longing of God for all His people ... (It is) . . . an expression of His purpose ... a statement of the ultimate goal of redemption that He intends His people to realize" (Curtis Vaughn, Bible Study Commentary, "Ephesians," Zondervan, p. 78).

I find inspiration in reading that prayer. I have offered it on behalf of people who were under my spiritual leadership. I offer it in your behalf right now. Take your Bible and turn to Ephesians 3:14-21. Let us learn from this prayer which God has caused to be written in His holy Word. Look at what it tells us concerning our personal spiritual lives.

Source of spiritual life

The prayer is addressed to "*the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (verse 14). Why is a prayer dealing with our spiritual life addressed to Him? Because He is the Source and Sustainer of our spiritual life. Jesus said, "*This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent*" John 17:3. To know God in Jesus Christ is to have life. But more than that, Jesus said, "*I am come that they might have life, and they might have it more abundantly*" John 10:10. Not only does God give us life in Jesus Christ, He gives us abundant life in Him.

Since God is our Father, we address our prayers to Him (Matthew 6:9). We look to Him for the good things we need (Matthew 7:11). We enjoy the fellowship of His Holy Spirit (Romans 8:15). Through our faith in Jesus we call on the Father for forgiveness of sin (Romans 10:13). He responded by forgiving us and giving us life. He is the source and support of our spiritual life. Praise His name.

Development in the spiritual life

Being saved (born again) is just the beginning. There is so much potential for growth in "*grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" II Peter 3:18. So Paul prays for the spiritual growth of the Ephesian believers. Interpreters are not in agreement as to the number of petitions in Paul's prayer. I mention four for your consideration.

(1) Grow in spiritual strength so that you are "*strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man*" (verse 16). I see that growth made possible by the prayers of God's people. That is why Paul is praying for them and other new converts. It is made possible by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. So Paul mentions that the empowering is "*by his Spirit in the inner man*."

It is possible in limitless measure, "*according to the riches of his glory.*"

That is the petition I offer for you. When the power of God permeates your inmost being, you will experience a great inner reinforcement and a mighty increase of strength for righteousness and against evil. The prayer was offered originally for the Ephesian Christians, but its being preserved by divine inspiration in Holy Scripture makes it applicable to you and me. Think of the

potential in your life and seek to be satisfied with nothing less than a great increase of God's power in you by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

(2) Grow in consciousness of the indwelling Christ (verse 17). I believe prayer is not that Christ may begin to live in you. He began that in the person of the Holy Spirit the moment you were saved. The petition is rather that you may be more conscious of His indwelling presence and conform your life to welcome Him the more.

Here is one of the greatest spiritual discoveries I have ever made. God is not up in heaven while I am on the earth. He is here. But He is not just here with me. He is here in me. I go no place apart from his presence. What a blessed thought! Believe it and rejoice.

(3) Grow in love. You can be "*rooted and grounded in love*" (verse 17) so that you are "*able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge*" (verses 18, 19). There is an ocean of God's love you can swim in and never exhaust it. Grow up to your full potential in Him.

(4) Grow until you experience the fullness of God (verse 19). You can be filled to the full with God Himself. All His divine perfections can be reflected in you. You can be filled full with the consequence that you remain in a state of fullness (Colossians 2:9, 10). That is your potential. Realize it, for Jesus' sake. Since such potential is here for us, how tragic for one of us to fall short. Keep on growing spiritually and becoming more and more like Jesus Christ'

Goal of the spiritual life

Verse 21 reads, "*Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.*" There is the goal toward which we are moving. We are saved that we might be "*to the praise of the glory of his grace*" Ephesians; 1:6, 12, 14. Unless He is glorified in our lives, we miss the very purpose of our salvation.

Glorifying God has three elements, according to our text. It is to be "*in the church.*" It is to be "*by Christ Jesus.*" It is to be "*throughout all ages.*" Evaluate your life in view of that goal. Is that what your life is doing now? Are you glorifying God in a Bible believing New Testament church by Christ Jesus?

How is one able to do that?" one may ask. Verse 20 answers that it is possible by the power of God. Look at the potential of His power: "*able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.*" That is quite a potential, isn't it? Then consider the presence of his power "*that worketh in you.*" It is already at work in you. You can say with the prophet Micah, "*Truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord*" Micah 3:8. "*They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength*" Isaiah 40:31. "*The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits*" Daniel 11:32.

Thus we conclude our studies of doctrines in Ephesians 1-3. Beginning with 4:1 and to the end of the Epistle, we will see the practical application of the doctrines. God's goal is that we believe and behave.