

## PHILIPPIANS

The history of the church in Philippi begins with a dream by the apostle Paul in which he sees a Macedonian man who calls to him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."<sup>1</sup>

This dream occurs at the end of a series of frustrating efforts to evangelize in the region of Phrygia, Galatia and Bythina, according to Luke's report in Acts, Paul and his companions recognize the hand of God in all those experiences, probably in retrospect.<sup>2</sup> The realization of the dream, however, was not without frustration either. Paul and Silas end up in prison. They progressed from bad to worse.

Yet the dream was the beginning of the evangelizing of Europe, which for centuries would be a bulwark of the Gospel. It was from Europe that, finally, the Gospel went to the ends of the earth. The fact that the center of gravity shifted later on does in no way diminish the importance of Paul's visit to Philippi. We don't know exactly what role Luke played in all this. We conclude from the way Luke uses his personal pronouns, that he joined Paul's company discretely at the time of the crossing. Up to verse 10 Luke speaks about "they," indicating Paul and his companions. But in vs. 10 we read: "After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."

So the trip to Macedonia started with a vision given by God Himself. How much of Europe was in the grip of darkness we conclude from the prudent way in which the Holy Spirit makes clear the will of God to His servants. There was no voice from heaven as Jonah had received when he was given the message "Go to Nineveh." In contrast some doors were closed quietly so that Paul and Silas were led to the coast of Troas, groping their way as they went along. After this came the dream in the quietness of the night. It was as if Paul received a coded message.

Probably hordes of demons would have thrown themselves upon the evangelists if the instructions had not been given to them secretly. Once Paul, Silas, Luke, and Timothy arrived in Philippi, it was too late. Even at the conversion of Lydia, Satan's eyes were not open. He underestimated the power of the prayers of the women. Satan probably detests prayers of women even more than those of men. But when Paul and Silas later arrived in prison, there was a midnight prayer meeting at Lydia's house. The walls of prison could not withstand that double attack, one from the outside prayer meeting and one from the songs of praise in the prison cell.

The enemy first tried a ruse in order to keep the initiative and to prevent people from being converted by causing a slave girl in Philippi who was a demon possessed fortuneteller to make propaganda for the Gospel. Nobody will ever be born again when Satan quotes the Bible. Only the Holy Spirit alone can open the hearts of people understand the Word of God. The Jews who returned from captivity in Babylon to Jerusalem understood this danger when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin offered help to rebuild the temple.<sup>3</sup> It is never Satan's intention that men's souls would be saved. That is why, when Paul cast out the spirit of fortune-telling from the girl, the enemy started an immediate counterattack.<sup>4</sup>

We learn from all of this that church-planting is a supernatural work. Jesus Himself planted the church in Philippi, beginning with a woman whose heart was open to the Gospel and later with a man who was so shocked by an earthquake that the shackles of his soul came loose, and he was brought over from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son, from darkness into God's marvelous light.

The church in Philippi was God's miracle tree for Paul. It would be an interesting study to make a comparison between Jonah in Nineveh and Paul in Philippi.

The commentaries tell us that Philippi was a Roman settlement which consisted, in Paul's days, mainly of Roman and Macedonian colonists. Many were retired military personnel; the jailer may have been in this category. Situated on the "Via Egnatia," the city was an important place where trade roads converged. Few Jews lived in Philippi when Paul passed through and in the following period. The fact that there was no synagogue so that Paul and Silas had to look for a place of prayer would indicate this.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 16:9

<sup>2</sup> Acts 16:6,7

<sup>3</sup> Ezra 4:1-5

<sup>4</sup> Acts 16:16-24

<sup>5</sup> See Acts 16:13

The designation of Lydia as “a worshipper of God” better describes a Jewish proselyte more than a Jewess. So Paul was forced to deviate from his normal pattern of ministry to bring the Gospel to the Jews first.

The experts do not agree concerning the place of the prison Paul occupied when he wrote this epistle. The majority lean towards Rome, but others place him in Ephesus, e.g. Marcus Loane in *The Surpassing Excellence*. Others believe he was in Caesarea. I tend to favor the Rome theory. The fact that the Canon groups this epistle with those written to the Ephesians and Colossians seems to confirm this tradition.

The important word in this letter is “joy” and “rejoice.” We find these words in 1:4,18, 25; 2:2,17,18,28,29; 3:1; 4:1,4,10. The Greek word is *chairō*. This word acquired amazing significance against the background of Paul's imprisonment. It lifts us up above all circumstances, and it makes us participate in the joy of the Lord. *Chairete en Kurio*, “Rejoice in the Lord” is the theme of this epistle. The same supernatural element that was present in the birth of the church in Philippi was present in the prison in which Paul was incarcerated. This joy has no connection with circumstances; it is the joy of the Holy Spirit. It is even a weapon against circumstances the enemy wants to use to exert pressure upon us. In this way Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit when He faced the hardness and lack of understanding of those He came to save. In Luke's Gospel we read: “At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.’”<sup>6</sup>

We will not make any effort to divide Paul's epistle into sections. It is clear that the coming and departure of Epaphroditus is an important factor in the letter. The church in Philippi had delegated him to take a contribution to Paul, and he was the one who took this epistle back to them. We read this in ch. 2:25: “But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.” Commentators agree that the epistle has a very personal character. Paul had a bond of deep intimate love with the people in Philippi. In ch. 4:1 he calls them “My joy and crown.” Isn't it wonderful that as human beings we can mean so much to one another? Our crown will not be an impersonal piece of metal that will be put on our heads in heaven. Our crown will be people who have come to know Jesus Christ through our life and testimony. We may be proud of them. Paul loves these people and they love him. There is no stronger bond among people than fellowship in Jesus Christ. If the love of Christ, which flows towards us from Christ, flows through us to others and from the others back to us, there is joy unlimited, even if our hands and feet are bound.

If this letter was written from prison in Rome it dates approximately from the year AD 62.

## I. Introduction. 1:1-2

***“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”***

There is little we can say about these verses. Paul calls himself and Timothy “servants.” The title Paul uses in some of the other epistles is omitted. The Greek word for “servant” is “*doulos*,” which means slave. It implies right of ownership. The fact that Jesus Christ bought us and paid for us with His own blood means that He has rights on our body, our spirit, our time. Paul's use of the word “*doulos*” implies a complete surrender of himself to the will of God.<sup>7</sup>

Paul writes this to a church which consists mainly of Roman citizens. He underlines what he wrote before in I Corinthians: “For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave.”<sup>8</sup> Both the sender and the receiver of this letter belong to the category of “free men, called to be Christ's slave.”

The church is called “saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi.” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* says about this: “The term saints does not designate a level of ethical achievement.” If had been Paul's intention to refer to their lifestyle, the mention of the overseers and deacons separately would point to a difference of sanctity in those people. It could also be an indication of apostolic irony. The original

<sup>6</sup> Luke 10:21

<sup>7</sup> See also I Cor. 6:19,20

<sup>8</sup> I Cor. 7:22

meaning of the word "holy" is "to be set apart (for God)." That "ethical achievement" should eventually flow out from this condition is a different matter. The Hebrew word for "holy" that is used in the Old Testament is *qadash*, which means "to consecrate, or dedicate" and also "to pronounce clean." It is true that the word "saint" points here primarily to our position in Christ, but it implies also a lifestyle that is in accordance with this position. In Leviticus God says: "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.'"<sup>9</sup> How this works in practice, we learn elsewhere in Leviticus, that God adds: "I am the LORD, who makes you holy."<sup>10</sup>

The Greek word *episkopos* is translated "overseers." The KJV and RSV say "bishops." The word had originally a secular meaning of "inspector," and it was used for the Roman magistrates. We should not exclude the possibility that Paul uses the term ironically in his letter to these retired colonials. This is the only epistle in which Paul mentions the overseers and deacons separately. The word "deacon" (*diakonos*) means "servant" in the general sense of the word. The term was used both for slaves as well as for hired helpers. *Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament* says: "It represents a servant, not in his relationship, but in his activity."

We see in Acts, where we meet the deacons for the first time, that their service had a social connotation.<sup>11</sup> We also understand that the church in Philippi was moved by social issues. One of the reasons for the writing of this letter was the fact that they had sent material help to Paul.<sup>12</sup> Paul uses them, with other churches in Macedonia, as an example to the church in Corinth because of their generosity toward the needy brothers in Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup> So we can say that the deacons in the church in Philippi fulfilled their task, as they should. Surely, giving and joy are complementary. The joy of the church in Philippi was, undoubtedly, related to their generosity.

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." - vs.2 Paul combines East and West in this greeting. *Charis* ("grace") is a Greek salutation and "peace" is the Greek translation of the Hebrew *Shalom*. *Vincent* says that "grace" expresses God's love for man and "peace" the condition which is the result of that love. It is a beautiful thing that polite greetings can have such a rich spiritual significance. Actually, what Paul did was change the customary word *charein* (greetings) with the shorter form *charis* (grace.) *Charis* is a loaded word in the New Testament. Both grace and peace are gifts of God to man. It seems strange that Paul mentions the Father and the Son but not the Holy Spirit. We could say that the remainder of the epistle deals with the Holy Spirit.

## II. Phil. 1:3-11

*"I thank my God every time I remember you.  
 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy  
 Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,  
 Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the  
 day of Christ Jesus.  
 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in  
 chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.  
 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.  
 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,  
 So that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,  
 Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ; to the glory and praise of God."*

Paul relives over and over again in his heart the events that led to the birth of the church in Philippi. He never lost his amazement about the supernatural character of what happened. He had never really worked hard to bring about the birth of the church. God just gave it to him. The daily life of the church is a testimony to the supernatural element that brought it into existence. That is why Paul's

<sup>9</sup> Lev. 19:2

<sup>10</sup> Lev. 20:8

<sup>11</sup> Acts 6:1-16

<sup>12</sup> See ch. 4:10-19

<sup>13</sup> II Cor. 8:1-7

intercession for the church in Philippi is mingled with praise. How good it is when we can thank God for each other! There are people in my life who cause gratitude to well up in me when I remember them. This is one way by which God brings joy into our lives.

If we analyze what Paul says in these verses, we realize that one way in which joy comes to us is by thinking of others. This delivers us from an excessive concentration upon ourselves and our circumstances. Then there is intercession; that is the bringing of others and their needs before God. Intercession elevates our human relationships to the highest level. This kind of intercessory prayer was symbolized by Aaron, the High Priest when he entered the Holy Place. Part of the High Priest's clothing consisted of two shoulder pieces containing two onyx stones engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel.<sup>14</sup> He also wore a breastplate with twelve precious stones, each bearing the name of one of the tribes. Aaron carried names of the people on his shoulders when he appeared before God. Paul makes allusion to this Old Testament picture when he says in vs. 7: "It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart."

Intercession made by people on earth is an image of Jesus' intercession for us as our High Priest in Heaven. Our relationship with Christ is based on His intercession for us. We can intercede for others because He prays for us.

Not every man who accepts the Gospel becomes immediately an evangelist himself. In Jesus' parable of the sower we find a category of people who spontaneously accept the Word, but they never bear fruit because of the hard layer of rock under the surface of their lives, which is never broken. In Matthew Jesus says about such people: "But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the Word, he quickly falls away."<sup>15</sup> Trouble and persecution give proof of what is inside. The Philippians participated in the propagation of the Gospel from the very first day, and they also received their share of persecution. Paul says later on in this chapter: "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, Since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have" (ch. 1:29,30). They had been eye witnesses of the scourging and imprisonment of Paul and Silas, and they knew from the very beginning what price they would have to pay. But they also understood that if the Gospel of Jesus Christ was worth dying for, it was good enough to live for. People who have suffered for the Gospel and have faced death because of it understand this better than anyone else.

It was not easy for Paul to say these things; he wrote this letter from prison. The Gospel grows nowhere so well as under persecution. The Negro slaves in America and the Christians in communist China are witnesses to this fact. It is difficult for us to understand this mystery that the Holy Spirit works in the heart of man. We would expect man to give up under pressure, but this is usually not the case.

Paul gives the glory to God for the fact that the converts in Philippi became evangelists from the first day. This is God's work; it has nothing to do with their background or circumstances. That is why he expresses, in faith upon God, the confidence that these saints will persevere. It sounds Calvinistic, doesn't it?

Vs. 6 also emphasizes the fact that being a saint in Christ, as vs. 1 puts it, is not the same thing as being sanctified by God. From the day of our conversion we are saints in Christ. On that very day the Holy Spirit starts a good work in us that will ultimately result in perfect holiness. God wants us to be holy, as He is holy. In Jude vs.24 we read: "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy...." God is not only able to keep us from stumbling; He can also make us perfect.

In other epistles Paul also expresses this truth, which was precious to him. In Colossians we read: "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation."<sup>16</sup> In Ephesians: "And to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."<sup>17</sup> John sees the church as a bride adorned to meet her bridegroom. In Revelations he says: "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. It shone with

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<sup>14</sup> Ex. 28:9-12

<sup>15</sup> Matt. 13:21

<sup>16</sup> Col.1:22

<sup>17</sup> Eph. 5:27

the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.”<sup>18</sup> God is serious when He says: “Be holy!”

Several times in this epistle Paul returns to the mystery of the work of the Holy Spirit in us and how this fits in with human initiative. The fact that our sanctification is God's work does not mean that we are passive onlookers. Otherwise, our receiving a crown at the day of Jesus' return would be an empty ritual.

The reason Paul gives for his assurance regarding the Philippians' spiritual condition is a strange one. In vs. 7 he states two proofs: First the fact that he has them in his heart and secondly that they share in the grace God has given to Paul. We read: “It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.” We mentioned already that having other people on our heart is part of our priesthood. For Paul this image has a strong emotional content. He loves these people deeply. God uses our love for others to reach them and to build them up. Rarely does God reveal Himself to others outside those bonds of human love. Direct revelations are, of course, not excluded, but usually these are indications that the normal channels are plugged up. Carrying others upon our heart is both part of our official priestly office. Part of Aaron's priesthood consisted in the fact that he wore the names of the tribes of Israel on his heart; it was part of his clothing. So for us too it is a part of our priesthood to intercede, but it is also the emotional experience of the streaming out of warm personal feelings toward our neighbor via the throne of God. It is good and healthy, not only to tell God that we love certain people, but also to tell one another. Paul does say to the Philippians that he carries them on his heart, doesn't he?

This verse is refreshingly positive. Paul is very much aware of the fact that everything that has been accomplished is the work of the Holy Spirit. The participation in the preaching of the Gospel, the way in which suffering is accepted, and the pouring out of love for one another, all are matters in which man is involved one hundred percent; and all this would be impossible without the presence and operation of the Spirit of God.

It has been said that a counselor should always keep a professional distance between himself and the people who put their trust in him. He has to guard himself against getting too much involved emotionally. This is what the text book says. Paul does not follow this advice. In vs. 8 he says: “God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.” He is homesick for the church in Philippi. Jesus Himself never kept His distance professionally. We have to be careful that our emotions are kept healthy. We are sinful people and the devil is unscrupulous if he can bend our feelings and desires. Dangers are never absent in the realm of counseling. We always must open ourselves to the searching eye of the Holy Spirit in our relationships with one another. Our feelings have to be kept within the framework of Christ's compassion for others. There is a very subtle danger in that the priority shifts in our love for other people. Every human relationship that would diminish in any way our love for God with all our heart, all our soul and all our mind and all our will, is being manipulated by the evil one. The relationship between Paul and the Philippians is best described in II Corinthians: “They gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.”<sup>19</sup> All relationships that are channeled via God will be healthy ones.

Important factors in a relationship of mutual love are mentioned in vs. 9 where Paul speaks of “knowledge and depth of insight,” or as the RSV puts it, “knowledge and all discernment.” The love of Christ is not blind. When Paul says in I Corinthians that “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things,”<sup>20</sup> he doesn't mean that he closes his eyes to the shortcomings of his brethren in Christ. One knows what he “bears” and “believes.” Bearing and believing are acts of the will, not a covering up of sins. Jesus says clearly that we must tell our brother his faults. Jesus says: “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.”<sup>21</sup> Love distinguishes between that which belongs to the domain of human frailty, which has to be touched by the Holy Spirit in the heart of our brother and that which can cause serious damage in the relationship with God and with one another. Tact and sensitivity are necessary in dealing with interpersonal relationships because we are complicated beings who seldom see things as they really are. If we

<sup>18</sup> Rev. 21:2,11

<sup>19</sup> II Cor. 8:5

<sup>20</sup> I Cor. 13:7 (RSV).

<sup>21</sup> Matt. 18:15

have this tact we are following Christ example in dealing with one another. The Holy Spirit deals with us with sensitivity; therefore, we should love our neighbor as ourself. We must always ask ourselves the question of how we would react to a particular situation; and then we should approach our neighbor accordingly.

God does not demand of us that we evaluate one another. As Paul says in Romans: "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand."<sup>22</sup> We should accept one another as we are because God has accepted us and our neighbor as we are. This does not mean that there would be no place for evaluation at all. There are certain situations in which we must do evaluation, especially in those situations, love and discernment are required. If we have to evaluate fellow Christians, we should do it within the framework of their gifts and the task that is given them. From what Paul says in I Corinthians, we understand that evaluation is required only under specific circumstances; it is not a general rule. We read: "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me."<sup>23</sup> We are to be judged by the Lord, but that is different from self-evaluation.

The questions we should not ask ourselves are: How successful am I, or how much self-fulfillment do I experience? Rather we should ask ourselves: is what I do in accordance with the Word of God? And secondly: Is what I do and the way in which I do it glorifying to God? Purity and blamelessness are the fruits of obedience to the Word of Christ. Jesus says in John's Gospel, "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you."<sup>24</sup> The only way that the fruit of righteousness will grow in us is when the Holy Spirit plants the seed in our lives and we help it grow in living a life of obedience and fellowship with the Lord.

We should reach for God's glory. Moses prayed: "Now show me your glory."<sup>25</sup> The most decisive factor in the growing process is that the Lord Jesus stands between us and the Father. The fruit of righteousness is to the honor of the Father through Him. His righteousness is projected on us because our sins were projected on Him.

### III. Phil. 1:12-26

*"Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.*

*As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.*

*Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.*

*It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.*

*The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.*

*The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.*

*But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.*

*I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.*

*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

*If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!*

*I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;*

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<sup>22</sup> Rom. 14:4

<sup>23</sup> I Cor. 4:3,4

<sup>24</sup> John 15:3

<sup>25</sup> Ex. 33:18

***But it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.”***

In Matthew, the Lord Jesus predicts what will await His disciples. The Gospel will have to be preached to governors and kings, and the way this is done is by having accusations brought against the evangelist and having him taken to court.<sup>26</sup> Toward the end of the book of Acts, we read about some of the testimonies that Paul was able to give in such a situation. In Acts 23 Paul stands before the Sanhedrin. In Acts 24 Felix hears the Gospel from Paul, and in chapter 25, Festus and Agrippa are faced with the truth.

We cannot determine with certainty where the advancement of the Gospel, as Paul mentions in vs. 12, took place. As we said before, most commentators tend to place Paul's imprisonment in Rome, some in Ceasarea and others in Ephesus. This last place is favored because of recent archeological finds by which a "preatorium" in Ephesus was unearthed. In any case, Paul talks about Roman officials who, were it not for Paul's testimony, would normally not have been confronted with the Gospel. Needless to say, the experience was not an unadulterated joy for Paul; imprisonment was invariably accompanied by physical pain, and shackles and often floggings that were common.

In my own experience, I know of cases in which the Lord used physical suffering to lead to the salvation of others. Mijo van der Bijl, the wife of one of my colleagues, underwent a cancer operation in the Netherlands. She led a woman to the Lord who was in the same ward with her. A boy who was the cause of a motorcycle accident involving some of our colleagues on the mission field, was converted because of the accident.

For Paul, however, the important thing was not only that "as a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that [he was] in chains for Christ," but "because of [his] chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly." It is not only the blood of the martyrs which is the seed of the church, but also their lives and testimony which create a fertile soil for the seed. Nothing is so encouraging as witnessing an anointed, courageous Christian. Paul's heroic conduct was the work of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus Christ promises His assistance to us. We read: "But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, For it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."<sup>27</sup> When we are taken to court, Christ is taken to court. And the *Parakletos* has never been surpassed by any lawyer.

We do not read here that anyone received new life in Christ through Paul's imprisonment; however, in Philemon vs. 10 we encounter Onesimus, whom Paul had fathered in prison, though this could have been during a different imprisonment.

Paul's thoughts in vs. 15-18 are hard to follow. The translation of "envy and rivalry" does not sound right. We have to keep in mind that the "preaching of Christ," as Paul calls it, is not a subjective matter, but an objective announcement of the truth. The way Paul puts it, it sounds as if the Gospel is about Paul instead of Jesus. Of course this cannot be the true intention of the passage. From Paul's experience in Philippi we learn that Paul himself did not accept with joy the announcing of the Gospel from just any source. He cast out the evil spirit of the fortune-telling slave girl.<sup>28</sup> The fact that in this epistle Paul says he rejoices in the preaching proves that the source of it is not satanic. Also, if it were a matter of the Jews preaching circumcision, the apostle would not have expressed himself so kindly. In chapter 3:2 he utters sharp warnings against this kind of preaching. And the epistle to the Galatians is proof that Paul did not act kindly toward those who tried to rob the Gospel of its power. So, it is hard to determine whom Paul has in mind here. We will have to interpret these verses in the light of what is said in ch. 3:17-19, where Paul sets himself as an example of a genuine Christian for others to follow. There he speaks about people, who profess to be Christians but who live as enemies of the cross of Christ.

The message of the Gospel which we proclaim should be demonstrated by the way in which we live. The message that was preached was good, but the lifestyle of those who preached it was not. It is possible that Paul suffered from the fact that in the eye of the public he was thrown on the same heap as

<sup>26</sup> Matt.10:17-20

<sup>27</sup> Matt.10:19,20

<sup>28</sup> Acts 16:16-18

those who clearly profited from their preaching and that by doing so gave the Gospel a bad name. It seems doubtful that some had adopted a lifestyle of affluence with the express purpose to make Paul suffer. They may never have given Paul a thought. Perhaps they were too egocentric for that. In the same way would those who preached the Gospel "out of goodwill" have done this with the purpose of lightening Paul's suffering. It may be true that those who "preached Christ out of envy and rivalry" were more concerned about themselves than about Christ, but Paul would never have entered their picture. I cannot help thinking that Paul treats the matter too subjectively. He says to himself that these people preach on purpose to bother him, and this supposition is probably without ground. This doesn't mean that the lesson we draw from it is not valuable. Not only the message we but also the way in which we bring it is important. We can make life easier or harder for other people depending on whether our way of living corresponds with the Gospel or not.

The word "deliverance" in vs. 19 has multiple meanings. The KJV calls it "salvation." Obviously Paul does not speak about his conversion and regeneration. It is beyond doubt that those things were in the past for Paul. In ch. 3:10-14 Paul speaks about things that are still lacking in his salvation. We should understand "deliverance" or "salvation" in that light. Paul is convinced that not he, but Christ, is the accused in the Roman court; and he wants to be sure that his attitude or his speaking will in no way be a hindrance in the glorification of his Lord. Whether this means acquittal for him or condemnation is of no importance. But he knows that in the natural he is not indifferent. His human nature does not accept either with equal tranquillity. The desire for self-preservation was as strong in Paul as in anybody else. Without the intercession of other Christians and without the help of the Holy Spirit his defense would turn out to be a complete disaster. Paul did not have the inherent abilities that would assure victory in himself. Only by trusting in Jesus' promise in Matthew, that the Holy Spirit would give him the words to speak, would the Gospel come through clearly.

There is always the danger that we put our trust in our reputation. Only if we follow the advice in Proverbs: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight,"<sup>29</sup> will our way before God indeed be straight. That is the "salvation" Paul speaks about. It is important to realize that the intercession of others and the help of the Holy Spirit are indispensable. I presume the Holy Spirit can work directly in the heart of a person if the church doesn't function as it should, but that is not God's method. The Spirit works in and through the body of Christ.

Often I am reminded of my experience when my wife and I were in Sentani and a thief tried to kill the night watchman and me with a dagger. The thief was the one who lost his life because the night watchman killed him with an arrow. I was amazed to discover my feelings toward the guy who had stabbed me and almost made me lose my life. In the natural I should have hated him, but the Lord gave me feelings of love and compassion for him. Had my natural feelings come to the surface, I would have felt ashamed, but the Lord gave me feelings for which I did not have to be ashamed. I was utterly amazed at my own reaction. Paul did not only want the Gospel to be heard clearly when he stood before his judges, but also that the love of Christ would be visible in him, even if he was going to be mistreated or even executed.

This brings us to one of the great verses in the Bible: vs. 21 - "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." We will never live a life of reality if we have never settled the matter of death first. Actually, the problem of death is that we have to let go. The tendency we have to keep ourselves from dying shows that deep down in our hearts we do not want to be dependent upon God. We act as if the source of life is in ourselves, when actually, the problem of death is that we must yield.

Death came about when the life-line with God was severed in Paradise. The first step toward life is in the recognition of these facts. If I confess before God that I am dead outside of Him and that He alone is the source of my life, I let go of myself. We can only say that Christ is our life if we have surrendered our life to Him. Paul describes this process clearly in where he says: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."<sup>30</sup> This is the fundamental acknowledgment that Christ died on the cross in my stead. This means that when He died, I died. The result of this is that I lost all claims I had upon myself and upon all that belongs to me. The basis for His victory is my absolute defeat. Without this total bankruptcy no new life is possible. Without my death there will be no resurrection for me either.

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<sup>29</sup> Prov. 3:5,6

<sup>30</sup> Gal. 2:20



Ravi Zacharias tells the story of how afraid he was when he visited Phnom Penh at the time it was bombarded by the Khmer Rouge. A missionary who was with him showed no sign of fear whatsoever. When asked "How come you are not afraid?" he said: "I died years ago." Another missionary in Cambodia, Mary Lou Rorebaugh, conquered her fear of bombs by accepting the fact that she could be hit by one. We can only live if we have already died. These basic facts are explained in II Corinthians: "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."<sup>31</sup>

Paul's words "For me, to live is Christ" indicate also what the content and the quality of his life is. It means, literally, that we live for Him and not for ourselves. We exist for Him and our acts should please Him. In everything we do He should occupy the central place; otherwise Christ would not be exalted in our body.

It is also true that, if Christ is our life, we live as people who are resurrected from the dead. Ruth Paxon calls this *Life on the Highest Plane*. Identification with Christ's death results in identification with His resurrection. Paul elaborates this truth in Romans.<sup>32</sup>

This identification consists both of a position and a growing process. Elsewhere in Romans he says: "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection."<sup>33</sup> Or, as the KJV puts it: "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." That is why in ch. 3:10-14 Paul indicates that he had not experienced yet to the full all that was due him in the resurrection of Christ. He says: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, And so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

Obviously, we cannot demonstrate the fullness of God's glory in our mortal bodies. But our position in Christ is enough to give a glow to our lives. In II Corinthians Paul says: "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."<sup>34</sup>

The fact that "to die is gain" does not deny the hostile character of death. Death will always be "the last enemy," which will be conquered finally at the end of time. Revelation says: "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire."<sup>35</sup> It is clear, however, from the paradox of Paul's words that this enemy of ours will not be able to incur any lasting damage to us as God's children in Jesus Christ. Death means the end of our life on earth and the decomposition of our body; but it is also the perfection of the glory of Jesus which was planted in us and for which God has predestined us. God leaves it to the enemy to do the dirty work; after all, the devil is our greatest enemy, the author of death.

So the gates of Heaven are opened for us through death. "To be with Christ," as Paul puts it in vs. 23, is the goal of our existence and the fulfillment of our being. I remember having an attack of malaria in Brussels during our first furlough from the mission field. I didn't know it was malaria, and when the fever soared, I thought I was dying. The thought that I would soon see Jesus, who had died for my sins, filled me with a deep joy. A verse from Peter's epistle kept coming to me: "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy."<sup>36</sup>

In vs. 22-26 Paul speaks about a dilemma most people in this world have never faced. For the average person the greatest priority is to stay alive. The Germans call it "the struggle for existence;"<sup>37</sup> and

<sup>31</sup> II Cor. 5:14,15

<sup>32</sup> Rom. 6:1-14

<sup>33</sup> Rom 6:5

<sup>34</sup> II Cor. 3:18

<sup>35</sup> Rev. 20:14

<sup>36</sup> I Peter 1:8

<sup>37</sup> Der Kampf ums Dasein

Hamlet's most famous words are: "To be, or not to be that is the question." One chooses, if there is a choice, "to be." We live in a world in which death has the final say, and efforts to stretch life are pushed to an extent that becomes ridiculous. People who lose consciousness are hooked up to a life support machine. Many people are ready to compromise morally if that stretches their life. In Communist Russia the KGB was able to force many people to sign confessions simply by threatening them with a gun. The only reason that the choice between life and death is a dilemma for Paul is because staying alive would be more advantageous for the kingdom of Heaven. He knew the Lord had used him to bring others to Christ Jesus. What a life-goal! At the same time it is clear that our lives can only be useful to the Lord if for us to die is gain.

Of course in reality Paul had no choice. It was not up to him to decide whether he would live or die. That which he calls a choice, when he says, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far," is actually an evaluation of his life on earth. That is important. We will never be able to draw lines from particular situations on earth to Heaven, as Christ often did. Jesus was able to stop at certain moments in His life and evaluate what happened in an instant from God's perspective. We cannot judge that clearly, but we can determine the value of our life as a whole in the light of eternity. The only way to stand before death and not fear and to work with fruit is if we are convinced that "to depart and be with Christ ... is better by far." We should not confuse this longing with being weary of life. Paul's attitude is a healthy one. The dilemma is not to die or to live but to be with Christ or to be with people on earth. The only reason that we should not choose death over life is that there are people on earth who need us: our spouse and our children, our neighbor, believers and unbelievers. It is Paul's love for the Philippians that makes the scale tip toward them.

Whether Paul was actually released or not, we don't know. He says he knows that he would be released, but he could have been wrong. This is not important; the important lesson in these verses is that Paul is willing to sacrifice, at least temporarily, his Heavenly glory because of his love for these people. In Romans he says he would be willing to give up his salvation for good, if this would save his kinsmen. We read: "For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race."<sup>38</sup> This kind of attitude can be formed in us only by the Spirit of Christ, who Himself chose to be forsaken by God in order to save us.

Paul wants his children to rejoice in their faith. According to vs. 25 this is a process of spiritual growth. Our joy will increase as much as our fellowship with Christ becomes stronger and more intimate. We will detach ourselves more and more from the influence that circumstances have upon our emotional well-being. The source of our joy will be the Lord. As Nehemiah said: "The joy of the LORD is your strength."<sup>39</sup> This kind of joy is an indication of spiritual maturity.

At the end of this section it sounds as if Paul shows a lack of humility. That is, if we take humility as a denial of facts. Jesus Himself stated publicly that He was humble. In Matthew we read: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."<sup>40</sup> There is a lot of misunderstanding about what humility is. Only a person of high status can be humble. We should not confuse humility with baseness. Paul boasts about the Philippians and calls them "my joy and crown" (ch. 4:1). He thinks it to be quite normal if the Philippians would boast about him in the same way that he does about them. We should be proud of or rejoice in one another because of the work the Holy Spirit does.

Paul would have had a sparkle in his eyes when he dictated the sentence to Timothy in vs. 26: "So that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me." There may also be a touch of humor and even irony in this phrase. The literal translation as given in *The Greek Interlinear Bible* is: "That the boast of you may abound in Christ Jesus in me through my presence with you again."

#### IV. Phil. 1:27 - 2:18.

***"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit,***

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<sup>38</sup> Rom. 9:3

<sup>39</sup> Neh. 8:10<sup>b</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Matt. 11:29

*contending as one man for the faith of the gospel Without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved; and that by God.*

*For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.*

*If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

*And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death; even death on a cross!*

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in Heaven and on earth and under the earth, And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

*Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed; not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence; continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

*Do everything without complaining or arguing,*

*So that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe*

*As you hold out the word of life; in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.*

*But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.*

*So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.”*

The key word in this section is humility. Everything Paul says in the selection is derived from the concept of humility. The unity of spirit is the fruit of humility. Inter-personal relations are determined by humility, which causes people to “consider others better than themselves.” The humility of Christ is presented as the supreme example to be followed, and the attitude of obedience, which does “everything without complaining or arguing” becomes a testimony of light in a world that lives in darkness. This is the basis for a “conduct ... that is worthy of the Gospel of Christ.”

In this way Paul gives his advice in vs. 27. The Gospel is the message of God who became man in order to redeem us by His death. The conduct that is worthy of this Gospel is the conduct that follows the example of Christ.

We don't know the problems that plagued the church in Philippi. Several times Paul uses the word unity or words connoting unity. In 4:2 he even mentions names. Evidently, there were no serious problems that would cause schism as was the case in Corinth. Almost every time Paul speaks about unity or being like-minded, he connects it with the struggle to present the Gospel to people who oppose it. So in vs. 27 where the Gospel is preached there is opposition. This opposition may take the form of human efforts to hinder the preaching, but the reality behind every opposition is that which Paul exposes in Ephesians, where he says: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the Heavenly realms.”

Undoubtedly, those are the powers that try to frighten the believers, mentioned in vs. 28. They should be opposed from the basis of the victory of Jesus Christ, of whom Paul says in Colossians: “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”<sup>41</sup> But if we, as Christians, use our energy to fight one another, we show clearly that we have no

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<sup>41</sup> Col. 2:15

idea what spiritual life is all about. The majority of Christians do not see the great outline of the battle. The Bible gives several examples of armies that destroyed themselves. If the Church of Jesus Christ starts to indulge in self-destruction, it plays into the devil's hand.

The expression "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy" is the translation of the Greek *politeuesthe*, "be a citizen." The term is very fitting for Romans who live outside the actual boundaries of their homeland in a Roman colony in Macedonia. We have to behave on earth as citizens of the kingdom of Heaven. This thought is further worked out in 3:20,21.

In vs. 29 the boundaries of the meaning of the word *grace* are being enlarged. Peter says the same in his epistle, where we read: "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."<sup>42</sup>

It is obvious that suffering in itself is not good. Pain, sickness and death form no part of God's original plan with man. "Grace," which is the word used in Greek translated "it has been granted," does not pertain to the content of suffering but to the fruit it produces and the attitude we take towards it.

It is also important to note that Paul connects suffering and faith in vs. 29. Both are part of the grace God has imparted to us. We need grace to be able to believe. Our sinful nature keeps us separate from God's truth. To trust God does not come naturally to us since we are suspicious by nature. If we learn to put our trust in God, it is by the influence of the Holy Spirit. We need this certainty that God is real and that He does good to us and that the end will be glory when pain and darkness close in around us. Our natural tendency is to fear, but the experience of God's love takes away fear.

It is also true that our insight in the suffering of Christ deepens as we suffer ourselves, and this will make us understand more of the love that drove Him. This understanding is what God intends to bring about in us. He wants us to answer His love with our love which is the purpose of the grace of suffering. Pain is the reaction of our bodies to everything Satan pours out upon us. Pain does not originate with God, but He built it in as a warning signal and as such it is, undoubtedly, a divine invention. God uses the weapons of the enemy to destroy the enemy. The greatest example of this is Jesus' victory over the powers of darkness by His death on the cross.

Paul surely often thought back over the events that led to the founding of the church in Philippi. It started with a closed door in Asia. After that came the vision at Troas and the crossing over to Macedonia, followed by Lydia's conversion and Paul's imprisonment. He may have asked himself what impression all these things had made upon the Philippians. From a human viewpoint, the situation was a total defeat. What kind of message has a shackled prisoner with a bleeding back to bring? But it was in this seemingly hopeless situation that the church was born. We see how the struggle of Paul and Silas and the way they reacted to their most difficult circumstances spoke more clearly than their sermons did. Their songs of praise in the middle of the night, as recorded in Acts 16:25, opened the door for God's victory in Philippi.

We understand from Paul's words here that the church in Philippi did not have an easy time. The authorities of the city had come to request politely that the apostles leave, but they may have been less polite toward the Christians who remained in the city. Demonic powers must have thrown themselves upon this little group of believers. They had seen, however, in Paul's life what God's grace can accomplish.

When Paul writes these words he is back at square one. There is no better place from which to write this epistle to the Philippians than a Roman prison. The Philippians undoubtedly understood this; they had been there themselves, some as prisoners, some as jailers.

In the first part of chapter two, Paul gives as an example of humility the attitude of Jesus, or as the KJV and RSV put it "the mind" of Christ Jesus. His description of Jesus' humility is unsurpassed in the Bible.

In introducing the subject in vs. 1, Paul laces his remarks with diplomatic humor. He makes an appeal to them in the name of Jesus Christ. The Greek word, translated "encouragement" is *paraklesis*, which can also be translated as "comfort." In this context the word "appeal" would seem more

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<sup>42</sup> I Pet. 4:12-16

appropriate. The word is a legal term from which the word *parakletos* is derived, which is the title Jesus uses for the Holy Spirit.

Although Paul writes in Greek, the form in which he puts his thoughts is pure Hebrew. The "if any" is the Hebrew word equivalent to our question mark. The questions all require a positive answer. Of course, the Philippians experience encouragement from their being united with Christ! Of course, they have fellowship with the Holy Spirit! And, of course, they know the meaning of tenderness and compassion! Paul does not question these things, but he reminds the brethren of the fundamental truths on which their lives are built.

It is necessary for us to pause from time to time in order to realize where we are and to make our spiritual inventory. It is our position that determines our actions. We cannot conduct ourselves "in a manner worthy of the Gospel" if we don't realize what the Gospel means to us and where it has brought us. Such pausing does not mean stagnation; Paul writes this to promote progress.

The important part, of course, is not that Paul's joy be made complete. That is a detail. The Philippians should not grow spiritually just to make Paul happy. Their growth is for the Lord's sake, not for Paul's. But there are stages in our Christian life in which the person of Christ stands less clearly before our eyes than the person who led us to the Lord. This is not bad as long as it is not a lasting situation. Sooner or later it will have to become clear that the Father Himself loves us and that our human relationships have to be subjected to the goal of our relationship with Christ.

What Paul is actually saying is that there is encouragement from being united with Christ, comfort from his love, fellowship with the Spirit, as well as tenderness and compassion; he says these factors should form the basis for our Christian humility. The way he puts it, tenderness and compassion seem to be directed toward Paul, but this doesn't change any of the truth of what he says. The Philippians understood that their effort should be to please not Paul, but Christ. God wants us to pursue holiness, and our holiness demonstrates itself in our relationship with others.

Although Paul doesn't say this in so many words, it is understood from his admonition that our conversion and regeneration do not automatically cancel out sinful tendencies. "Selfish ambition" "vain conceit," "considering others less than ourselves," and "looking at our own interests" are dangers that continue to threaten us. The Holy Spirit will not conquer those without our consent. Those are "the little foxes that ruin the vineyards" (See Song of Songs 2:15). If we open ourselves up for the critical, loving eye of God, we will discover that our best intentions are often mixed with bitter substances. Christ will have to become incarnate in us. It is the humility of Christ, not our own humility that is needed in us.

The fact that humility is mentioned in connection with Christ's attitude proves that the point is not a lack of honor or position or abilities. Real humility presupposes gifts and abilities. A person is not humble because he has nothing and is unable to do anything. Winston Churchill's comment about his colleagues Clement Atlee as "That modest little man, with so much to be modest about," is funny and insulting to the highest degree, but nothing more! It does not define humility. Humility is based on our gifts and achievements. The source of humility is the recognition that our gifts are borrowed and that we are one hundred percent responsible for what we do with them. Humility expresses itself in obedience toward God in the use of our talents, not in the denial of our possession of them. To deny what God has given us and what He has made us has nothing to do with humility. Devaluation of the concept of humility is the result of devilish propaganda.

Confession of humility does not exclude humility. Jesus said of Himself: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart," (Matt. 11:29) and we should follow Him. But we, in our slyness, are able to simulate humility to manipulate a deeply rooted pride. Charles Dickens, in his famous book *David Copperfield*, paints the picture of Uriah Heep who keeps on saying: "We are umble people." If Christ were not the Second Person of the omnipotent Triune God, He could not be the humblest Person who ever lived on earth. It boils down to this: we are not humble because of a lack of ability but because of what we do with our abilities. A humble person honors God with what he possesses.

The "mind of Christ," as the KJV calls it, is put before us as an example to follow. We have to understand that we are unable to teach this "mind of Christ" to ourselves. Our sinful nature keeps us from learning. Without the Spirit of Christ, the mind of Christ will remain elusive to us. In the quotation from Matt. 11, Jesus says: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me." If we accept this invitation, His gentleness and humility will be imputed to us. The image is very fitting. Jesus speaks of a couple of animals that plough together. If we take upon us the yoke of Christ, we share our weakness with His omnipotence; and in ploughing together our hearts are being changed and conformed to His. Pulling the yoke together with Christ is an essential part of our emotional and spiritual healing as sinful human beings.

According to the Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Paul quotes an existing hymn for his description of the glory and humiliation of Christ. The NIV translates "in the form of God," as the KJV puts it, with "in very nature God." The original, however, seems to speak more about the external manifestation than the essence of the divine nature. But whatever the sense, Paul does, obviously, not intend to diminish in any way the character of the Second Person of the Trinity. Paul says the same as John in his Gospel: "The Word was God" (John 1:1b). The Amplified Bible gives the following rendering of vs. 5: "Who, although being essentially one with God and in the form of God [possessing the fullness of the attributes which make God God]."

The very nature of God stands in contrast with the very nature of a servant in the following verse. Here again the KJV translates it with "the form of a servant." "The form" does not imply that He would be less God or less man. He is and remains God, the eternal and almighty Creator of Heaven and earth. He "is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Heb. 1:3). This is what is meant by "being in the form of God," or, "being in very nature God." But the translation of the Greek word "arpageon" as "robbery," as the KJV gives, does not seem to be a very good one. The context speaks about something that one would not want to give up under normal circumstances. Here we enter a realm of mystery that is inaccessible for our human spirit. How can we understand the dilemma of an un-created God who would lay aside His divine attributes, which we cannot even imagine or describe? A poor comparison would be if, for one reason or another, a multimillionaire would be presented with the choice of exchanging his status for that of a pauper. Jesus chose to be a pauper because He is Love. Love and humility are closely related. They cannot exist separately. This fact adds to humility a dimension that is seldom added to it on earth; nor is humility added to love in our human philosophy.

"But made himself nothing" (NIV), or, as the RSV puts it: "But emptied himself." The Greek word *ekenosen* is, probably, the most analyzed word in the New Testament. It seems arrogant to add my personal analysis to this. It should be made clear, however, that there must have taken place a fundamental change when the Son of God exchanged the eternal for the temporal. As human beings, we have little understanding in the essence of our own being. We hardly know who we are ourselves- and even less, what we are. As Christians, we have the advantage over atheists who see man as the product of evolution, in that we recognize a divine element in man. At least we know in what direction our thinking about ourselves should go. But we don't know how to think from the opposite direction. That is why we cannot explain what the "emptying" of the Son of God involved. There are two things that should give a handle to our understanding of the subject. First, as a man, Jesus did not possess the divine characteristic of omnipresence. Second, there is, obviously, an inseparable unity among all God's characteristics. We cannot speak about divine attributes as if they could be broken up into a series of separate factors. To put it another way, if God lacked one of His attributes or if He did not possess that attribute perfectly and eternally, He would cease to be God. It is a logical conclusion that if one of the divine attributes is not active, none are. This does not mean a denial of Christ's divinity. It only means that during His life on earth Christ could not exercise His divine attributes. He became human in the complete sense of the word and lived within the boundaries and limitations in which man lives upon earth. Heb. 2:14, 17 says, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are; yet was without sin."

That is why Jesus states emphatically that the supernatural manifestations in His life are the work of the Father, which are released through Him because of His faith as man. As an example we quote: Matt. 21:18-22: "Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, 'May you never bear fruit again!' immediately the tree withered. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. 'How did the fig tree wither so quickly?' They asked. Jesus replied, 'I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.'" This truth adds dimensions to our humanity of which we can hardly dream.

As humans who are born on this earth and who have breathed in the polluted air of sin since birth, we look at life from the wrong side. The Word that became flesh has demonstrated to us the only correct philosophy of life. In His humiliation He has shown us the highest height of human life. His becoming man in itself did not debase Christ. After all, man is created in God's image and Jesus Christ is God's perfect image. Paul uses the word "humbled" only in connection with Jesus' taking upon Himself the load of our sins and dying on the cross. Jesus did not become less by becoming man. Humility has nothing to

do with lowliness. Humility is an act of the will which can only be exercised by people of the highest nobility. Pride lowers a man; humility raises him up. J.B. Phillips gives a beautiful rendering of this passage: "For he, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to his prerogatives as God's equal, but stripped himself of all privileges by consenting to be a slave by nature and being born as mortal man. And having become man, he humbled himself by living a life of utter obedience, even to the extent of dying, and the death he died was the death of a common criminal."

Jesus came into this world to die for the sins of the world. He is "the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). This provision for the atonement of sin was included in the plan of creation. Jesus accepted this call to be "the Lamb" when He was baptized in the river Jordan. I presume that Psalm 40:6-8 was before His mind as He went into the water: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced, ["but a body you prepared for me" (Heb 10:5)]; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, 'Here I am, I have come; it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.'" Jesus was very much aware of the fact that He had come to give His life. That is why He says in Matt. 20:28: "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." All other humans are born to live; Jesus came with the specific purpose to die. It is obvious that this goes against the grain of nature. The goal of Jesus' life could only be reached by a series of definite decisions of the will. Those decisions are what is called here "His obedience."

In this light, what does it mean to have "the mind of Christ?" It is clear that our position is not the same as Christ's. He is God and became man. We start as man. Paul addresses Christians. In Christ's coming down to earth, the cross lay before Him. For us the cross is behind. Paul does not work on our guilt feelings by pushing us to be humble in that we would confess our sins. The sin problem is behind us. We cannot show the mind of Christ unless we accept that we have been raised with Christ from the dead and that we are seated with Him in the heavenly realms. In that sense we have the same starting point as He did. But, of course, we don't come down to take the sins of the world upon us. That would mean a senseless repetition. But we identify with men who have fallen in sin. And if the Son of God had to learn obedience, there is every reason that we too must learn to obey. We demonstrate our obedience by giving up that which is rightfully ours. Paul says in Rom. 9:3: "For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race." That is the attitude of humility, the mind of Christ. The elders who fall down before the throne of God and cast their crowns before the throne, in Rev. 4:10, show this humility. Without a crown we cannot be humble.

Jesus refers to this humility several times when He admonishes His disciples to deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Him. He does not say this to fallen sinners, but to the born again person. In Matt. 16:24, for instance, we read: "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'" This is not a case of exchanging our poverty for His riches, but of our giving up our riches for His sake. As John says in I John 3:16: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." That is the mind of Christ.

It is on this basis that God exalts. This is the second resurrection. Just as there is a second death, there is a second resurrection although the expression is not found in the Bible. The Father fulfilled His part of the eternal covenant when He "brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep." (Heb. 13:20). And now, He has put Him, as a human being, in a position that is not accessible for angels or archangels. The great hymn of praise in the book of Revelation is: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (Rev. 5:12). The glory of our Lord Jesus Christ as a man is the same as the glory of God the Father. It makes one dizzy to realize that, as the bride of Christ, we will share in this glory. The New Jerusalem, the bride of the Lamb, has the glory of God, according to Rev. 21:9-11. We don't lose anything by giving up what we have. Our adoration of Jesus Christ as Lord will exalt us to dizzying heights.

Vs. 11 says: "And every tongue [should] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." All glory and honor, both the glory of Jesus as well as the glory given to us, is due only to God. The first sin occurred when the glory of one creature did not flow anymore toward God. Lucifer became Satan and Adam became a sinner. As Isaiah 42:8 says: "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another." We have to be watchful at this point. In one of her books, Corrie ten Boom writes that she was embarrassed by all the praise and honor she received. She decided to take all the compliments that were given her during the day and present them to the Lord as a bouquet. All honor that is given to us

belongs to God. Without Him we would crawl upon the surface of the earth as despicable creatures. If we are honorable, it is because God made us so.

The word "therefore" in vs. 12 is a loaded word, one of the most explosive ones in this chapter. If the previous verses would go to our head we would have missed the point completely. A realistic observation brings us to the conclusion that everything Paul says here surpasses our natural situation by far. "Fear and trembling" are healthy reactions and complete and unconditional obedience is the only way to progress. Obedience has to be learned. The Philippians had started to obey God because Paul had admonished them to do so, and he had been their example. There was a danger that their obedience would slacken in Paul's absence. In the beginning people are often not obedient for Christ's sake. In early stages of our spiritual life, we often do certain things because people tell us. When I came to know the Lord, people often gave the following succinct advice: "Go and ask the Lord yourself!" If we are able to adapt a similar attitude by which we can hear the voice of the Lord when we ask Him for advice, we are on the right track.

When Paul talks about working out our own salvation, he does not mean that we have to be converted and born again by our own effort. What is meant is the sanctification of our lives and the maturing of what God has planted in our hearts. Also, "fear and trembling" has nothing to do with being afraid of God, but it means being serious about Him and our relationship with Him. The fact that we would not even desire our own renewal and progress if God did not help us to want this shows how absolute the havoc is that sin has created in our lives. God has saved us, and He Himself will keep on working on our salvation until we have been changed into His image. The work will be completed when we see Him in glory. This is what Paul also says in chapter 1:6 "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." But we play an active part in this process. In our own strength we can only hinder what God wants to do. We have the power to be negative. Our effort will have to consist of our continuing to relinquish the negative tendencies and areas of our lives and surrendering them to the control of the Holy Spirit. In II Cor. 10:5 Paul speaks about [demolishing] "arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, [taking] captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." In that context Paul speaks about his ministry to others, but we should apply the same principle to our own lives. It is often our tendency to deny entrance to the Holy Spirit to certain areas of our lives. Working out our salvation consists mainly in handing over the keys. The faith factor in this process is the realization that God takes pleasure in us. He loves us, and He expects us to surrender to Him because we love Him. So working out our salvation with fear and trembling is in reality a growing in love.

The practical side of this "working out" of our salvation demonstrates itself in the way we do our work "without complaining or arguing." Our love for God is like a diamond with many facets. There is the side that sparkles towards God, but there is also the side of our testimony towards "a crooked and depraved generation." The way in which we do our work sets us apart from the gray masses; and it makes us shine like stars in a dark universe. Our first testimony should be our life; what we say is the lesser part of our testimony. Most people don't listen to what we have to say, but they look at what we do.

This paragraph is made more interesting by the fact that Paul draws himself into the picture. It almost sounds as if the apostle has doubts about the fruit in his own life. This may have been true to a certain extent. Most of God's children are more aware of their sins and shortcomings than of their sanctification. Moses did not know that his face was shining. We read in Ex. 34:29; "When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD." That is a healthy sign. If we are too sure that we will get the prize, we cease to run the race; this means that we will no longer surround the people we have won to the Lord with our intercession.

When Paul says he hopes the Philippians will hold high the banner of the Gospel so he can boast, he does not mean to indulge in vain thoughts about himself. The situation in Philippi was not like that in Corinth where people were split apart in groups: one calling themselves "Paul," another "Apollos," another "Christ," and all the time each group was trying to outmaneuver the other (I Cor. 3:4). The situation in Philippi was quite the opposite. Paul knows that he is in danger of being put to death, and so he examines the reason that this could happen, so that he would know how to bear his lot. The German philosopher Nietzsche has said: "If we understand the 'why' we can bear the 'how'!" So Paul wrote these words against the background of a possible Roman execution. He is not talking about his salvation or the possible loss of it. He thinks about his crown. He does not want to appear before the Lord with empty hands. Maybe he had the parable of the talents in Matt. 25:14-30 in mind.



Paul speaks about the fruit of his life at different occasions. This doesn't relate in every instance to the conversion of people. In II Cor. 11:2 he speaks about the purity of the church. "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him." It is a wonderful thing to bring a daughter into the world, but the task of the parents does not end with the birth of the girl. Even in a spiritually minded church as the one in Philippi, Paul is concerned about the purity of the church, and he is ready to give his life so that the glory of God may be manifested in them. Our crown does not only exist in people we lead to the Lord, but also in the quality of life these Christians demonstrate in their spiritual growth. The efforts required to make our spiritual children grow are more demanding than the energy it takes to bring them to Christ. To illustrate this, Paul uses images like a race, like heavy labor, and like the pouring out of the blood of a sacrificial animal at the foot of the altar. And even the drink offering that is poured out upon the altar is symbolically meant as the pouring out of blood.

The drink offering or libation occupied a special place in the Israelite worship. Wine is not mentioned in the book of Leviticus, except in Lev. 23:13. There were no grapes in the desert. There is mention of the drink offering in Num. 15, after the spies had come back from seeing the promised land and after they had brought back the grapes of Eskol. In Num. 15:5,7 and 10 the quantity of wine is indicated in accordance with the kind of sacrifice that was brought. There are two things to be noted in this connection: the sacrifices mentioned were not meant to expiate sin. They were sacrifices that were a sweet aroma before the Lord, such as the burnt offering, the food offering and the peace offering. All these sacrifices were brought after the land of Canaan had been conquered. When Paul mentions the pouring out of his blood and compares it to the pouring out of a drink offering, he rings notes of victory, of gratitude, of love and of intimate fellowship with God; such as was expressed in the sacrifices mentioned above.

Four times in a row Paul uses a word that expresses joy. In Greek it is the same word. The NIV translates it "glad" and "rejoice." The KJV says "joy" and "rejoice." The spiritual growth of a church demands sacrifice both from the children and the fathers. But whoever loses his life for Christ's sake will not only find real life, he will also find the key to the joy of Christ. A lack of joy can almost always be traced back to an unwillingness to sacrifice.

In this selection Paul illustrates further the principle of sacrifice. These verses describe daily experience with difficulties, sickness and sorrow. They start with Paul's concern for the Philippians, a concern which is only mentioned in these verses and nowhere else in the epistle. This concern manifests itself in Paul's very human and earthly emotions. The spiritual victory which is such a dominant feature in this letter does not exclude human emotions and concerns. The spiritual will ultimately conquer all the facets of human life, but this is a slow process. Often the attitude that we are so spiritual and that we have the victory in every domain can do a lot of harm both to ourselves and to our testimony to others. We create more freedom by honestly admitting concern than by simulating a spiritual victory.

We have to conclude from the above that being in good spirits is not the same as rejoicing in the Lord. We should not confuse the two. Our joy in the Lord is a constant factor which is not influenced by favorable or unfavorable circumstances. One of my friends once crossed the Atlantic from Europe to America by ship. One evening as he was leaning over the railing of the top deck, a girl came up beside him. As they were looking at the setting sun, she said, "Looking at the beauty of this sunset it is not hard to believe in God, is it?" To which my friend answered, "What do you do when it rains?"

**Phil. 2:19 - 3:1.**

*"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you.*

*I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare.*

*For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.*

*But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. 23 I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me.*

*And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.*

*But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow.*

*Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety.*

***Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.***

***Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you."***

Paul's sending of Timothy to Philippi, however, is more than an effort to receive some emotional uplift. Timothy is one of the co-signers of this epistle. He may have been Paul's secretary who took Paul's dictation. He cannot have been a prisoner with Paul; otherwise, Paul would not have been able to send him. He probably was Paul's daily visitor and comforter, and so the sending of Timothy must have been a real sacrifice for Paul. Timothy's absence made Paul a lonely man. We read later that Timothy himself underwent suffering and imprisonment. Heb. 13:23 says: "I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released."

A visit by Timothy to Philippi would be for the church almost equal to a visit by Paul himself since Timothy had adopted Paul's love for these people. The sending of Timothy is the second phase of a plan. His going is preceded by the sending back of Epaphroditus, who had come from Philippi with a gift from the church for Paul, which Paul mentions at the end of the letter (ch. 4:18). Let us turn our attention to the person of Timothy. Paul had met him for the first time in Lystra, according to Acts 16:1-3, and from that moment Timothy was a member of the team; consequently, he was an eyewitness to the birth of the church in Philippi. We don't read that he had been imprisoned with Paul and Silas, possibly because his father was a Greek. It is possible that Timothy stayed behind in Philippi when Paul and Silas were evicted from the city. We do read, though, that he and Silas joined Paul again when the latter had arrived in Corinth.

Most of the above, of course, is speculation. It is quite possible that, although Paul was the spiritual father of the church, Timothy had actually spent more time there. According to ch. 2:22, the Philippians were quite familiar with Timothy.

Paul's bitter ejaculation, "For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ," (vs. 21) indicates the fact that is still true centuries later: genuine and faithful servants of Jesus Christ have not been abundant. This, of course, is speaking generally. It remains true, however, that sin has affected man so deeply that, even after his regeneration, an important part of his ego remains untouched. Looking out for the interest of Jesus Christ is not the predominant point of the lives of most of Christ's servants. At best there is a mixture of interests.

Paul is still talking about the mind of Christ; as we said, that the mind should also be in us. The main characteristic of this mind is that we "should look not only to our own interests, but also to the interests of others," and that "in humility consider others better than ourselves." (vs. 4,3). The love of Christ in us means, after all, that we are willing to give our lives for our brothers. Servants of Jesus Christ who are willing to do this are an exception, rather than the rule. Timothy was ready to give his life for Paul; and on the basis of this, Paul knew that he would do the same for the Philippians.

We are often trapped in the maze of our own interests because we do not use praise as a weapon. Our whole perspective changes when we see how praise can cause earthquakes, and how shackles that bind people to the walls of their prison are shaken loose, and how people's hearts are set free.

Paul presents his relationship between Timothy as a child with his father; they reach out spontaneously to one another. He says that if this is Timothy's attitude toward him it will guarantee his love to the Philippians. Also, Paul harbors the hope that he will be able to come himself and to renew and strengthen the bond of love between himself and the church. Whether he was able to carry out his plan or whether his execution made this impossible, we don't know.

We see the same thought presented in 1:24 "But it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body." Paul had led many people to the Lord in Philippi, and he loved them passionately in Christ. The plans he makes to visit them are plans for the future. The immediate need, however, is the departure of Epaphroditus, who will have to carry Paul's letter to them.

Epaphroditus originated from Philippi; he had been sent by the church to take a present to Paul, probably a gift of money. Paul calls him "My brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier" (2:25). Probably, Epaphroditus was one of those of whom Paul says in 1:5 that they were in "partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." The fact that Paul calls him "my brother" means that he had put his faith in Jesus Christ. The expression "fellow worker" points to the help he had given to Paul and others in the

founding and building up of the church. But "fellow soldier" speaks of insight in the fact that there is a battle to be fought in the Heavens. He understood that people would not be converted unless "the strong man" who kept them in his power was bound first. The reference is to Matt. 12:29 where Jesus says: "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house." For this spiritual insight which Epaphroditus evinced he had to pay a high price. What seemed to be nothing more than a trip to Paul to deliver a package turned out to be a dangerous trek through enemy territory, by which he was almost fatally wounded. Serving Jesus Christ is not child's play.

Epaphroditus' concern that word of his sickness might have reached Philippi shows the depth of his spirituality. He knew people would worry about him; somehow a rumor had traveled back to Philippi, and the root of worry had sprung up in the hearts of those who loved him. This thought could have slowed down his recovery, and it may have bothered him once he was back on his feet.

We don't read either that he experienced divine healing, but this does not exclude divine intervention.

From the way Paul describes it, we get the impression that those supernatural powers that sometimes streamed through Paul were not active in his case. It seems as if the extraordinary miracles God did through Paul as mentioned in Acts 19:11-12 were not repeated here. (See also Acts 28:8-10). This would prove that divine healing cannot always be expected automatically. There are, of course, the matters of our faith and of demonic resistance that play a role in this.

Indirectly, the joy in the Lord Paul constantly talks about comes up again in vs. 27. The circumstances in which Paul finds himself are described as a chain of sorrows. The eventual death of Epaphroditus would have meant "sorrow upon sorrow" for Paul. It is important to see that the pressure of circumstances does not exclude the joy in the Lord; they do not even mutually influence one another. Circumstances work upon our emotions, but the joy of God works upon our spirit. Nights without sleep are not necessarily proof of spiritual defeat. We read in Acts 12:6: "The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance." We tend to see this as a proof of Peter's spirituality. This may have been the case, but it could also be that he was mentally exhausted because of the tensions he had passed through. But it could also be that the Holy Spirit possessed him to such a degree that his body functioned without any tenseness. The worst thing we can do is to blame ourselves for a lack of spirituality or to worry about our spirituality if we cannot sleep.

There is no contradiction between God's mercy to Epaphroditus by which he did not die and Paul's words in 1:21 that "to die is gain." We have already seen when we studied that verse, that Paul did not deny the hostile character of death. It is indeed God's mercy if we are healed from a fatal disease, as it is His mercy when He brings us through death into His eternal glory. It is also His mercy when He spares our loved ones the grief of being separated from us through death. For death is often much harder for those who remain behind than for the one who dies.

It is interesting to see that Paul did not lack a sense of humor, as exemplified by his gift of making simple things seem complicated. The church in Philippi was worried about Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus was worried about their being worried, and Paul rounds off the circle by adding his own worry to this!

At several points the contrast between outward circumstances and the joy of Jesus Christ is mentioned. In 1:29 Paul calls this contrast "grace." Here, in 2:30, just before the joy of the Lord breaks through in the next chapter, Paul describes how Epaphroditus had risked his life to pay off the spiritual debt of the Philippian church to Paul. Of course, this is no debt in the real sense of the word. Paul cannot draw a balance by deducting the debits from the credits. The point is the same as the one he makes in Philemon vs. 19 and 20, where he says: "I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back; not to mention that you owe me your very self. I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ." Philemon owed his life in Christ to Paul, and so did the Philippians.

We could say that Paul shows a tendency to braggadocio. After all, it is only the grace of God that flows through him to others. And if one is paid for this, then what does grace mean? This is hard to understand, yet it seems that when the grace of God flows through a person it adds to the person's glory. God gives crowns for what He bestows upon us in grace!

Another strange phenomenon is that Paul sends such a strong recommendation of Epaphroditus to the church in Philippi; after all, he was their envoy but Paul sounds as if Epaphroditus would be unknown to them. It could be that Epaphroditus himself was a shy person, who would not have

been able to bring himself to recount his experiences in such vivid detail. Also a prophet is never honored in his own city. And, finally, this all fits in the theme of this chapter, which says that we should "in humility consider others better than ourselves" (vs. 3).

If we are able to rejoice truly in the spiritual growth of others, the joy of the Lord will not be very far away. Later on, in 4:4 Paul says: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" If we have fellowship with Jesus Christ, we are connected with the source of all joy. Jesus Himself promised us that our joy would be full in our fellowship with Him. "Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete" (John 16:24).

In John 17:26 He says: "I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them." The love the Father has for Christ will be in us. So we will be able to testify: "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light" (Ps. 36:9).

We often skip over the fact that Paul follows his words, "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!" with, "It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you" (3:1). The KJV says: "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous." There is in these words a suggestion of danger as far as the Philippians are concerned and of grief for Paul. We should not underestimate the tragedy of Paul's circumstances. "Sorrow upon sorrow" sums it up quite well. There is the tension of Paul's court case hanging over his head in which his life is at stake. There are the people surrounding Paul who suppose that they can stir up trouble for him while he is in chains (see 1:17); as if imprisonment in itself is not trouble enough! And there is the deep disappointment of seeing how people who say they are servants of the Gospel "look out for [their] own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (2:21). We will get to Euodia and Syntyche later in ch. 4:2.

"The joy of the LORD is your strength" Nehemiah said to his people (Neh. 8:10). The word "strength" may be translated as "stronghold" or "refuge." If we flee towards God's joy, we don't flee from reality but to towards it. "Rejoice in the Lord!" is a flight. In that sense of the word, we should always flee. If we flee towards God's joy, we are safe. If we think we can withstand in our own strength the tensions and bombardments of the devil, we are foolish.

The joy of the Lord is only found in fellowship with the Lord, and for fellowship we need rest and times of quietness.

## **VI. Phil. 3:2-4:3**

***"Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.***

***For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh;***

***Though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:***

***Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;***

***As for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.***

***But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.***

***What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ; the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.***

***I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,***

***And so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.***

***Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,***

***I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.***

*All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.*

*Only let us live up to what we have already attained.*

*Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.*

*For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.*

*Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in Heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,*

*Who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

#### **Phil 4:1-3**

*Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!*

*I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.*

*Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."*

The chapter divisions seem to lack some logic in this epistle. The verses above have one common theme, that is what the attitude of a child of God and a servant of Christ should be. The section opens and closes with bad examples which should not be followed and in between those Paul presents himself as a model to be imitated.

This part opens in vs. 2 with a sudden and sharp attack against a certain category of people Paul calls "those dogs." We should bear in mind that he does not speak here about the same group as was mentioned in 1:15 and 17, those who preached "Christ out of envy and rivalry, ... out of selfish ambition." As we saw already, Paul rejoices in their preaching.

But he doesn't have anything good to say about these Judaists. We meet them for the first time in Antioch where they proclaim that people cannot be saved without circumcision (Acts 15:1,2). They meet with immediate resistance from Paul and Barnabas. In the subsequent church council in Jerusalem they are defeated. We meet them again in Asia Minor where they "bewitched" the church in Galatia.

For us, twentieth century Christians, who have no Jewish background, it is hard to understand what the dispute was all about. The points in question are no longer relevant for us, but the underlying principle is as important nowadays in our lives as it was then. Both for Jews and non-Jews the question is: "What is the basis of our trust for salvation?"

In arguing against the need for circumcision, Paul does not deny Israel's predestination by God as part of the plan of salvation for this world, but he reacts to the misunderstanding and wrong interpretation by the average Israelite of God's intention in choosing Israel.

In the Old Testament the spiritual reality is represented in earthly images. Without fellowship with God those images had no content. Since most Israelites had no personal relationship with God the picture became the reality for them. Decrees and ordinances were kept meticulously as if God demanded the keeping of the ritual of circumcision, the shedding of the blood of animals and the observance of the Sabbath. With the coming of Jesus Christ the images lost their importance, and the emphasis became love, obedience and compassion.

The Old Testament itself makes clear what God considered important: for instance, in I Sam. 15:22: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams;" and in Ps. 40:7-9, "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, 'Here I am, I have come; it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.'" "

So Paul reacts against the fact that people put their trust in things that were images of reality and in their own efforts to observe those images instead of in the sacrifice Jesus brought when He died on the cross and in His subsequent resurrection and glory. Glorifying in Christ means renouncing all merit because of the honor God gives to us and the glory which awaits us. On the other hand, it consists of our positive

praise of Christ for the love He showed us. As Rev. 5:12 says: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

Putting no confidence in the flesh puts the stress on the putting into practice of the things mentioned above. "Flesh" stands here for the whole complexity of man who is fallen and not renewed. The word has different connotations in various contexts. Sometimes it doesn't mean anything but physical existence on earth, as in ch. 1:22, "But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour" (KJV). In the context of chapter 3 it stands for the man who, in the depths of his soul, does not submit to the will of God. In Rom. 8:1-9 Paul contrasts the mind set of the flesh with the mind of the Spirit. The mind of the flesh denies the complete bankruptcy of self, as well as the complete payment of all debt by Jesus Christ. A man who puts confidence in the flesh thinks that he can come before God with the remains of his own inventory and that God will accept that as payment for his debt. The tendency to think this never dies completely even among born again Christians and the Holy Spirit has to bring us back, over and over again, to the fact that we are "circumcised in Christ." In Col. 2:11,12 Paul puts it this way: "In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, Having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead." To be circumcised in Christ means to consider oneself as being crucified with Christ Jesus. In verses 5 and 6 Paul looks back on the things that used to be important to him before he had his encounter with Christ on the way to Damascus. He paints a typical Jewish attitude toward religion, as we still see it in orthodox Jews of today. I am reminded of Herman Wouck's book *This Is My God*. One's heritage and tradition and external ritual seem more important than spiritual fellowship with God, which should give content to those rituals.

The qualifications Paul had are very impressive. He was born and reared an Israelite, of the branch of Judaism that took their religion very seriously. Even his persecution of Christians was proof to him that he was on the right track. He was uncompromising in every respect. But this last characteristic became his undoing. He persecuted Jesus Christ, the Man who was the content and meaning of the rituals he observed.

The expression as we find it in the KJV in vs. 6 "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless," has always been a problem phrase for me. The NIV clarifies this in a satisfactory way by saying: "as for legalistic righteousness, faultless." But it could be that the NIV is too negative in its rendering. We read about Zechariah and Elisabeth: "Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly (Luke 1:6). There is an obedience to the best of our knowledge. The big difference between Paul and Zechariah is, of course, that the blood of Jesus Christ had been shed in the meantime. Before the cross, people were deemed righteous before God on the basis of animal sacrifices. But it is also true that Paul does not mean the same thing that Luke meant when Paul speaks about being blameless and faultless. Paul uses the term in the sense of observing the prescriptions of the law in a meticulous way. The condition of the heart was of no consequence in this.

In the Gospels we see scores of examples of this contrast between the righteousness of the law, or legalistic righteousness and the sinful condition of the human heart. In Mark 3:1-6 we read about people who wanted to enforce the Sabbath law so strictly that a sick person could not even be healed on that day. They had more compassion for their animals than for humans. They spied on Jesus, hoping that they would be able to trap Him, and then they planned to kill Him.

Obviously, observing the law meticulously does not bring us any closer to God, even though God gave this law. Only the Holy Spirit can draw us into fellowship with the Father. That is why Jesus tells Nicodemus, the Pharisee, that he has to be born again. When Paul says: "Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ" (vs. 7), he indicates that rituals and liturgy can become a hindrance to the knowledge of God, if rituals and liturgy are all the religion we have.

As Christians from a Gentile background, we can hardly imagine how enormous Paul's sacrifice of this "heritage" must have seemed. Only the enormity of the sacrifice of Christ can put this in the right perspective. That is what Paul does here. There is nothing in life that is worth as much as the knowledge of Christ Jesus. And, of course, knowledge stands here for more than intellectual knowledge, although that is not excluded. Knowing Christ does not offend our intellectual faculties.

Paul puts the stress here upon "the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith" (vs. 9). Thus, he emphasizes the legal aspect of our relationship with God. The basis for this relationship is the death of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of Golgotha. The knowledge of this, that is the deeper penetration into the mystery of such love and obedience, such purity and sin, such cruelty and light, such a struggle and victory, demands a lifetime to accomplish. It will be impossible to try to increase our

understanding and at the same time to cling to human efforts to bring ourselves up to the level where God wants us. God considers our self-righteousness as garbage, and we will do well to do the same. As Isaiah 64:6 says, "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."

To "gain Christ" is not the same as accepting the sacrifice of Christ, and it is even more than seeing oneself as being crucified with Christ. Paul speaks about what grows in our lives as a result of our identification with Christ in His death and resurrection. Christ had already taken hold of Paul and had "gained" Paul, so to speak; but Paul did not feel that Christ had been completely formed in him. There is more at stake than a subjective experience. We are to God "the aroma of Christ", as Paul testifies about himself in II Cor. 2:15. To "be found in Him ..... having ....." as vs. 9 puts it, is what others see in us and that goes often further than that of which we are conscious within ourselves.

Paul does not indulge here in forced humility. He demonstrates a healthy dissatisfaction with the status quo; otherwise, there would be no incentive to press on and take hold of that which is an essential factor in the spiritual battle in which we all are engaged.

It is clear what the difference is between the righteousness that is imputed to us because of faith in Jesus Christ and the righteousness that we present to God as our own. If our righteousness is the result of the death and resurrection of Jesus and our participation therein by faith, there will be manifestations of righteousness in our life, but they will be the fruit of our relationship, not the basis for our justification before God. It is because we believe and accept that we are completely covered before God by the sacrifice of Jesus, that moral changes will occur in our life and other people will be able to see the difference in our behavior. But God does not accept us because we have started to behave differently.

The core of all that Paul is saying is "the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." (vs. 8) and "I want to know Christ" (vs. 10). He speaks about intimate knowledge between two persons.

Our knowledge of Christ in this sense of the word is usually rather superficial. The most precious experiences which deepen our knowledge of our Lord are usually had in difficult and trying circumstances. George Müller said at the end of a life of marvelous answers to prayer: "I know the Lord." A missionary in the Philippines, a young lady, was kidnapped and raped by extremists. She testified that at the moment of her deepest trial she felt the presence of the Lord in a way she never had before, and she was able to forgive the man who violated her. Such experiences deepen our knowledge of Jesus Christ; yet we will not know Him as He knows us. We don't even know ourselves as He knows us. In I Cor. 13:12 Paul says: "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." These words are said in the context of the chapter about love. The point in question is not the gathering of knowledge but loving a person. As Paul says in I Cor. 8:3, "But the man who loves God is known by God." When we love Him, we want to become one with Him in His suffering for us, and we want to experience some of what He went through. In ch. 1:29 Paul called this "grace." If we become bitter because we suffer we, obviously, do not really love Jesus. If we see our suffering in relation to His suffering, our love and fellowship with Him will deepen. There is no stronger bond than the bond between two people who have suffered together. I remember people who survived life in a concentration camp together, or hostages who went through the ordeal together. To be crucified with Christ is the deepest fellowship that exists.

This is just the beginning, not the end. The bond of love with Christ exists also in the common experience of His resurrection. This is backed up by "all power in Heaven and on earth." It means victory over death, not only for Christ but also in us now. When John saw Him, he says: "I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades'" (Rev. 1:17,18). So John experienced the power of Christ's resurrection.

Our lives may not be congruent with this truth, but this truth is the basis on which our likeness with Christ will grow. The seed of resurrection is already in us; the principle of victory over death has been implanted in us. It is a paradox that we may rest therein, but at the same time we must pursue it. The tendency of our life on earth is to rot and weaken. We have to fight this with all our might. Both, when we are young and when we grow older, we have to keep the goal before us. "Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Isaiah 40:30,31).

To “hope in the LORD,” or, as the KJV puts it, to “wait upon the LORD” is a strenuous activity. It is more exhausting than going on a hunt. Some commentators believe that Paul uses an image of a course with horses and chariots.

Vs. 13 is the clearest refutation of the doctrine that says that a child of God can achieve sinless perfection on earth. “Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Even if our sinful nature were completely eliminated, (and I cannot think of any example of anyone who has had this experience,) there still remains the pollution of the air of sin we breath in and the arrows of the Evil One that wound us. Also, if perfection consists in the not falling short of the glory of God, then it should be clear that no man, living on this side of death, has obtained this.

“One thing I do ....” If we can reduce our whole philosophy of life and our whole lifestyle to “one thing,” we are not far from the truth. Jesus says to Martha: “But only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42). And David says: “One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple” (Ps. 27:4). This one thing which David and Jesus mention is fellowship with God. This is the object of Paul’s pursuit also. Paul describes it as a pursuit, actually as a hunt. Paul’s attitude does not contradict the words of Jesus or of David. The point is to make fellowship with God in Jesus Christ the top priority of our life. In the great commandment of Deut. 6:5 Moses says: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” (Cf. Matt. 22:37,38). This pursuit in life is the one thing that is worth all we have.

When Paul wrote these words, he was already an old man. He says he wants to forget what is behind. The past is often the only thing older people do not forget. They have a tendency to live in the past more than in the future. I write this as a missionary who is in his retirement. I realize how dangerous it can be to spend one’s time going over the experiences and achievements of the past. I want the motto of my life to be “forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead ....”

“The prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus,” (vs. 14) is the reward for obedience to the God Who calls us from on high. The love for God will culminate in partaking of His glory and holiness. A glimpse of this glory, as Paul saw it on the road to Damascus, was enough to transform his life into the great pursuit: to know Him, to love Him, and to be like Him. The verses 15 and 16 seem to form a strange conclusion of this section. The NIV says: “All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.” The KJV translates it more literally with: “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded.” We find the same kind of contrast where Paul want to take hold of Christ because Christ has taken hold of him. It is on the basis of our being perfect in Christ that we pursue perfection. This is not contradictory. Two commentaries I read refer to Bishop Lightfoot who thought that Paul used the word “perfect” in an ironic sense, but the Tyndale Commentary sees the connection between Paul’s admonition here and the following verses. The Greek word used is *teleioi*, which means maturity or ripeness, as in I Cor. 2:6. All this proves is that loving God is a growing process. This love is planted in us as a seed when we are converted. The seed will grow as we open ourselves up more and more to the love of Christ. But even maturity is not static: it is a stage. We do not stop growing when we are mature, but as spiritual adults we increase the speed of our pursuit of the prize.

Most of us would hesitate to say what Paul says in vs. 17 and offer ourselves as an example. We read: “Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.” We might consider such utterances to be a lack of humility. How about putting it this way: If we cannot say to people who hear our preaching that they should follow our example, what do we say? The opposite would be, “listen to me but don’t do as I do!” What it amounts to is that Paul practiced what he preached.

The KJV uses the word “walk” instead of “live.” There is an interesting contrast between the pressing on of vs. 14 and the walk of this verse. Of course, we shouldn’t put literal interpretations to the images used. The paradox is solved if we put the ultimate goal of life next to the daily life. There difference is not in the speed but in the vision and the practical working out of that vision. People who “press toward the goal,” “walk with God.” This kind of walking indicates both the style and the content of life.

Paul puts this walk of life he propagates in contrast with the “enemies of the cross of Christ.” He does not elaborate here on who those people are. Commentators do not agree concerning whether he speaks about Judaists, or Christians from among the Gentiles, who use their liberty in Christ as an excuse



to live a life of debauchery. The mention of "their stomach" in vs. 19 does not fit in Paul preaching against circumcision. In the lives of the Jews who were so meticulous in their observance of the law, there was no place for sexual immorality. It is clear, however, from I Cor. 6:12-20 and Gal. 5:13-26 that sexual immorality was a serious problem among Gentile converts. Also, Paul's tears would be more fitting for the latter.

It is amazing how clever we can be in disguising ourselves. Even after we have accepted the Lord Jesus as our Redeemer, it is possible that our deceitful heart deceives us. Unless we open ourselves up for the searching eye of the Holy Spirit and pray, as David did in Psalm 139:23,24: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting," we are in danger of being pulled away from the cross of Christ. It is so easy to lose sight of reality. To set our mind on earthly things means to be enchanted by an illusion.

When Paul tells the Philippians: "Our citizenship is in Heaven," in vs. 20, he must have touched a familiar chord. As we saw before, most of them were Romans, who had settled in the city as colonists. They were far from the place where they were born and grew up. Similarly, Christians are strangers on earth. Peter confirms this in I Pet. 2:11 where he says: "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul." We have to be careful not to adapt to the custom of the country in which we live; we should not neglect or give up our heavenly culture and civilization. It is very difficult with the pressure under which we live to remain unsoiled. It is only possible to remain clean when "we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."

The expectation of Christ's return has lost its cutting edge in our days. Maybe this has been the case throughout the ages. In the first century of Christianity the expectation had lost its sharpness already, as is clear from Peter's admonition. "They will say, 'Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation'" (II Pet. 3:4). I admit that in my own life I am more occupied with my own death than with the return of Jesus. I wonder if Paul sometimes had the same problem. In ch. 1:23 he says: "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far." But the expectation of Christ's return is more than just the end of our lives on earth; it includes the resurrection of our bodies and the perfection of our glory. Christ's return will take us home to the country we belong to. When we get there a reception will await us of which the return of hostages and POWs only gives a vague foretaste.

Paul calls our bodies "lowly"; (KJV "vile"). A literal translation would be "the body of our humiliation." The body God created for us is honorable and good. Sin has humiliated us and put us to shame. Sin, sickness and death have worked together to make us lowly. In the expiation of our sin lies the seed of exoneration, healing and victory over death. At Christ's return our lowly bodies will be transformed "so that they will be like his glorious body."

The stress in these verses is not so much upon the body as upon the condition in which we live, of which the body gives expression. Transition of sin into redemption means passing from death to life, from humiliation to glory. The power of God's omnipotence is needed to bring this about. We don't have in ourselves what it takes. The transition is made available for us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There the energy which was needed for this glorification was released; therefore, we can say that the kingdom of Heaven is greatest power in the universe.

The Roman Empire did not lack manifestations of power. The "Pax Romana" was enforced with an iron hand. It was a power unto death. It was important for Christians in this Roman colony to realize that they had submitted themselves to Him who had all power in Heaven and on earth. This omnipotence was not unto death but unto life. Ultimately everything will be subjected to this life. Death will have no say whatsoever.

When Paul starts chapter 4 by saying "therefore" he means: "on the basis of this hope, of this power, of this victory, don't allow yourselves to be confused." Before he uses the word "agree with each other," (which is the same word as the one used in 2:2 - *phronein* "Think the same thing," "be of the same mind") he gives expression to his deep love for the Philippians. He longs for them in the solitude of his imprisonment and he calls them "my joy and crown."

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary distinguishes in this verse "six terms of endearment." It is not hard to recognize them. "Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!"

Paul considers the church in Philippi to be the proof of the genuineness of his ministry. This does not mean that the church is the result of his hard and arduous labor. God Himself built this church. Paul had only been obedient to a vision; he only sang when the darkness closed in upon him. We can hardly

say that the earthquake and the conversion of the jailer were the results of his campaign with the Gospel. The important thing we learn from this is that what we do is not the important part, but whether we are obedient and available. That is how we obtain our crown and wreath of glory. See also I Thess. 2:19,20: "For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy."

Therefore, the standing firm in the Lord consists in the holding on to our heavenly nationality and to a behavior that is in accordance with that. The first characteristic of this behavior is the being of one mind. In saying this, Paul gives the first personal admonition in this letter.

We don't know who Euodia and Syntyche were. The same goes for Clement and the "loyal yokefellow." The Greek word here is *Syzugos*, which when translated is "yokefellow." According to the Wycliffe Bible Commentary, this word is best left untranslated and considered as a proper name. That names may have a meaning and that Paul is able to make plays of words on names is evident from the Epistle to Philemon, where we meet with "Onesimus," the "Useful One." It seems more logical that Paul is speaking to a certain Syzugos, otherwise we have to suppose that the letter is addressed to an anonymous person and that is in conflict with ch. 1:1.

Furthermore, Paul talks about another group of his "fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life." Wycliffe suggests that this could mean that those people had given their lives in the service of the Gospel. But there seems to be no Biblical grounds for such an interpretation. Jesus uses the same expression in Luke 10:20 when He says: "However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in Heaven." There He speaks to people who were still on earth. Obviously, Paul is saying that the salvation of those people is assured. The fact that Paul says such things about his fellow laborers means that the fruit of their salvation is visible in their lives.

The question arises: "What is being 'of the same mind?'" Euodia and Syntyche belong to those whose names are in the book of life, but they cannot work together. It is obvious that God created each one of us with our specific individual characteristics. No two persons think or speak in the same manner. The confusion of Babel has made our differences into contrasts which are sharpened and manipulated by the devil. Our regeneration has, of course, brought about a structural change in our condition, but the differences between one individual and another have not disappeared. Our "old man" is not dead. Communism has tried to make people all say the same thing for fear of death, but this has not brought about inner unity. It is clear that Paul is not interested in a mere outward appearance of unity. The central point, the pivot of genuine unity is the cross of Christ. According to Eph. 2:15,16, the cross of Christ is the basis of unity among nations. We read: "His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, And in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility." The cross made the two one and put to death hostility. This is not only valid for the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, but also between individuals. A lack of unity is the struggle between one "old man" and another. Paul does not intend that the two sister would abandon their individuality, but that they would realize that they are both members of the body of Christ and that, therefore, they cannot afford to work independently of one another.

In Phil. 2:2,3 the apostle gives a definition of being like-minded: "having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." Sometimes our brothers and sisters in Christ need help to obtain this vision. That is the reason that Paul appeals to Syzugos to bring the sisters together.

This ends the sixth part of this epistle.

## VII. Phil. 4:4-23.

***"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!***

***Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.***

***Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.***

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

***Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable; if anything is excellent or praiseworthy; think about such things.***

***Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me; put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.***

***I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.***

***I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.***

***I can do everything through him who gives me strength.***

***Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.***

***Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.***

***Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account.***

***I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.***

***And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.***

***To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.***

***Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings.***

***All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.***

***The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."***

This chapter gives the impression to the superficial reader that it consists of two parts. A closer look helps us see that Paul treats only one subject, which is joy in the Lord and the practical application of this joy in circumstances which could be a cause of worry and concern.

We encountered the expression "Rejoice in the Lord always" already in ch. 3:1. We saw already that the word "joy," *chairō*, appears ten times in various forms in this epistle. It is the main theme of the letter. In ch. 3 joy in Christ is the counterweight against human efforts to please God. In this chapter the joy in Christ is a defense against all kinds of circumstances and human relationships that could blur our perception of God's reality.

When Paul says: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ..... The Lord is near," he puts all human relations and all outward circumstances in the light of the "Maranatha," that is the return of Christ. This puts everything in a different light if we see it in connection with Christ's return. "Always" means "under all circumstances." Ezra and Nehemiah taught the returned captives that the joy of the LORD ought to be their strength. The word "strength" in Neh. 8:11 also means fortress, a place to flee to. The joy of the Lord is a fortress in which we may take our refuge when pressures build up and become too much for us and when our human relationships become too difficult. That is no flight from reality, but a flight towards reality.

When the unbelief and the hardness of heart of Jesus' contemporaries became too much for Him, Jesus took His refuge in the joy of the Holy Spirit. We read in Luke 10:21 "At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.'" Nehemiah and Jesus give us examples to follow.

Since Paul puts so much stress on the necessity for joy in the Lord, we must recognize its importance and its source "in the Lord."

When I first heard the Lord speak to me at a Youth Retreat in Holland joy came as a great surprise. It overwhelmed me and swept me off my feet. When I returned home after the retreat, I desperately tried to hang on to the feeling of joy, but it evaded me. Circumstances closed in upon me as before. I found out by trial and error that if our joy is based on circumstances instead of on the Lord, joy is an unstable entity. The Lord has the key. In Schiller's "Ode to Joy" which is the core of the final movement of Beethoven's ninth symphony, the key to joy is never found. Schiller knows what joy will do for man, but his joy is a myth, borrowed from Greek mythology. The phrase: *Joy, beautiful sparks of the gods, daughters of the Elysium*<sup>43</sup> is worlds apart from the joy in the Lord. I am not saying that Beethoven's ninth symphony does not overwhelm me every time I hear it. It says: *All men become brothers under your soft*

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<sup>43</sup> "Freude, schone Gotterfunken, Tochter aus Elysium"

wing.<sup>44</sup> How much more is this true of those who have been born again by the Holy Spirit and who have become members of the body of Christ and who rejoice in the Lord!

The joy of the Lord will make us gentle. The KJV says: "Let your moderation be known unto all men." And the RSV "Let all men know your forbearance." Adam Clarke says about this word (epikieikes): "The word is of very extensive signification; it means the same as mildness, patience, yieldedness, gentleness, clemency, unwillingness to litigate or contend." The idea is not that we should condone sin, but that we should put up with human frailty because we love the other person. God does not want us to be confrontational. And love is the first of the fruits of the Spirit, according to Gal. 5:22. God wants us to be kind to others because He is kind to us. We must build a reputation of gentleness even though this may not fit our character or natural tendencies. That is why Paul appeals to the presence of the Lord in the Holy Spirit. He makes us kind.

It sounds almost threatening that Paul concludes his exhortation with "Maranatha, the Lord is near!" It is a serious warning. When the Lord returns He will ask us to give account of our kindness. Over against our kindness stand the wrath of the Lamb. In C.S. Lewis' book *The Magicians Nephew* (One in the series of *The Chronicles of Narnia*) Aslan says to Digory: "Let us be kind to one another." According to Lewis, Christ says this to us.

Where love and joy grow we will also find peace. In verses 5-7 Paul contrasts peace with anxiety. The transition from being anxious to having peace takes place in the middle of a prayer. It is a common tendency in our thought life to be anxious. If we let our thoughts go, anxiety will surface by itself. Therefore, we should bring everything that befalls us to the Lord. The idea is, of course, not that we should inform the omniscient God about our circumstances, but that if we draw God into every situation, He will let His light shine upon it, so we can see our circumstances in His light.

We are living people, and we deal with a living God. Our life has not been predetermined by God in the sense that everything has been prearranged in an unchangeable way. Our desires play an important part in what happens. God asks us: "What do you want Me to do for you?" Paul does not say in these verses that God will fulfill all our wishes, but that our anxiety will make place for peace. If our relationship with the Father is such that our wishes are completely in accordance with His will and character, He will grant us our requests. But most of us are not that far along in our walk with Him. That is why thanksgiving is important in prayer. Thanksgiving is only possible if there is obedience and faith in us. When we give thanks, we reach out in faith to the answer of our prayers. It means that we lay aside our own desires if God wants to give us something else. That is obedient surrender.

The word "petition," or "supplication," as the KJV and RSV translate it, draws the right picture of our relationship with God. He is the Almighty One, and we are men. We are in no position to dictate anything to God. "Supplication" also speaks of intense longing. Why would God give us anything that we did not really want with all our hearts? Prayer is serious business. There is no place for impulsiveness in prayer.

The surprise in the verse is, of course, "thanksgiving." It implies not only that we expect that our prayers will be heard, but also that we recognize that our circumstances are arranged and ordered by God. It is especially this last recognition that changes anxiety into peace. And what a peace! It is "the peace of God which transcends all understanding." This brings to us a dimension of which we have no idea in our earthly relationships. This peace is not only more intelligent than our human understanding but it is also something that our intelligence cannot grasp. It is the peace of God in Jesus Christ.

The effect of this peace upon us is that our hearts and minds are guarded. In dealing with animals, we can excite them to the point at which they can no longer be handled. As human beings we can be shocked so deeply by people, things or demons that our feelings and thoughts can no longer be kept under control. The peace of Christ makes us into people who can control themselves, both intellectually and emotionally, so that we will not suffer from anxiety when threatened by anything. God protects us in Christ with His peace.

It seems to go against the grain of our intelligence that we should pray for all things with thanksgiving. Paul says the same thing in I Thess 5:17,18 - "Pray continually; Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." We will only be able to see the logic of this if we see all our circumstances as part of God's plan for our life, as so many factors that work together for good.

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<sup>44</sup> "Alle Menschen werden Brüder, wo Dein sanften Fluegel weilt."

In the book *The Hiding Place* Corrie ten Boom tells of her experience in the German Concentration camp Ravensbrueck where she and her sister Betsie were imprisoned. Betsie quoted the verse from I Thess. 5 and started to give thanks to the Lord for everything there was in the camp, including the multitude of fleas in their barracks. Corrie thought this was going too far. Who would thank God for an abundance of fleas? Shortly afterward the ladies started a prayer group and Bible study in the barracks which were never disturbed by the guards. They found that the reason that the guards left them alone was the fleas!

Paul is almost playful when he shows that giving thanks for everything does not go against our intelligence but that it transcends our understanding.

In the next two verses, 8 and 9, Paul gives a plea for aestheticism. In reading these words we would almost get the impression that Paul gives us a humanistic treatise. Of course, the opposite is true. In Paul's day there was no such thing as humanistic aestheticism, at least not in the form we know it now. Undoubtedly, there were Greek schools that uttered thoughts that would sound familiar to a modern humanist. Paul's words prove that all truth and all nobility and purity and loveliness comes from God. All aesthetic values lose their content if they are not brought in relationship with God. Everything that is beautiful and noble is related to God. In some cases the relationship is consciously demonstrated as in the works of Bach and Rembrandt and Bruckner; their works are the ones that move me most deeply. But I receive enough blessing and joy to glorify God, when listening to Mozart, Beethoven, and Chopin. Probably for opposite reasons I cannot stand Wagner!

Many Christians have harmed the cause of the Gospel by their neglect in recognizing the value of beauty and aesthetics. Very few Evangelical churches are tastefully and artfully decorated.

"Whatever is true ...." The opposite of truth (*alethea*) is a lie. A lie, however, can take various forms and shades. The best definition in the context of this chapter is probably the opposite of "phony." It is not only important for us as Christians that we do not lie but speak the truth, but also that we live the truth. We have to be genuine for God as well as for men. If we think the truth we will live it also. Only the Holy Spirit can protect us against self deception. We have to concentrate upon the truth.

"Whatever is noble ...." The Greek word is *semna*. The KJV translates it with "honest," the RSV with "honorable." Of the three translations "honorable is probably the most correct rendering. The German book *Linguistic key to the New Testament*<sup>45</sup> says: "To step back before somebody."<sup>46</sup> If truth is related to our own character then to be honorable should be applied to our relationship with others. As members of the body of Christ, we should honor one another. We came across this thought already in 2:3 "in humility consider others better than yourselves." To step back before somebody means to take off our hat for someone. If we meet the image of Christ in one another, this attitude will come naturally. We learn to recognize in one another those characteristics that point toward Christ, instead of getting stuck on people's negative side.

In a world in which injustice and unrighteousness have the upper hand, it is important that we hang on to the concept of God's character of absolute righteousness. Man's acts do not determine the norms for living. We will not be judged on the basis of public opinion but of God's righteousness. If we lose sight of this fact, we will get bogged down in "situational ethics." Our own moral conduct and that of others can only be judged in the light of God.

In these verses Paul does not present to us a series of subjects for meditation that would give us a spiritual boost so that we would feel good about ourselves, but he calls for realism to see the enemy clearly and to celebrate the victory of Christ over him. This is not an attempt to moralize but a call to arms.

"Whatever is pure ...." No man who is a descendant of Adam is completely pure in his motives. Our best intentions are polluted. Purity is only possible if we confess our secondary thoughts and let ourselves be filled with the Holy Spirit. This kind of purity is a hard reality. It is as far removed from the sweet dreams we have when we meditate about it as sweet dreams are removed from a waking up in the trenches. Purity is much more than something that is nice and attractive. It is as hard as a diamond; it is gold, purified in the fire.

"Whatever is lovely ...." This word stands against the background of love. It is that which is done out of love and which provokes love. It is an aesthetic word that, although greatly misused, indicates that

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<sup>45</sup> Sprachlicher Schlüssel des Neuen Testaments

<sup>46</sup> Vor jemand zurucktreten.

everything that is beautiful somehow is related to the character of God. That is why the psalmist can say: "How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty!" (Ps. 84:1).

Whatever is lovely to the eye is admirable to the ear. God is both the God of painters and sculptors as well as of musicians. He created both the tone and the poet who makes the word sing. Maybe Paul speak in the first place of gracious speech, but that doesn't exclude music. Music is grace par excellence. I have nothing against dissonance as long as it is intended to contribute to the harmony. Music and poetry are for me the best instruments for the glory of God. I don't want to exclude prose, of course. Eloquence can praise God also.

"If anything is excellent ...." The KJV uses here "if there be any virtue ...." The Wycliffe Commentary quotes Lightfoot, who believes that virtue refers to certain good elements in paganism. This is quite possible. No culture is one hundred percent corrupt. Even among atheists one can find people with a high moral conduct. It is dangerous, however, to keep virtue purposely separated from the character of God, as if the image of God would have nothing to do with our moral behavior. Virtue is, in final analysis, a manifestation of holiness. If this is not recognized, then "good" becomes the enemy of "best."

In his book *Peace child*, Don Richardson speaks about "redemptive analogies." Those are traditions and acts in a pagan culture that express something of God's redemptive intervention in this world. We find those analogies in several cultures. Among the Me tribe in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, for instance, generosity is a virtue that is highly valued, perhaps more from the side of the receiving party than from the giving one. We have to be careful, though, that we do not draw the line too far. There are pagan virtues that are incompatible with the moral standards of a child of God. The opposite is true also. Meekness, for instance, is nowhere considered a virtue outside the sphere of influence of the Gospel. There were values that were valid for first century Christians, who had just come out of heathenism, which we could hardly apply to ourselves. But the least we can do, as children of God, is to live up to the standards that unbelievers set for us. The praise Paul speaks about will have to come from our fellow human beings, as well as from God.

In the 9th verse Paul puts the preceding truths in the right perspective. It becomes clear that there is much more involved than decency alone. "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me ...." is the moral law of the Old Testament, which is the expression of God's character, as well as the message of the Gospel of Christ. Once again Paul puts himself up as the example to be followed, as he did also in 3:17. It is God's intention in some stages in our lives that we follow and imitate people who know God. This helps us to grow into the position where our fellowship with the Lord is direct and intimate enough that God can speak to us personally. Even a position of spiritual maturity does not guarantee complete protection against temptation, and we may very well stumble and fall. But, not only will "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" but also "the God of peace will be with [you]."

In vs. 10 we come to the gift the church had sent Paul through Epaphroditus. In both epistles to the Corinthians, Paul explains extensively his financial policy in relation to the churches. In I Cor. 9 he makes it clear that, as an apostle, he had a claim to the financial support of the churches that he founded, but that he refused to accept this support. He was consistent in this policy, at least as far as his relationship with the church in Corinth was concerned. Corinth was a booming city and undoubtedly there must have been members of the church who were well-to-do. In Philippi, however, most people had to live of their pension. Possibly Paul had initially refused the gifts of the Philippians, but their insistence was ultimately too strong for him. To keep on refusing would have meant to turn down genuine love.

Here, too, we see the irony of the fact that God gives preference to the widow's mite for the support of His work. To the poor the grace of giving was given; but in contrast, rich people are often left on the side. II Cor. 8:1-5 gives an interesting picture of the above truth. It has been my personal observation that sacrificial giving is most often practiced by people who really cannot afford to give, affluent people often give little.

Paul's joy about the gift had little to do with the amount given, but primarily with the grace of God behind the gift. Paul treats the whole subject as a spiritual matter. Several commentaries point out that the gift is mentioned at the end of the letter, not at the beginning. This would indicate that the epistle is not written as a "Thank-You" note. I do not agree with this view. This kind of reasoning is typical for the materialistic spirit of our twentieth century. We put too much emphasis upon the financial side of the work of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is not true that financial support requires more of God's omnipotence than other, more spiritual matters. Finances are part of God's grace to us. It is amazing how stimulating this

insight is to our faith once we catch the vision. If we seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, we will not have to mention money first in our "Thank-You" letters.

It is hard to reconstruct the circumstances. The Philippians had wanted earlier to send money to Paul, but they did not have the opportunity. We are talking about a world in which money, which consisted in a certain amount of heavy metal, had to be carried by special courier. Robbery was a common phenomenon. How complicated the transfer of money must have been is shown by the careful plans Paul had to make himself to carry the collection of Macedonia and Achaia to Jerusalem. (See Rom. 15:25-28, 31; I Cor. 16:3,4 etc.) In this case Epaphroditus' trip was the ideal opportunity to put the plan of the Philippians into practice.

In vs. 10 Paul says: "I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me." The KJV translates "renewed" with "flourished." The Greek word is *anathalo*, which literally means "to bloom" or "to sprout out again" such as trees do in the spring. Paul rejoices in this new spring in Philippi's garden. Paul does not say that he did not need the money, but that he had learned to be content whatever the circumstances. That is, he knew how to live frugally when he had to. The money must have been very welcome, but the demonstration of love was even more valuable. Love without demonstration doesn't amount to anything.

Paul doesn't tell us anything about his circumstances. The only thing he reveals is that he had learned an important lesson in the various conditions in his life; he had learned to be content. He went in his life from one extreme to the other; from poverty to abundance and back to poverty. He says that he has learned the secret. The Greek word used here stands for someone who is initiated into a secret society. He has learned the secrets of both conditions. In the "Parable of the Sower" Jesus points out the danger of poverty and riches in connection with the growth of the Word of God in our hearts. The thorns and thistles stand for the man who hears the word, but "the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth" choke the Word in his heart (Matt. 13:22). Agur in Prov. 30:7-9 recognizes the same danger. He says: "Two things I ask of you, O LORD; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God." We need to know ourselves well in order to be able to say such things.

Not many people are poor by choice. If we do have a choice, we usually choose to be rich. We should not take Paul's confession that he was initiated to be an indication in the art of dealing with poverty as well as with riches, as an indication that he was proud and conceited. He ascribes his ability to cope to the Lord, who enables him. It is good to realize that we need strong legs to be able to bear the burden of wealth, and that to bear poverty we need legs that are at least as strong. Even more, it is important to know that our legs will never be strong enough if the power of Jesus does not sustain us. Our foolishness is that when we are poor we worry, but when we become affluent, we ascribe our affluence to our own cleverness. There is no reason to feel guilty under any of the above mentioned circumstances. The Lord grants grace both to bear and to enjoy. It is all from His hand.

Vs. 13 "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" is often quoted out of context. Of course, "everything" contains more than poverty and riches. An important factor which we should not overlook in this context is, that everything, that is all our circumstances, are part of God's plan with our life. The attacks of the enemy become in God's hand tests for our purification. The important thing is not our circumstances but whether we react to them by leaning upon the Lord and availing ourselves of His strength. Paul says that he learned in everything to switch over to God's omnipotence, to the God who loves us and gives us grace. No circumstance, however bad, can hold out against this.

Having said this, Paul hastens to add that the Philippians did well to share in his troubles. The power of Jesus does not work outside the fellowship of the saints. We should not try to be rugged individualists who don't need anybody's help. The grace of the Lord is sufficient, even if all the saints would leave us stuck, but that is not God's primary way of giving help. If the body functions as it should, the body sustains the members. The word "troubles" is translated in the KJV as "afflictions." A Roman prison was no sinecure. It spoke well of the church of Philippi that they had compassion with Paul in his imprisonment.

"The matter of giving and receiving" in vs. 15 is borrowed from the world of commerce. Paul shows a sense of humor in using those terms. Speaking about debits and credits does not mean, of course, that Paul sent money to the church, and they sent it to him. There is a reference here to what Paul calls in I Cor. 9:9 "an ox that is treading out the grain." It is also true that Paul did not have kept careful accounts of what he did for the church and what they did for him. How could the salvation of souls be expressed or

recorded in money or material goods? As Jesus said in Matt. 16:26: "What can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

More than a conversion from spiritual values into material values, Paul sees in the gift of the Philippians a demonstration of a spiritual gift: generosity and love. It is not the gift, but the love that gives which tips the balance in favor of the church. In II Cor. 8:1,2 Paul says about the church in Philippi and surrounding area: "And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity." "God loves a cheerful giver" (II Cor.9:7).

People who are on the receiving end often have the experience that the giver has a tendency to remind the recipient of his generosity. That is why Paul's gesture is so graceful here; he reverses the roles and reminds them of their own generosity, the gifts they had sent him before while he was in Thessalonica. "I have received full payment" (vs. 18) is one of the funniest, most sparkling, sentences in the Bible. The account is balanced! The only full payment of our debt which we have in this world before God is the blood of Jesus Christ. No collection or sacrifice can stand next to this. But just as the animal sacrifice in the Old Testament was an aroma pleasing to the Lord, not because the blood had any value in itself, but because it was an image of the sacrifice of Christ, so He accepts our gifts as a pleasing aroma, if they express the love of Christ. Our gifts have no value and they have infinite value.

The promise of vs. 19 "My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" runs as a purple thread through the whole Bible. David says in Ps 37:25 "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread." And in Matt. 6:32,33 Jesus assures us: "Your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Paul's words have nothing in common with "Green Power." It states nowhere in the Bible that we should become rich. God promises to take care of our needs and often He does much more than just that. For most people it would mean a spiritual punishment if they became rich. If a man becomes rich and loses his soul, he loses all.

The authority with which Paul states the promise is striking. He uses the personal pronoun "my" in front of God. It is dangerous to say those things. We can only say that God is "our God" if He possesses us completely. That is the reason that Paul can take the liberty to promise support to the Philippians in God's Name, because he has a "partnership" with God.

It should be made clear also that the promise can take effect only if the Lord has top priority in our life. If we don't trust Him completely to take care of our needs and if we worry about our support, He will let us go ahead in our efforts to take care of ourselves. Only if we take His interests to heart will He take care of ours. The glorious riches in Christ Jesus is our guarantee. There is nothing on earth that can be compared to this; therefore a Christian can always afford to pay his debts.

We are treading on dangerous ground. We will need deep spiritual insight and the gift of discernment to be able to keep the right course. We are not more than our Lord, who had no place on earth to lay His head, according to Matt. 8:20 and who "though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor" (II Cor. 8:9). God's promise does not mean that we will always have the food we want at the time we want it. If the Father withheld breakfast from His Son, as we read in Matt. 21:18,19, what grounds do we have to suppose that we will always eat our fill? There are some lessons we will only be able to learn if God withholds something from us. We read in Deut. 8:3: "He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." Much of the fulfillment of God's promise will depend on how fast and well we learn. If we realize that behind all our experiences stands the love of the Father for us in Christ Jesus, we will understand how well God provides for our needs.

The purpose of the promise is to keep us from worry and to bring us to thanksgiving. After all, providing for our needs "according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus" is no small matter. The doxology of vs. 20 is therefore very appropriate. "To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen." The essence of all experiences of abundance and need is the glory of God. This means that we have to glorify God in all our circumstances. This is, in a nut shell, the lesson Paul gives us. The better we learn this lesson, the more joyful we will be as Christians, who give thanks to God in all circumstances. In doing so, we prepare ourselves for the real task that is awaiting us in eternity. Amen! It is certain!

In vs. 21 Paul greet all the saints in Christ Jesus personally. Unity in the body of Christ does not eliminate our individuality. To the contrary; our personality will be strengthened and accentuated when we



become new creatures in Christ. Sin reduces us to part of a mass of people. God respects our personality and makes us stand out in the crowd.

If it is true, what commentators suppose, that Paul dictated this letter, probably to Timothy, it is likely that he wrote vs. 21 personally in his own handwriting. We find parallels of this in Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18 and II Thess. 3:17.

The mention of all the saints "who belong to Caesar's household" is very intriguing and has led to endless controversy. Vincent believes that the reference is to slaves and servants of the palace. But it is not necessarily so that Paul speaks about the palace in Rome. Inscriptions have been unearthed that indicate that there was a "praetorian guard" in Ephesus. One commentator (Synge) believes that Paul's words are a funny equivalent of the British designation of prisoners as "his majesty's guests." Such humor would not have been beneath Paul. Whatever the meaning or the place may have been, the suggestion is strong that Paul used his imprisonment to lead others to Christ. The epistle to Philemon is proof of this.

The last blessing, "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen," is meant for our spirit. Our body and soul need the grace of Jesus Christ also, but our spirit, the organ with which we exercise fellowship with God would be dead without God's grace.

**COLOSSIANS**

Paul wrote this letter in prison, probably under the same circumstances as when he wrote the epistle to the Philippians. All the discussions regarding the place of his imprisonment in the Philippian epistle are similar here.

One of the differences between this letter and the preceding one is that the apostle had not founded the church himself, and he did not know the people to whom he wrote personally. We gather from ch. 1:7 that Epaphras was the first person to preach the Gospel in Colosse and that he had informed Paul about the condition of the church. Evidently Epaphras was himself a Colossian. We read in ch. 4:12 "Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured." The Colossians were on Paul's prayer list, together with the church in Laodicea. Both cities were situated in the Lycus valley in Asia Minor. A third city in the vicinity was Hierapolis. In Paul's time, Colosse was probably the least important of those three places. The time of her glory was past.

Most commentators stress the fact that Paul wrote this epistle because he wanted to oppose false teachings in the church. There is no doubt that the letter contains warnings, but the general impression is that Paul gives in this letter a blueprint of intercession for the church. It sounds as though he prays for them aloud, so they can hear what he says and their lives can be changed by the grace of God. This method of admonishing through prayer is very effective. It can only be used by people who understand the value of prayer and who realize that transformation of a person's life and spiritual growth are the work of the Holy Spirit. Without intercession and the influence of the Spirit of God there will be no understanding that spiritual growth is of vital importance. Therefore, in our interpretation of this epistle, we will not emphasize false doctrines that are exposed and admonitions that are given, though they are clearly there, but our emphasis will be upon Paul's intercession for the spiritual growth of a church which he does not know personally.

If we outline the letter we can see that the stress in the first part is upon doctrine. Unger's Handbook of the Bible gives three divisions:

- I. Doctrinal exposition 1:13 - 2:3
- II. Doctrinal polycism 2:4 - 3:4
- III. Doctrinal matters 3:5 - 4:6

One has to manipulate the verses quite a bit, however, to make them fit this mold.

The epistle tells us just as much about that church as about Paul's vision of church planting. Paul shows us that being rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son God loves is the beginning of the hope which is stored up for us in heaven. The word "hope" occurs several times in this epistle. We may consider this to be the theme.

**1:1,2**

***"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother. To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father."***

The opening words differ little from those in other epistles. Paul stresses his apostleship. This stress may be stronger here than elsewhere. He wants to show that God has given him the right to meddle in the affairs of a church which he doesn't know personally and where he is not personally known. His apostleship is "by the will of God." We find this same sentence in Eph. 1:1. This was, obviously, the way Paul introduced himself. Now, Paul thoroughly knew the church in Ephesus. We read in Acts 19:9,10 that Paul spent at least two years in Ephesus. "He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord." It is far from certain, however, that the Ephesian epistle was actually addressed to the church in Ephesus. The word "Ephesus" in Eph. 1:1 does not occur in several important manuscripts. It could be that the book which we know as Ephesians is actually the letter that was sent to Laodicea, which is mentioned in Col. 4:16. ("After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.") If this is true, the apostle would have only used the introduction of himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus" in epistles sent to churches "as have not seen my face in the flesh," ch. 2:1 (KJV).

The recipients of the Colossian epistle are addressed in the same way as those receiving the epistle of Ephesians. "To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ." The KJV and RSV translate the Greek work *agioi* as a noun. "To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse." But the translators were not consistent because they should have treated *pistoi* as a noun also and say "To the saints and believers." Of course, this does not make any practical difference. It is on the basis of their faith in Christ that they have been sanctified, that is, set apart for God. They are saints because they are in Christ, Who is our holiness; Paul says: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God; that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption."<sup>47</sup>

This doesn't mean that we should not make a distinction between our position in Christ and our personal sanctification. This distinction becomes clearer if we substitute the word "glory" for "holy." The Seraphim in Isaiah do this when they say: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."<sup>48</sup> If sin means that we "come short of the glory of God,"<sup>49</sup> as Paul defines sin it, then holiness should mean that we partake in God's glory. Obviously, this glory has, as yet, not been revealed in our lives; however, it should be clear that positional holiness makes little sense if there is no trace of progressive sanctification.

This relationship between positional holiness and personal sanctification is the main theme of this epistle. Paul first presents God's holiness in us in Christ Jesus, and then he sets the fullness of God's glory as the goal constantly before us. The bridge between these two he calls "the hope." The point of his intercession is that the Colossians reach this goal and that, by fixing their eyes upon it and reaching toward it, they would see changes take place in their lives; thus the gap between what was, what is, and what ought to be becomes smaller and smaller.

The fact that Paul uses the word "holy" so early in his epistle indicates that he has a clear idea of what he wants to say. The word "faithful" has a double meaning in English. It suggests both faith and reliability.

"Grace and peace" is the salutation by which Paul binds the Old and New Testament together. The customary Greek salutation was *chaire* (hail). Paul changes this into "charis" (grace). In doing so he opens with very simple means a window on eternity. Generally speaking human forms of politeness are a watered down version of what intimacy must have been when man still enjoyed perfect fellowship with God. Our greetings have become meaningless. But for a man who has experienced the atonement and redemption in Christ it is possible to greet his neighbor with the blessing of Christ *charis kai eirene*.

"Shalom!" Paul's salutation here is shorter than the ones in Ephesians and Philippians but that probably has no significance.

There is a strong similarity between the opening of this epistle and Rom. 1:8-10. In both letters Paul indicates that he does not know the churches personally. He knows what the conditions of the church are only through what others have told him.

### 1:3-6

***We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, Because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints; The faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel That has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.***

In the letter to the Colossians there are three points which fill Paul's intercession for them with gratitude:

1. Their faith in Christ.
2. Their love for all the saints and
3. The hope that is stored up for them in heaven

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<sup>47</sup> I Cor. 1:30

<sup>48</sup> Isa. 6:3

<sup>49</sup> Rom. 3:23

As we mentioned already, "hope" is the theme of this epistle. Of course, faith in Christ is the foundation. There would have been no church in Colosse if people had not accepted the fact that Jesus died for their sins and that in His death and resurrection the powers of darkness had been conquered. And the best evidence that the faith of these people was not a dead faith was that they demonstrated love for one another. They loved not only their own people but all the saints.

Hope, however, is the climax. We get the impression that Epaphras had put the greatest stress on hope in his preaching in Colosse. It could be that the economic depression of the city made a very fertile ground for this form of preaching; healthy economy is rarely conducive to a good spiritual perspective. We know that it will do no good to gain the whole world at the expense of our soul. As Jesus says: "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?"<sup>50</sup> It is a sad thing, though, that those who try to gain the world invariably suffer in God's economy.

It is important that we express our thanks to God for one another. Thanksgiving robs the devil of the opportunity to sow negative feelings of criticism in our human relationships.

The faith of the Colossians was a result of their hearing the Gospel from the mouth of Epaphras. Love was the fruit of this faith, which the Holy Spirit grew in their hearts. This doesn't mean that the Spirit would have had nothing to do with their faith, but faith and love are not factors that come about without our involvement. God imputes love and faith to us; however, it seems that hope belongs to a different category. Yet, in First Corinthians, Paul presents them as an inseparable unity. "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."<sup>51</sup> Faith and love grow in our lives on earth, but hope is rooted in eternity. Paul says that it is stored up for us in heaven. Peter is very clear on this point, speaking about our heritage, he says: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, And into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade; kept in heaven for you."<sup>52</sup> He also links this hope with the resurrection from the dead. So we could define hope as a reaching out toward the inheritance that awaits us on the other side of our lives on earth.

Hope, in the Biblical sense, has little in common with what is meant by it in our daily use of the word. For unsaved people, hope is a rather vague concept that has little or no relationship with certainty. For the Christian hope is certainty. The writer to the Hebrews gives this definition: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see,"<sup>53</sup> or, as the KJV puts it: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Hope is based on the guarantee of God's glory which is awaiting us. If we believe in God, that is, if we consider God to be reliable, we will start to understand something of His character, which will lead us to certain conclusions. Jesus drew such conclusions when He said "But about the resurrection of the dead; have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living"<sup>54</sup> The fact that God is the living God guarantees the resurrection from the dead and the fact that God is the God of glory forms the solid basis for our hope of glory.

Those points were, obviously, the content of the preaching of the truth, as Epaphras had brought it to the Colossians. I wonder how much we have deviated in our modern preaching for this truth. Usually truth is not presented as absolute. Even in Jesus' time, the tendency existed to make truth relative to subjective experience. This shows in Pilate's question to Jesus: "What is truth?"<sup>55</sup> The fact that truth is absolute should be fundamental in our announcement of the Gospel. Therefore we can say that sin is not only a deviation from the truth but also from God's glory, as Paul states: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."<sup>56</sup>

Looking at Colossians from this perspective, we find it difficult to determine what Paul had in mind when he said: "All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth." "The world" must have been

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<sup>50</sup> Matt. 16:26

<sup>51</sup> I Cor. 13:13

<sup>52</sup> I Pet. 1:3,4

<sup>53</sup> Heb. 11:1

<sup>54</sup> Matt. 22:31,32

<sup>55</sup> John 18:38

<sup>56</sup> Rom. 3:23

the Roman empire, but we should not think too little of his vision, even in those days. He may not have known the world as "From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya," but he must have been familiar with Jesus' words "The field is the world,"<sup>57</sup> and "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."<sup>58</sup> He also understood the germinating power of the seed of the Gospel. The way in which the Gospel bore fruit in Colosse guaranteed the limitlessness of the harvest. What God did in Colosse He could do anywhere; for man is the same the world over. The good news is that every person has the capacity to know the grace of God. Everyone who has sinned needs forgiveness of sin, and we all qualify as sinners. Understanding God's grace consists of the realization that our sins have been forgiven by the blood of Christ.

### 1:7,8

***You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, And who also told us of your love in the Spirit.***

We deduct from these verses that Epaphras was one of Paul's disciples from the time Paul was in Ephesus and gave his lectures in the hall of Tyrannus. "Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord."<sup>59</sup> We conclude from the above that people who followed Paul's lectures in turn went out and passed on what they had learned to the people in their own cities. The result was that people turned to Christ, and churches mushroomed all over the area. Paul's lectures surely were more than mere intellectual exercises, but they must have been very practical; otherwise such results would not have occurred.

Paul had a great respect for and appreciation of Epaphras, whom he calls "our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf." The quality of a disciple is of great importance in the spread of the Gospel. Paul emphasizes those qualities: "reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."<sup>60</sup> Such people are links in the chain of the spreading of the Gospel.

The word "love" occurs twice in these verses: Paul loved Epaphras, and Epaphras was able to convey this love to the Colossians. Then, the love of Epaphras evoked love in the hearts of the believers in Colosse. This "love in the Spirit" (vs. 8) is a healthy demonstration of human emotions.

*The Tyndale Commentary* makes some very profound remarks about this section. "You ... understood God's grace in all its truth." The Greek word is *epignosis* which indicates a grasp of the essence of something which goes beyond the intellect and the emotions.

### 1:9-14

***For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.***

As we said before, the epistle is a blueprint for intercession. These verses are, Therefore, the essence of what Paul wants to say. We will never be able to understand completely the mystery of prayer. The Kingdom of Heaven will not come unless people pray "Thy Kingdom come!" Paul understands the important role prayer plays. He realizes that the Colossians had "understood God's grace in all its truth." This meant that they had a good start, but the church would bog down without intercession. We see in Revelation what happened to the church of Laodicea.<sup>61</sup> And in our present day there is also no trace

<sup>57</sup> Matt. 13:38

<sup>58</sup> Matt. 28:20 (KJV)

<sup>59</sup> Acts 19:9,10

<sup>60</sup> II Tim. 2:2

<sup>61</sup> Rev. 3:14-22

left of the church in Colosse. Of all the churches in Asia Minor, which is now Turkey, nothing remains. After Paul's death nobody took up his mantle of prayer and witnessing. This should make us aware of the importance of prayer for others.

Now, let us examine how Paul prays and what the things are he requests in his prayer. He emphasizes five points:

1. That they will be filled with the knowledge of God's will, a knowledge which will demonstrate itself in spiritual wisdom and understanding.
2. A life that is worthy of the Lord.
3. A desire to please the Lord in every way.
4. to bear fruit in every good work
5. To grow in the knowledge of God.

After this Paul discusses the result of such a life. Each of the above points is worth a detailed study.

1. The first point is the knowledge of God's will. This is essential for all that follows. God's will is revealed in His Word. For the church of the New Testament the Word of God was the Old Testament, for us in the twentieth century it is the whole Bible. The Bible gives a complete picture of God's will. It will depend on our attitude toward the written Word as to whether we will really get to know God's will or not. Jesus' motto for life should be ours: "Here I am, I have come ..... I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."<sup>62</sup> The key is obedience. Jesus says Himself: "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own."<sup>63</sup> The willingness to obey God's will should precede the knowledge of God's will.

First we observe the commandments and the precepts of the Bible, but then we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in our personal life. Knowing the leading of the Holy Spirit requires a finer ear. God does not reveal His will to us as one of several options. We will not be able to choose between God's will and something else. The choice is made before we start to find out what God's will is. If we surrender to God's will, He will not let us remain in the dark as to what that will is. This surrender will result in "spiritual wisdom and understanding." "Spiritual wisdom" is translation of the Greek word *sunesis* "understanding." The Dutch Bible translates it with "spiritual insight."<sup>64</sup> I like that translation better.

2. The purpose of the above is to live a life that is worthy of the Lord. This means a life style that is in accordance with the glory of God. In English the word "worthy" is related to "worth." During the presidential election campaign in the United States the slogan "family values" was promoted. That this was defeated by the emphasis on the state of the economy is not the point we are discussing. "Family values" is a vague term that stands for a certain conservative style in which families stay together in harmony. Of course, in political campaigns those slogans are not supposed to have a religious basis. It would be wrong, in that context, to say that decency is derived from holiness. The values Paul discusses go back to the central meaning. He speaks about a life that can stand comparison with the glory of God.

We have to state, of course, that nobody can be measured by the standard of God's glory and pass the test. Yet, Paul does not say anything negative about this. He knows that at the end of this life of imperfection and stumbling efforts there is an eternity of glory that awaits us. John says in I John 3:2,3: "We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure." It is the course we set that determines the style. If we do live this kind of "worthy" life, people around us will take note. Unbelievers maintain high standards for Christians, and they judge us with a sharp eye. To live a life "worthy of the Lord" describes our testimony in this world, and it determines the amount of light we emit.

3. If our life style influences our surroundings, our "pleasing Him in every way" relates, of course, to our fellowship with God. The only way in which we will please God is by being "an aroma of Christ." "For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing."<sup>65</sup> When Paul says that we should please God in every way, the stress is put on "in every way." Originally the

<sup>62</sup> Ps. 40:7,8

<sup>63</sup> John 7:17

<sup>64</sup> geestelijk inzicht

<sup>65</sup> II Cor. 2:15

word *apeskeia* (Greek for "to please") means the lowly submission as of a slave to his master. This conveys a repulsive picture to our modern mind. There is no indication in the Bible that God treats us as slaves or considers us to be worms. In fact, God honors us. But from our side we are wise if we consider ourselves to be "unworthy servants" ... who "have only done our duty."<sup>66</sup>

If we keep in mind the "in every way" part of our obedience, we will look at the details of our life to see if there is anything that would not please the Lord. In practice, this means that we surrender every domain of our life to the control of the Holy Spirit. It is a fascinating thought that the possibility exists that God would take pleasure in what I do. Is that what is meant by the song of the angels: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests"?"<sup>67</sup>

4. Bearing fruit requires constant fellowship with the Lord Jesus. Jesus says: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."<sup>68</sup> Bearing fruit in Christ and doing good works is identical. Paul's slight stress on the words "in every good work" not only draws our attention away from negative things we could do but it also stimulates us to enlarge our horizon. We should bear fruit in as many different varieties as possible. There is, of course, the danger that we would waste our energy and spread ourselves too thin so that, in fact, nothing is accomplished. I am sure that Paul does not mean to say that we should do all the good works that can be done. That would not agree with the variety of gifts the Holy Spirit imparts to the body of Christ, and it would cause tensions that are not from God. Obviously, the intention is that what we do should be a good work which we do unto the Lord and not for ourselves; our works should bear fruit to the glory of God.

5. Growing in the knowledge of God differs from the knowledge of God's will in vs. 9. Spiritual growth starts with obedience to the will of God. The goal is to know the eternal personality of God. All personality is derived from God's eternal personality. If human personality with all of its limitations, deviations, and sins is already so fascinating that the world is full of novels and character studies that have been written, how much more wonderful is it to grow in the knowledge of God's character. To know Him is the purpose and fulfillment of our life. "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."<sup>69</sup>

Knowing God is a growing process that will never end. It will fill eternity. On earth we can only make a beginning. As we reach out in faith toward the Lord we will have experiences with Him that will increase our knowledge of Him. At the end of a life full of answers to prayer, George Müller said that he knew the Lord. This may have been an incomplete statement, but it moved the people who heard it. Francis Schaeffer says that the fact that our knowledge is incomplete does not mean that we cannot have true knowledge.

True knowledge excludes misunderstandings and misconceptions. Job accused God of the calamities in his life because he did not understand the character of God. Israel treated God with suspicion. They believed that God had lured them into the desert to kill them treacherously. If we become convinced of God's absolute love and justice, we will grow in the true knowledge of God. We don't labor for God in an impersonal relationship as an employer and an employee. God shares His secrets with us in an intimate relationship that is unparalleled.

The strengthening Paul speaks about in vs. 11 and 12 is retroactive. *The Tyndale Commentary* also points this out. We are not only strengthened as a result of our obedience and our bearing fruit, but God's strength is also the source and the basis of our fruitfulness. If God did not strengthen us, there would be no question of obedience and spiritual growth. Without God we would not have any endurance. Paul describes it as a spiral; we move upward in a circle. We read in the psalms about people who go up to the temple in Jerusalem: "They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion."<sup>70</sup>

After the initial surrender of our will the Holy Spirit draws us up higher and higher so that we come ever closer to the throne of God. *The Tyndale Commentary* points out that our strengthening is not the result of the circumstances in which we find ourselves, but the source of our strength is the glory of God.

<sup>66</sup> Lk. 17:10

<sup>67</sup> Lk. 2:14

<sup>68</sup> John 15:5

<sup>69</sup> John 17:3

<sup>70</sup> Ps. 84:7

Circumstances can stimulate us to look for strength from above, and we receive strength to endure hardship as God's light shines upon us. We understand, as Daniel found, that the powers of this world represented by the huge statue Nebuchadnezar saw, have only feet of clay. We can thank the Father because we see things in their right perspective.

God's glorious might was demonstrated in Jesus' resurrection from the dead, in which our death was conquered also. This gives us a handle on life. Because of this we can let down our anchor, and we can resist death. Paul comes back to this theme several times in his epistles, as in Eph. 1:19,20 and Phil. 3:21. Because we know how the end, God's glorious future for His children, we are able to bear the intervening period of sickness, suffering, and even death. We find this same thought expressed in Rom 5:2-4, where Paul says: "Through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." There Paul emphasizes that suffering is beneficial to the forming of our character. Under pressure we are prepared for the glory that is awaiting us. We rejoice, not because things are difficult, but because we can reach out toward what lies ahead.

This life is a preparation for the inheritance we will receive. We are not only "shielded by God's power" in this life, as Peter puts it in I Pet. 1:4,5 but the Holy Spirit also builds our character. He prunes and purifies us so that we learn to live for eternity: "the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light." On this earth people flatter and manipulate old aunts from whom they expect to receive a share in the inheritance. As children of God, the least we can do is to adapt ourselves to the light that shines upon our life and to let it shine through us. This light is the glory of God.

The verses 13 and 14 contain one of the clearest declarations in the Bible about what God did for us when we turned toward Him and how the Holy Spirit renewed our hearts. "He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." We were all born in prison, and from birth we possess the mentality of a prisoner. It was part of our nature to obey the warden. Israel in Egypt gives a good illustration of this mentality. When Moses brought the message of liberation, it sounded attractive, but it did not coincide with the reality of their slavery. The Gospel has the same kind of unrealistic sound for modern man. It is "not relevant" to him. This is the result of the fact that we fail to realize that God created us for life and liberty. At our conversion this realization comes back to us and the prince of darkness loses his grip. The devil is no match for the Almighty God Who lays His hand upon us and pulls us toward Himself. No demonic power is able to stand against this love of God.

This does not mean only that the Evil One has no longer any power over us, but also that we do not have to maintain a prison mentality any longer. We are no longer under obligation to obey our sinful tendencies. Yet, just as Israel, after they left Egypt and arrived in the desert, kept on longing for the onions and garlic of Egypt, so our "old man" keeps pulling us down, unless we put ourselves wittingly on the basis that we have a right to be free of sin because we have been crucified with Him, buried with Him and raised from the dead with Him. Paul describes all this in Romans 6.

God has transferred us into the kingdom of Jesus, as the RSV puts it. We are not autonomous. We are part of a kingdom in which we have citizenship, and we owe obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ. But the relationship is quite different from the one in which we were governed by Satan. He is a murderer of men, and his aim is to destroy. In Christ we share in God's love. Because He loved us, He gave His life for us, and our answer to this love is obedience. I am a citizen of the kingdom of the Son of God. Every morning I should remind myself of my glorious citizenship.

In Jesus we are part of a new order of things. The key to this new order is "redemption and forgiveness of sins." We do not receive redemption and forgiveness as independent entities, outside of Christ. They are part of being in Christ. We are only redeemed and forgiven inasmuch as we are "in Christ."

It is important to note that Paul makes a distinction between being rescued from the dominion of darkness and being forgiven. Some Pentecostal Christians teach that all sins are acts that are committed under demonic pressure; as if our personality would have nothing to do with this and we would not be personally responsible for our acts. All that would be needed is to be rescued from the power of the demon who makes us do it. Pardon implies personal responsibility. God forgives us because He holds us personally responsible for our acts. We need not only be rescued from the dominion of darkness but we should also confess our sins and ask for forgiveness. Let's say it again: this redemption and forgiveness are



in Him. When He was nailed to the cross, He took away from the devil every claim upon men and all dominion over him. In Him we are partakers of this victory

### 1:15-23

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation-- if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.*

The mention of the Kingdom of the Son God loves brings Paul to the glorious utterances of the verses 15-20. Here, Paul mentions four very important things about Jesus Christ:

1. He is the image of the invisible God. vs. 15
2. He is the Creator. vs. 16
3. He is the head of the church. vs. 18
4. He is the redeemer. vs. 20

Most commentators believe that Paul says these things to cut off some influences of gnosticism in the church in Colosse. This is quite possible, of course, but the first intent is but positive not negative. Our vision of the person of Christ is crucial to our spiritual life. To know Him is the most important thing in the world. The depth of our knowledge of Him determines our spiritual health, which is the best defense against aberration.

Who is Jesus?

1. He is the image of the invisible God. Our physical eyes cannot see spiritual reality. That is why the Word became flesh in order to enable us to see Him, hear Him speak and touch Him. As John says: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life."<sup>71</sup> The writer of the Hebrew epistle agrees completely with Paul when he says that "the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being."<sup>72</sup> And in the Gospel of John the apostle puts full emphasis on this truth. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. .... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. .... No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."<sup>73</sup> Jesus, Himself, says to His disciples: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."<sup>74</sup> All these verses confirm the same truth, but they do not explain the mystery. It will always remain the greatest miracle to us that the invisible God expresses Himself in a visible world. Yet, at the same time are we, ourselves, beings who are partly spiritual and who are able to express abstract thoughts and emotions in sounds of words and music, in sculptures and art. In a sense we, ourselves, are expressions of God's being in flesh and blood; we are men who have been created in His image and likeness. That is why God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ is accessible to us. The conclusion of all of this is: **Jesus is God.**

2. He is the Creator. The phrase: or "the first-born of all creation," (NAS) is confusing to us, because birth has the connotation of the beginning of something that had no previous existence. When the Son is called

<sup>71</sup> I John 1:1

<sup>72</sup> Heb. 1:3

<sup>73</sup> John 1:1, 14, 18

<sup>74</sup> John 14:9b

“firstborn” or “only-begotten” does this not mean that He is not the eternal one who existed before time was created. Speaking about wisdom, Solomon says: “The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began.”<sup>75</sup> These verses indicate that the word birth can be used in a poetical sense. If we take the above literally, it would mean that God did not possess any wisdom before this point. With the words, “the firstborn over all creation” Paul says the same as John in the prologue of his Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word. .... Through him all things were made.”<sup>76</sup> The Father created everything through the agency of the Son.

What an overwhelming truth is the fact that Jesus is the Creator of all, and that, as man He became part of His own creation. Like the apostle John, we will never overcome our astonishment over the fact that we can have contact with the eternal God via our ears, our eyes and our hands. “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.”<sup>77</sup> Our Lord Jesus Christ is the firstborn of all creation and I am His creation.

Paul uses three prepositions in Greek: *en*, *di* and *eis*, which mean “in,” “by” and “unto.” They indicate the relationship between the Creator and creation. “In Him, through Him and unto Him.” (ASV). In doing so, Paul shows us the depth of the process of creation which surpasses our understanding. If everything that exists has its existence “in” Christ, it means that the essence of creation is a part of God’s character. Being the time-bound creatures we are, we cannot imagine what eternity is like. We tend to place eternity within the frame of time, instead of outside. We call eternity “everlasting,” which is an expression borrowed from time. I cannot understand how it is possible that creation existed eternally in Christ and yet was brought about in time. Yet, everything within me tells me that Paul used the right words when he says: “For in him were all things created” (ASV). God expressed His being in creation. The picture of a seed is, probably, the best illustration, although it does not completely exemplify the reality. As the whole oak tree is contained in the acorn, so is all of creation contained in Christ. Heaven and earth, as they exist at present, have their issue in Him.

Paul distinguished two levels: the visible and the invisible; meaning the material and the spiritual. Most of the material bodies are invisible to the naked eye. We cannot see atoms and magnetic fields and so on. But that does not qualify them as spiritual. To deny the existence of the spiritual, as the naturalists do, leads to nonsense.

The terms “thrones, powers, rulers and authorities” pertain, probably, to the invisible and spiritual creation. These terms are, generally, understood to indicate various categories of angels. We don’t know the source from which Paul knew these names. They are, most likely, a part of Jewish tradition and the angelology of Paul’s time. The names must have been part of the inventory of gnosticism that was prevalent in the first century. Paul uses them to indicate that Jesus is Lord over the powers that were given inflated positions in the church that was under the influence of gnosticism. These ranks of angels were created by Christ. “All things were created by him and for him” is clear and natural language. It corresponds to what David says: “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.”<sup>78</sup> And this Word is Christ.

Created “unto Him” (ASV) reveals the meaning and the purpose of creation. This point is especially important for us as human beings. We exist “unto Him.” John says: “You created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”<sup>79</sup> He did not only create because He willed, but also because He had pleasure in creation and glory and joy. That is why God says: “I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind.”<sup>80</sup> The fact that sin tries to take away this joy and destroy it doesn’t mean that the discovery of the meaning of life no longer kindles joy in us. The reward for leading a life that is focused on God is to enter into the joy of the Lord.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Prov. 8:22,23

<sup>76</sup> John 1:1,3

<sup>77</sup> I John 1:1

<sup>78</sup> Ps. 33:6

<sup>79</sup> Rev. 4:11

<sup>80</sup> Prov. 8:30,31

<sup>81</sup> Matt. 25:21,23 (KJV)

Five times Paul states the absolute priority of Christ over all of creation: "Firstborn over all creation," "all things were created by him and for him," "He is before all things," "He is the head," "He is the beginning." There is no doubt left as to the relationship between Christ and creation.

In vs. 18 the apostle jumps from the old creation to the new. The abyss of sin which lies between the two, although it is not mentioned, is bridged in this way. The church consists of people who were rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom. They are people who were dead in their sins and have come to life through the new birth. He made us into members of His body. We receive our life from Him. The priority of Christ, Therefore, has a much deeper meaning for us than for the rest of creation. He is not only the Lord because He created us, but because we have come into a unique and intimate relationship with Him, and because He gave His life for us in order to save us.

Chronologically, "the first-born from the dead" should precede "the head of the body." Easter comes before Pentecost. Paul reaches a special effect by reversing the order. It draw the attention of the church to the risen Lord. As "first-born from the dead," He stands at the head of a long line of people who are going to take part in His resurrection. We, who are living between life and death, see Him who has conquered death. So we see that immortality has entered into the mortality of this life on earth, and we know that, if He is the first, we will be next.

"God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him," we read in vs. 19. The Father held nothing back in His love for the Son. He gave Him everything He had: all of His eternal, infinitely divine characteristics. So Jesus could say to His disciples: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."<sup>82</sup> In the same manner does the Son pour out His fullness upon us, who have received the Holy Spirit as "an earnest" or "guarantee," and "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as he is."<sup>83</sup>

By the blood that was poured out at the cross, everything that had been separated from God was reconciled again with Him. The way Paul puts it, this reconciliation acquires a great depth in connection with the fullness of God in Christ Jesus. The One Who died on the cross was not a poor deprived, despicable human wreck. Demons and men may have treated Him as such; but He was the Lord of glory. Reconciliation came about in that God made peace on the cross by the blood of Jesus. Throughout the ages man had poured the blood of animals upon altars, as an image of this pouring out of Christ's blood. This was the purpose of the Incarnation. He came to pour out His soul into death and to pay for every debt our sins had incurred with God.

This reconciliation is universal. "Whether things on earth or things in heaven," does not allow any limitations. Calvin erred at this point when he stated that Christ's blood was shed only for the elect. Reconciliation is not limited to man alone. This does not mean that every creature is, automatically, saved from perdition, but that, if anyone or anything is lost, it is not because God put limits to salvation. Man is lost because of his own choice. During an exorcism session one demon is said to have spoken the words: "No provision is made for us." It is quite possible, however, that the demon lied. But this question is outside our field of vision.

We have little idea of the extent of damage sin has caused in heaven and on earth. The author of the Hebrew epistle lifts up a tip of the veil when he says: "It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these."<sup>84</sup> The fall of Lucifer and later of man has polluted all of creation. Angel, man, and beast were affected. Reconciliation, Therefore, means much more than payment of our personal guilt. When the peace of God descends upon our souls, it is only a fraction of a huge cosmic process or restoration. We do not enter Heaven as isolated individuals; however, this also does not mean that we are not saved personally and one by one.

The last verses of this chapter (vs. 21-29) emphasize again the individual and universal aspect of reconciliation. The Colossians were formerly "alienated from God and enemies." The word "alienated" suggests a deviation from an original condition. Sin separates us from the source of life. Being an enemy means being actively involved in opposing the Person and the work of God. Man who does not know God is more dangerous than the wildest animal.

These verses state that man is held personally responsible for his evil deeds, which demonstrate his hostility towards God. It is true that God brought about reconciliation without our personal involvement and

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<sup>82</sup> John 14:9

<sup>83</sup> I John 3:2

<sup>84</sup> Heb. 9:23

that Adam sinned without consulting us first. In the same way that Adam's guilt was imputed to us, so Christ's righteousness has been imputed to us. That is to our advantage; otherwise, we would have to pay personally for a debt that we would never be able to pay. But the fact that we die for a sin we did not personally commit and that we are given life without doing anything for it personally, does not mean that we have no personal responsibility. Enmity with God means that we have personal culpability towards God. If we confess our sins and ask for forgiveness, the Holy Spirit can implant in us God's holiness, which will, ultimately make it possible for us to stand "without blemish and free from accusation" before God. "Without holiness no one will see the Lord."<sup>85</sup>

This is not something that will happen to us automatically, whether we want it or not. Neither will it happen without our being deeply involved in it. This is obvious from vs. 23. We read the condition: "if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel." We are held responsible for our continuation in the faith and our holding on to the hope. It is my humble opinion that Calvin was wrong at this point, by insisting that grace is irresistible.

Yet, perseverance is also not a matter of human determination, but of faith in God, who is able to keep us from falling.<sup>86</sup> We should lean upon the perseverance of our Lord Jesus Christ, not upon the strength of our own character. Solomon advises us: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."<sup>87</sup> This gives us the key to the perseverance of the saints. Peter's denial of Christ is a clear example of what happens when we lean upon our own understanding. The devil knows us better than we know ourselves, and he knows how to manipulate our weaknesses. Unless we place ourselves under the protection of Jesus Christ, we do not have a ghost of a chance against him.

When Paul speaks about "not moved from the hope held out in the gospel," he, probably, speaks about the danger of being influenced by false doctrines which threatened the church in Colosse, such as gnosticism and Judaism. It is important that we get a good grasp on the truth. A Christian bookstore somewhere in New England, supposedly, carried a sign on its display window "Dogma stops here." The sign should have read "Dogma begins here." Faith is not a matter of the heart alone, it involves the whole man: intellect, emotions, and will. If we go off the track in our thinking, our emotions will eventually lose sight of hope also.

Paul says some things about the Gospel that go far over the boundaries of his own time and life. He says that the Gospel "has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven." Unless we take this hyperbolically, (which is a figure of speech evangelists use with ease), we have to believe that Paul opens here a window on a reality that is closed to us. We can hardly believe that Paul exaggerated to the point where he believed that his ministry of the Gospel was universal. During his lifetime the Gospel had not been preached over the whole earth; it still has not. In one of his visions in the book of Revelation, John says: "Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth-- to every nation, tribe, language and people."<sup>88</sup> Paul's preaching of the Gospel, as well as every other proclamation of the truth, is part of this "eternal Gospel preached to every creature under heaven." What the Bible proclaims in time and space is part of God's eternal word to the whole of creation. If the message of redemption from sin had been one of God's afterthoughts that would only have occurred after the fall of man, then the fall itself would have taken God by surprise. That is inconceivable. The book of Revelation calls Jesus: "The Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."<sup>89</sup> And the covenant, on the basis of which the blood was poured out, is called "an eternal covenant."<sup>90</sup> In that sense of the word it is true that "the Gospel has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven." In the same sense what Isaiah says is true that the whole earth is full of God's glory.<sup>91</sup> This truth may not be visible for us who live in time and space, but this does not mean that the Word of God should be doubted. It should stimulate us even more to make our lives in time and space part of God's eternity on earth.

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<sup>85</sup> Heb. 12:14

<sup>86</sup> Jude 24

<sup>87</sup> Prov. 3:5,6

<sup>88</sup> Rev. 14:6

<sup>89</sup> Rev. 13:8

<sup>90</sup> Heb. 13:20

<sup>91</sup> Is. 6:3

It sounds almost absurd that Paul, as a frail human being, can say that he has become a servant of this Gospel. Yet, this is true. And every servant of Jesus Christ can repeat this after him. As human beings we handle things of eternity.

### 1:24 - 2:3

*Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness-- the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

In the following section Paul enters more deeply into the ministry of intercession which he has taken upon himself for the churches in Colosse and Laodicea and others, which he does not mention by name. He characterizes this ministry of intercession as a difficult struggle. He uses the word struggle twice in these verses. In vs. 24 he calls it *Christ's afflictions*, which he fills up in his own body.

This verse is one of the more controversial ones in this epistle. We will find lengthy efforts to explain the meaning of Paul's words in almost every commentary. Roman Catholic theologians use this verse to reaffirm the church's teaching on accumulation of merits of the believer toward his own salvation. The most logical seems to place Paul's words against the background of his experience on the road to Damascus. Up to that point Paul was a persecutor of the church of Christ. Jesus Christ reveals Himself to Paul as the real object of his persecution. Paul's persecution of the church was experienced by Christ as personal suffering. In his ministry of intercession Paul identifies with the young Christians in Colosse: their suffering becomes his suffering, he weeps with those who weep, and he thinks of those who are in prison as fellow prisoners. The Gospel he preaches does not leave him personally untouched; it pierces him to the bone. As an adult believer he stands in the gap for them in the struggle against the powers of darkness which are out to devour the young church. His ministry of intercession is an image of the intercession Christ makes for us at the present time as our High Priest in Heaven. His filling up in the flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions is not a substitutionary suffering, as Christ underwent, but an identification with the suffering of the church. As witnesses for God, God wants us to be deeply involved with the suffering people, to whom we witness. Paul actively participated in the suffering of others. He takes the initiative in this. That must be the meaning of the phrase "I fill up in my flesh."

God allows us to have some painful experiences in our lives and He wants us to make an application from our experiences to the suffering of others. When the baby of a missionary lady in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, died shortly after birth, she testified that the Lord allowed her to have this experience to bring her closer to the tribal women she worked with, who lost babies at a frightening rate. When Isaiah receives the call of the Lord, he immediately identifies himself with the people to whom he has to announce God's judgment. He cries out: "For how long, O Lord?"<sup>92</sup> Identification with the people we uphold in prayer is the essence of intercession. Paul expresses this in a penetrating manner when he addresses the Galatians: "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you."<sup>93</sup> Intercession is like labor pains.

Serving the church means praying for the church. Paul had only been indirectly involved in the planting of the church in Colosse. Yet, he felt himself responsible for the church as if he had fathered them himself. God had given him the task to "present the Word of God in its fullness," not only in the church he had planted himself, but also in those who were the indirect result of his labor. With his intercession and the writing of this epistle, he wants to reach this goal.

<sup>92</sup> Is. 6:11a

<sup>93</sup> Gal. 4:19

The following verses explain what is meant with the phrase "to present to you the word of God in its fullness." It involves bringing people to the point of conversion: first they must experience true conviction; then ask for forgiveness and receive the new birth. But this is only the beginning of the new life. People who never get further than this point remain, at the best, marginal Christians. The fullness of the Word of God comes to us in the realization that Christ lives in us through the Holy Spirit. This realization is closely connected to our identification with Christ in His crucifixion. Paul puts it elsewhere as follows: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."<sup>94</sup> Dr. A. B. Simpson, who founded the Christian and Missionary Alliance, made this discovery. The basis for his worldwide missionary activity was "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Paul calls the Word of God "the glorious riches of this mystery." Undoubtedly, he is referring to the Old Testament. Understanding of the Old Testament is of vital importance for the spiritual life of New Testament Christians. Our Lord Jesus Christ broke the code of the Old Testament secret. As a man, He learned the meaning of the Scriptures. He knew that the Scriptures were written about Him, and He understood the meaning of passages, such as: "Here I am, I have come-- it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."<sup>95</sup> He applied the Scriptures to His own life, and He let Himself be guided by them. His life on earth was a demonstration of the meaning of God's Word. Christ's life and death and resurrection clarify what the Holy Spirit had to say in the Old Testament. Even the prophets who put the Word of God on paper did not fully understand all of the meaning of what they wrote. The apostle Peter says: "Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things." This is the advantage we have upon Old Testament believers, that we may grasp what was most hidden to them. That is why Jesus says to His disciples: "But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."<sup>96</sup>

Another side of this mystery is highlighted by Paul in the Ephesian epistle. There he says that the Gentiles together with Israel are heirs of God's glory in the church.<sup>97</sup> Both sides of this coin are clearly visible in the Old Testament, if one becomes a searcher of the Scripture.

All animal sacrifices pointed to the Lamb that was slain at Golgotha, and in God's promise to Abraham we read that all peoples on earth will be blessed through him. Israel did not understand this mystery because they did not understand who they were and what role they played. Consequently, they looked at God's covenant in the wrong way. In spite of all declarations in Scripture which said the opposite, they believed that God occupied Himself with them because they were so special. They had the matter turned around. God did not speak to them because they were special, but they were unique because God spoke to them! The context of Paul's epistle teaches us the intercession for one another is necessary in order to grow in our understanding of the mystery. The contents of the Gospel can be summed up in the words: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." There is a sense in which Christ is present among believers, as in "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."<sup>98</sup> The Greek says there: *en mésoo autoon*, which means *among them*. But in our text the Greek says: *Christos en humin*, which means literally Christ *in you*. Paul speaks about a personal, individual experience. This idea is reinforced in the following verse which reads: "so that we may present *everyone* perfect in Christ." Jesus predicted His presence in the heart of every believer through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In John's Gospel we read: "If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever -- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day

<sup>94</sup> Gal. 2:20

<sup>95</sup> Ps. 40:7,8

<sup>96</sup> Matt. 13:16,17

<sup>97</sup> See Eph. 2:11 - 3:13

<sup>98</sup> Matt. 18:20

you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you."<sup>99</sup>

Faith in Jesus Christ is much more than being in agreement with a dogma; it is the fellowship of our spirit with another Person, a fellowship so intimate and complete that it surpasses all other human relationships. The physical union between husband and wife is an inadequate image of this relationship. It is a mutual experience. Jesus puts it this way: "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you."<sup>100</sup> Although we will not be able to grasp this truth in all its fullness while on earth, this does in no way diminish the reality of it. Our relationship with God is founded on mutual love.

When Paul says in vs. 28, "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ," he doesn't speak about dogmas and catechisms but about a relationship with Jesus Christ. Without a personal encounter with Him there can be no conversion. It is through our daily fellowship with Him by means of times of Bible reading and prayer that the quality and progress of our life is determined. This does not mean that dogma is not important or that it would not matter how we live our lives, but without personal love for the Lord and without accepting His love for us, dogmas and catechisms won't get us anywhere. Love produces obedience in a natural way. Jesus says to us: "If you love me, you will obey what I command."<sup>101</sup> The first and greatest commandment is: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."<sup>102</sup> Martin Luther is supposed to have said: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and then sin as hard as you can." Sin loses its power when there is love for God.

In this epistle Paul uses also the proclamation of Christ as defense against false teachings which had invaded the church in Colosse. This proclamation consisted of an oral account of the facts concerning Christ: Who He is and what He did, so that we can love Him, although we do not see Him personally. Peter puts it this way: "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy."<sup>103</sup> For us, who live twenty centuries after the facts, a personal encounter with Christ is not an experience that can be verified by our senses, but a projection of Christ by the Holy Spirit on the screen of our spirit.

The goal of all this is that we be "perfect in Christ." Paul manages to pack a lot of truths in this short sentence. First of all, it is God's intention that we be holy, that is, perfect, a complete and whole human being. Sin makes us less human. God wants us to be completely human again. Just as in a marriage with a rich partner the other party will become rich, so do we become perfect in our union with Jesus Christ. Our vision of Him will change our lives and place us on God's level. It is almost impossible to fully grasp this truth while we are still living on earth.

All of this is the aim of intercession, which is costing Paul so much struggle and energy. All the demons in hell try to obstruct our sanctification and so does our own sinful nature. Without the intercession of our Lord Jesus, through which we are "saved to the uttermost," and without the intercession of others who possess spiritual insight and spiritual maturity, we will not make any progress. Christ has to be formed in us, as Paul declares in the epistle to the Galatians,<sup>104</sup> and this will not happen without prayer.

This prayer also needs the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul admits that there would be little or no prayer in his own life if the Holy Spirit does not empower him. In the epistle to the Romans he explains how the Holy Spirit assists us when we pray. We read: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words

<sup>99</sup> John 14:15-20; 16:7-15

<sup>100</sup> John 14:20

<sup>101</sup> John 14:15

<sup>102</sup> Matt. 22:37,38

<sup>103</sup> I Pet. 1:8

<sup>104</sup> Gal. 4:19

cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."<sup>105</sup> The Holy Spirit puts a burden upon our hearts which surpasses our own understanding and He makes us groan. He, Himself, groans in us. The Father understands the meaning of this. In this way does the Lord share with us His own eternal compassion. He does not want the condition of our fellow men to pass us by without our being deeply affected by it.

## 2:1-15

***"I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally.***

***My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.***

***I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.***

***For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.***

***So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.***

***See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.***

***For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.***

***In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.***

***When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.***

***And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."***

We have to remember again that Paul prays for people he doesn't personally know. If the fate of his spiritual grandchildren affects him that much, how much more will the condition of those he personally lead to the Lord!

The first thing Paul prays for is encouragement or comfort. Following the Lord does bring tears with it; it is costly, and it involves pain and death. But God will wipe away all tears.

The second prayer request is for a growth together as believers in a bond of love. The members of the body of Christ should not only accept one another in order to function as they should, they should truly love one another. There is often a severe lack of cooperation among the members of the body of Christ because of a lack of love. We do not have to be blind to the faults of others, but having a critical attitude hinders the work of the Holy Spirit. Only a full measure of mutual love opens a window of vision upon the mystery of God. God doesn't reveal His secret to us if there is no love. The Wycliffe Commentary remarks at this point: "Several words here - mystery, wisdom, knowledge, head, dear to the Gnostics, are turned into effective instruments of Christian truth. Paul fills these words with the contents of the Gospel, thus disarming the false teachings and leaving them with empty terms. Paul un masks the deceit, and he demonstrates that the true wisdom and true *gnosticism* is Jesus Christ.

Throughout the ages the devil has deceived man with words. The result has been that man has lost his respect for the true Word, that is the Word of God that has creative power, the Word that has become flesh in Jesus Christ. Man uses slogans. "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword."<sup>106</sup>

Jesus Christ is God's great mystery. It is for Him that the Old Testament prophets searched. He caught Satan and his host of demons by surprise also. He is the mystery of the church. There is no human explanation for the birth, the existence and the continuation of the church. Without our Lord Jesus Christ, it

<sup>105</sup> Rom. 8:26,27

<sup>106</sup> Heb. 4:12



is inexplicable that Negro slaves would have embraced the Gospel, which was the religion of the white masters who mistreated them. There is no human explanation for the growth of the church in communist China. This mystery is the essence of the victory of millions who, through the ages, have withstood the gates of hell. Martyrs were burned at the stake with a song on their lips. A young Dutchman, who was executed by the German Nazis for helping a British pilot escape, sang: "Now will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight."<sup>107</sup>

Jesus is also for us the treasury of all God's wisdom. According to Paul's definition, the church of Jesus Christ exists of "Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth."<sup>108</sup> God chooses foolish, uneducated people, without a title, but nobody is wiser than they are, who are filled with the Holy Spirit. They know about the eternal things that give meaning and contents to the mysteries on earth.

Paul says these things to young Christians who are like sheep among wolves. He wants them to be aware of their potential so they will be able to withstand the enemy.

The warning that starts in vs. 4 is a logical continuation of the above. The warning and the preceding intercession belong together. We don't have a right to admonish people if we don't pray for them.

As far as we know, the church in Colosse was threatened by gnosticism and Judaism. The devil used half-truths to lead people astray. The church of Christ is the greatest threat to the kingdom of darkness, and it is understandable that the enemy does not give us any respite. We have to understand this situation; otherwise, we are in great danger. We may find ourselves as sheep among the wolves; the Lord wants us to "be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."<sup>109</sup> We have to come to grips with the facts that there is a war going on, why we are in the midst of it, and what our position is in this all. We don't have a chance to stand against the enemy as sheep have a chance against the wolves. If it were not for the fact that the Shepherd gave His life for us, we would do well to flee whenever possible.

It is important that we maintain our innocence as doves; that we remain pure. We may not answer the devil with his own tactics. Evil can only be overcome by good. Our behavior, therefore, has to be like shrewd snakes. When the Lord tells us to learn a lesson from a dishonest manager<sup>110</sup>, He means that we should imitate the perseverance and resourcefulness of the devil, as children of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Paul's admonition is, in no way, negative. He praises the Colossians for their orderly conduct. They compare very favorably with the church in Corinth. They are a group of solid Christians. The apostle bases these conclusions on the trustworthy reports he receives from others, since he doesn't know these people personally. The Holy Spirit also confirms to his spirit that the reports he received are reliable. This must be the meaning of the words in vs. 5: "For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is."

Paul does not consider, however, that they have arrived. There has to be progress. These people entered through the narrow gate; now they will have to follow the narrow road that leads to life.<sup>111</sup> After we receive Christ Jesus as Lord, we have to continue to live in Him. Or, as the KJV puts it: "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him." The best definition of this walk in Christ is found in the book of Proverbs: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."<sup>112</sup> Walking in Christ implies that there will be little difference between the way Jesus lived and our lifestyle. People will see Christ in us.

Walking implies progress. A person who walks has a starting point and a goal. Walking in Christ means that He is both our point of beginning and our point of arrival. When we walk in Christ, we are under His protection, just as a hen protects her little chicks with her wings, so that when we look at the chicks, we see the hen and not the chicks. In the same way Jesus takes us under His wings and protects and covers us.

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<sup>107</sup> Ps. 43:4

<sup>108</sup> I Cor. 1:26

<sup>109</sup> Matt. 10:16

<sup>110</sup> Luke 16:1-9

<sup>111</sup> Matt. 7:14

<sup>112</sup> Prov. 3:5,6

It also means that we no longer go our own way. John says about those who have been redeemed by the Lord: "They follow the Lamb wherever he goes."<sup>113</sup> Jesus determines the road we follow and where we go. If we are "in Him," we no longer have any say about this.

This is not all; walking in Jesus Christ leads to our being rooted and built up in the faith and to an overflow of thankfulness. In the school of Christ, we do not spend the first few years in formal school classes in order to be let loose upon practical life when we graduate. We learn with a "hands-on" experience. We learn by doing. Our roots will sink deeper in Him as we walk in Him, and our stability will increase as we take our nourishment from Him. The first Psalm uses the image of a tree: "He is like a tree planted by streams of water."<sup>114</sup> This is the Old Testament language for saying: "He is in Christ." The strength of a tree depends on its roots. What happens above the ground depends on what is under the surface. Our being built up in Him depends on the amount of nourishment we receive from Him. That is the reason that the amount of time and the quality of time we spend with Him is so important in our walk with Him.

Being strengthened in the faith does not mean only that we believe the right doctrine, but that we gain experience in faith and receive answers to prayer. The Lord allows us certain experiences which encourage our faith when the pressure upon our lives increases. That is how we can pray for mountains to be moved into the sea without doubting in our heart that it will be done.<sup>115</sup> Such was the faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when they were thrown into the furnace.<sup>116</sup> George Müller, the founder of the orphanages in Bristol testifies, to the fact our faith increases as we exercise it.

Paul does not only speak about personal experiences. This is clear from the addition "as you were taught." Remember, he spoke to people who were exposed to false teachings. Miraculous answers to prayer are, in themselves, no proof of the truth. Satan is a master of the supernatural; therefore, our subjective experiences have to be in accordance with the objective truth; otherwise we find ourselves on dangerous ground.

The climax Paul leads us to is thankfulness. Twentieth-century Christians are being bombarded with jargon, such as Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* and, more recently, Robert Schuller's *Possibility Management Thinking*. These are half-truths which are flung at us, which are more dangerous than half-lies. Thankfulness is the greatest positive power at our disposal; it opens wide the doors of possibility. Thankfulness does not necessarily mean that we have a feeling of being thankful, but that we thank God for what He is and for what He does. What God allows in our lives can cause us deep personal pain, but that in no way negates the fact that it is God who does it. A classic example of this kind of thankfulness is the hymn singing of Paul and Silas in the prison of Philippi at midnight.<sup>117</sup> Thankfulness is an act of faith, not a reaction to favorable circumstances. Often, thankfulness means that we brace ourselves against our circumstances. Just as faith is a growing experience, so will thankfulness increase as we practice it. We have to practice thankfulness in order to overflow in it. It could be that the Lord will work with us by increasing the pressure on our life!

Verse 8 suggests that some philosophy can be inspired by the devil. This does not mean that all philosophy has its source in the demonic or that we should set all thinking aside. It does not mean either that all human tradition is bad. Without oral traditions a good part of the Bible would never have been preserved. The dangerous traditions Paul has in mind are the ones that are given the same authority as the Bible. The fact that people held certain things as true 400 or 4000 years ago doesn't necessarily mean that they are true. Things are not true because they are antique, even though some lies have long and durable lives. Evil spirits use them to deceive people this way. The prophet Isaiah recognized this when he said: "When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word [of God], they have no light of dawn."<sup>118</sup>

On the other hand there is the danger that we detach the written Word of God from the living Lord. Adhering to the doctrine of literal inspiration of the Scriptures does not make us a new creation. For Paul, this verse meant that Christ is the contents and fulfillment of the Old Testament. This makes gnosticism only an empty hull. If we put our trust in Jesus Christ we become partakers of the fullness of God. It will be

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<sup>113</sup> Rev. 14:4

<sup>114</sup> Ps. 1:3

<sup>115</sup> Matt. 17:20; 21:21; Mark 11:23

<sup>116</sup> Dan. 3:16,17 ff.

<sup>117</sup> Acts 16:24

<sup>118</sup> Isaiah 8:19,20

impossible to grasp and experience this truth in all its fullness as long as we live on earth. We have come a long way when we realize that all of this surpasses our understanding. No human philosophy can touch this. The danger of gnosticism is not that it goes too far, but that it does not go far enough. The recognition that all of God is in Jesus Christ and that we may become what He is, because He became what we are, is essential.

The principle of gnosticism is that man can climb up via a hierarchy of angels and archangels. Paul shows how futile such efforts are, since "in Christ" we are already at the top. He is above the angels and so are we if we are in Him.

In verses 11-15 Paul refutes Judaism. The Judaists believed that non-Jews had to become Jews, by the ritual of circumcision, in order to be saved. Circumcision is a complicated ritual that symbolizes both death and life. Jesus places circumcision in the context of the healing of man when He says: "Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath?"<sup>119</sup> In this epistle to the Colossians, Paul places it against the background of death. Originally, circumcision was a sign of the covenant God made with Abraham.<sup>120</sup> It was that man accepted the covenant of God. The essence of God's covenant with Abraham was the promise of the Holy Spirit. In his epistle to the Galatians Paul says: "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."<sup>121</sup> Circumcision was linked to death because part of the body dies in circumcision. On the other hand, it is the gate to life because it leads to God's gift of the Holy Spirit to us. In this epistle Paul says that circumcision is an image of Jesus' death on the cross. If we consider ourselves to be crucified with Christ, we are circumcised. The true circumcision is the circumcision of the heart. "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God."<sup>122</sup> This interpretation is not original with Paul. Moses was the first one to say: "Circumcise your hearts, Therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer."<sup>123</sup> And Jeremiah uses the same expression: "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem."<sup>124</sup>

The death Paul speaks about here is our identification with the death of Christ. Some proponents of infant baptism try to base their practice on this verse because circumcision is performed on infants. But the verse can also be used against infant baptism because identification with the death and resurrection of Christ demands faith that is not yet present in a newborn baby. And, if taken as a basis for infant baptism, it means that only male infants should be baptized.

It is important that we do not, automatically, connect the word baptism with water. Jesus gives a totally different meaning to the word when He says: "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"<sup>125</sup> Water symbolizes baptism; it is not, in itself, baptism. The real circumcision and baptism are spiritual acts that God performs upon us. What man does is an answer to what God has done to us. That is why Peter says: "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."<sup>126</sup>

In these verses Paul does much more than refute Judaism; he shows us how we have become partakers of God's fullness in Christ. God has included us in the death and resurrection of His Son. When we believe this we do not only indicate that we hold this for true, but also that we agree with God's verdict when He condemned us to death on the cross. The fact that someone else was executed in our place does, in no way, diminish the depth of our guilt. The glory of the resurrection and the fullness of eternal life begin with this confession of guilt.

The apostle emphasizes particularly the freedom in Christ which we receive in all of this. We as Gentiles were dead and uncircumcised, and we were not included in God's covenant with Abraham. We were

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<sup>119</sup> John 7:23

<sup>120</sup> See Gen. 17:9-14

<sup>121</sup> Gal. 3:14

<sup>122</sup> Rom. 2:28,29

<sup>123</sup> Deut. 10:16

<sup>124</sup> Jer. 4:4

<sup>125</sup> Mark 10:38

<sup>126</sup> I Pet. 3:21 (KJV)

spiritually dead because our spirit was dead. And since our spirit is the organ that enables us to have fellowship with God, we had no fellowship with Him. We were all born into world with a spirit that could not function. When we turn towards God in conversion and confession of our sins, the Holy Spirit gives us the experience of regeneration so that the line of communication with God is restored. The key to this communion is the forgiveness of our sins.

It is only a small step from our trespasses to the law that condemns us. We must look into the reasons Paul gives for establishing a link between the law of God and demonic activity. Paul says that the law threatened us and opposed us because it condemned us before God and made us guilty of death. Death, obviously, is an invention of Satan. That is where the link is. When Jesus conquered death, He conquered the devil. As an expression of the will of God the law is, of course, perfect. We discover the law opposing us, not because it is evil, but because we are, and the law provides proof of our guilt.

Paul draws a condensed picture of the vicious circle in which man finds himself. Being in the power of demonic spirits man sins against God. The perfect will of God becomes the document that certifies man's lostness. Our debt to God is too immense for us to pay. It is impossible for us, as fallen human beings with a soul that is torn apart and ravaged by sin, to come before God with a payment for our debt that would meet the standard of God's glory. But now God has destroyed the proof of our guilt by canceling the written code of law that testified against us. There is no longer any document that God could use as proof against us in a court case so that we would be found guilty. God tore up the debenture. "He paid a debt He didn't owe, I owed a debt I couldn't pay ..." as the songwriter wrote.

No other writer of the New Testament gave us as many original interpretations of the death of Jesus on the cross as did the apostle Paul. It would be an interesting study to trace them all and analyze them all. In this epistle Paul paints a picture of our Lord on the cross as a documentation of our guilt. When He died, the document that was proof of our guilt was torn up. In the epistle to the Galatians, Jesus is shown as the personification of the curse that is upon our lives. In the first Corinthian epistle, Jesus is our foolishness that is crucified. Through the depth of shame of the cross of Jesus Christ, we become living human beings; not just vegetating men and women who breathe and move, but living, as God is living with an indestructible life that brings us into His glory.

The victory Jesus won over death and the devil is the beginning of our rehabilitation. Just as the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, God answers our confession of sin, not only, with forgiveness, but with our rehabilitation.<sup>127</sup> "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate." In the same way as the father of the Prodigal put his best robe on him, so God clothes us with the glory of Christ's resurrection.

The cancellation of the written code means the defeat and disarmament of Satan, who counted on being able to use the code to accuse us before God. The prophet Zechariah sees Satan doing this in the vision the angel shows him. "Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, 'The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?'"<sup>128</sup> This same vision also gives us a picture of rehabilitation.

John calls Satan "the accuser of our brothers." In Revelation we read: "Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: 'Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.'"<sup>129</sup> Satan is disarmed by the blood of the Lamb, by our testimony and our willingness to give our lives for the Lord. The first and most important factor in this victory is the blood of the Lamb. Satan's attempt to use God's righteousness against God meets with total defeat. He is the author of sin and he tries to accuse his victims before God, whose righteousness he despises, but his ruse is exposed. There is an anecdote about Martin Luther, who was presented by Satan with a long list of his sins. He told the devil to write on the document: "Paid by the blood of the Lamb." The story says that Satan dropped his quill and ran away.

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<sup>127</sup> See Luke 15:11-32

<sup>128</sup> Zech. 3:1-2

<sup>129</sup> Rev. 12:10,11

Paul does not elaborate concerning the fact that the law is a complicated combination of the moral law and the ceremonial law. The moral law demands a holiness of life which is equal to the holiness of God Himself. The ceremonial law provides both for the death as well as for the forgiveness of the offender. The fact that it was an animal that died instead of a man does not change the principle of the law. In fulfilling the ceremonial law when He died on the cross, Jesus took upon Himself the guilt of our trespass of the moral law. He washed us from our sins in His own blood.<sup>130</sup> That is why the devil can no longer point a finger at us. Our sins were laid on Jesus, and He carried them away. The only one Satan could point a finger at would be Jesus Himself. The accuser is rebuked. "The LORD said to Satan, 'The LORD rebuke you, Satan!'"<sup>131</sup> The case is closed. The accuser is exposed as the culprit and the deceiver.

## 2:16-23

***"Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!'"? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."***

"Therefore do not let anyone judge you." (2:16) "Do not let anyone ... disqualify you for the prize." (2:18) "Do you submit to its rules" (2:20) These words contain the same admonition as above, and they are directed against the influence of gnosticism and Judaism. The point Paul wants to make is that Christians should not become the victim of those doctrines. A Christian is like a sheep among the wolves, and he should be on his guard so that he will not be devoured.

There is little we can do, of course, if others judge us. What Paul means is that, if other people condemn us or judge us on certain points, we should not be concerned. On the other hand, though, Paul says, in other places, that our eating and drinking should be influenced by our surroundings. In Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8, he emphasizes that our actions should be governed by love for others. The situation in the Colossian church must have been different. There were young Christians who were in danger of missing the important principles. We have to come to liberty in Christ first before we can put restrictions on ourselves out of love for others. And the issue here is the ceremonial law not the moral law. We will never be free to lie, to steal, to commit adultery or to break any of the moral laws.

"Do not let anyone judge you," pertains probably to meat offered to idols or to animals that had not been slaughtered according to the Jewish ritual law. It is also possible that it involved eating of animals that were ritually impure. There is no example of the latter in the New Testament beside the vision of Peter in Acts 10:9-16.

The issue is a whole complex of Old Testament ordinances which had found their fulfillment in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul calls these ordinances a shadow of the reality of Christ. They are a picture, a print on paper of a Person and of the reality of the Kingdom. A picture, as a representation, is not without value. But if we prefer the picture over the living person, then something is basically wrong with us. That was the sin of the Jews to whom the epistle of the Hebrews was addressed. They rejected Christ because they wanted to hang on to the rituals of the Old Testament. As long as we see the ordinances and precepts regarding food and religious festivals as an image of Christ, we are free to do with them what we want. But if we don't recognize the reality of Christ, we miss the purpose of the ordinance. The

<sup>130</sup> Rev. 1:5 (KJV)

<sup>131</sup> Zech. 3:2

danger in observing the ceremonial part of the law is a very subtle one, if we do not discern what it expresses.

The danger in verses 18 and 19 lies on quite a different level. In the preceding verses the question was the choice of our liberty in Christ. Here the matter is disqualification for the prize. Clearly, this is a reference to gnosticism, which taught that man was on such a low level in the order of creation that he could not enter God's presence. He had to climb up via a complicated system of stairways, in which one had to be initiated. Paul calls this "false humility and the worship of angels." Worship of angels comes from the devil. We see this in Rev. 19:10 and 22:2,9: "At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, 'Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.'" "I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, 'Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!'"

The difference between false humility and true humility is clear. True humility is not self-conscious. True humility does not talk about itself. Uriah Heep in Charles Dickens' book *David Copperfield* presented himself as "umble," but this humility was a cover-up for his baseness. Paul unmasks this kind of humility as unspiritual and puffed up. True humility comes from the Holy Spirit. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me ...." Any kind of humility that is produced by our sinful nature plays into the hands of the devil.

The greatest danger is that this false humility disrupts the functioning of the body of Christ. If we see ourselves as members of the body and we understand the place we occupy in it, we will be protected from all kinds of dangers. True humility makes us function as members of Christ's body.

Paul's reasoning is logical. If it is impossible for us to live in direct communion with the Lord and if we need all kinds of middlemen in order to get through to Him, we are members of a body which is not connected with the head. And this means that we cannot have fellowship with one another as fellow believers.

The image of a body is an illustration Paul loves to use, and we find it several times in his epistles. This emphasis is paramount in chapters Rom. 12:4-8 and I Cor. 12. The body illustration, however, is seen in other letters also, like in Eph. 1:23; 3:16; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23 and in this Colossian letter we find it in 1:18, 24; 2:19 and 3:15).

The third admonition, in vs. 20, says: "Do not submit to its rules." We say again that this does not pertain to our moral conduct but to a series of rituals which were fulfilled in the death of Christ. Paul gives three reasons for his advice:

- 1- Our identification with the death of Christ,
- 2- Our new relationship with "the basic principles of this world," and
- 3- The fact that actually we no longer live in this world.

#### 1- Our identification with the death of Christ

This principle was foreshadowed in the laying on of hands which preceded the killing of the sacrificial animal. We read in Lev. 1:4 and other verses: "He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him." This gesture symbolizes substitution. The person who brought the sacrifice indicated that what happened to the animal should actually happen to him. In a sense it was the man who died. The death of our Lord Jesus on the cross makes this much more real for us. As in the case that a sacrificial animal was used, so is our identification with Christ in His death. The identification requires an act of the will from the person who brings the sacrifice. As far as God is concerned, we are all crucified with Christ. But unless we accept this personally, we do not experience the consequences of it. We lay our hand upon Christ to indicate that we have been crucified with Him.

#### 2- Our new relationship with "the basic principles of this world"

The clause "Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world" is not very clear. The RSV is even more obscure, saying: "If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe." The KJV comes close to the NIV with: "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world." We have to see what the Greek says and how that should be interpreted. The word is "stoicheion." Paul uses this word also in Gal. 3:3: "So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world." There our being subjected to the basic principles of the world is linked to spiritual immaturity. It seems that we do have to think in terms of

demonic powers, as the RSV indicates, territorial demonic powers that influence man's thinking and behavior for certain periods of time. In Eph.2:1,2 we see clearly that there is a connection between the acts of men and demonic influences. Paul says there: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, In which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." Even in modern times we speak about "the spirit of the age."

What seems strange is that Paul puts the keeping of the ceremonial law in this category. The tradition of the ceremonial law was good and holy, but the devil used this to harden the hearts of men by robbing the tradition of its content. Jesus describes the Pharisees in that way in the parable of the sower as the seed that fell along the path and was picked up by the birds.

Without the working of the Holy Spirit tradition becomes a weapon in the hand of the enemy. The devil always tries to draw the attention of man upon himself. Eccentric and egoistic people are an easy prey for him, especially if they are religious. But, being crucified with Christ, means that our ego has been nailed to the cross and this robs the devil of his handle on us.

Man is a most complicated creature and it is very easy to deceive oneself. The most important prayer we can utter in this respect is David's prayer in Ps. 139:23,24 - "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

But Paul does not only deal with the ceremonial law in these verses, because he mentions "human commands and teachings." That phrase cannot be applied to the law. We have to think about the Talmud and the Mishna, in which the law was interpreted, sometimes, into the most ridiculous details. Jesus reacts to this kind of interpretation when He chides the Pharisees and scribes in Matt. 23. The Bible propagates nowhere "harsh treatment of the body." It remains true that Jesus, as the Lamb of God, fulfilled the whole of the ceremonial law. In that respect have the Talmud and the Mishnah lost their value.

### 3. We live no longer in this world.

In vs. 20 Paul had already made mention of this. It is obvious that these words cannot be taken in a literal and physical sense. Of course, we live in this world and we are part of it. In John 17:11, 14 and 16 Jesus makes clear what our position in this world is. We read: "I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name; the name you gave me; so that they may be one as we are one. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it." The meaning of this is that we do no longer belong to the system that opposes God at the instigation of the Evil One. We are born in this world and we grow up in it, but since our identification with the death and resurrection of Christ we are free of the power that dominates this world. And inasmuch as we live in this world, we are here as representatives of the Kingdom of God.

Paul wants us to be aware of this fact and to draw the practical consequences in our daily life. Our thinking should be dominated by the heavenly glory as it is manifested in Christ. One of the greatest helps for me in this respect is John's description of his encounter with the risen and glorified Lord in Rev. 1:12-20. This glory will be ours when we shall appear with Him and others will be amazed about this glory which will shine through us. Paul says in II Thess. 1:10: "On the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you."

It is good to ponder these things. It will protect us from much misery on earth. The devil's propaganda can be so overwhelming, so that sometimes it seems as if there are only cancer patients and starved children in this world. We should be deeply moved by the suffering in this world, but this should not lead us to lose sight of the glory. When Paul says: "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things," he doesn't mean that we should be immune to the suffering of others but that we should not let ourselves be led astray by hairsplitting over interpretations of laws and precepts that have been erased by the blood of Christ.

We are dead as far as the world goes and our life is now hidden with Christ in God. Nobody can touch us.

Phrases like "set your hearts on things above," and "set your minds on things above," indicate that life in the heavenlies does not automatically become part of us. We have to reach for it in faith. Heavenly realities are invisible to us. We put ourselves, in faith, upon the basis of having died with Christ and of being raised with Him. Thus the heavenly things become accessible to our spirit.

**3:1-17**

*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.*

*Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*

*For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*

*When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

*Put to death, Therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

*Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.*

*You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.*

*But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.*

*Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices*

*And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

*Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.*

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

*Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

*And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*

In the remainder of this epistle Paul gives some very practical advise regarding our life as Christians on earth.

1. 3:5-8 regarding personal sanctification.
2. 3:9-17 mainly regarding relationships within the church.
3. 3:18-21 addresses relationships within the family.
4. 3:22-4:1 pertains to the relationship between master and servant.
5. 4:2-4 is a request for intercessory prayer.
6. 4:5-6 gives advise regarding relations with unbelievers and
7. 4:7-18 contains personal notes and greetings.

**1. Personal sanctification. 3:5-8.**

As we read these verses again, it becomes clear how important our own initiative is in the matter of sanctification. God does not do for us what we should do for ourselves. We will not automatically be promoted to perfect sainthood; sanctification is a process in which we participate and in which we grow. It is also not so that, when we surrender to the Lord, the devil will withdraw politely and sin will fade away by itself.

Jesus defeated the foe for us, and He included us in it when He provided for the purification of sin. But there are other victories which we will have to gain over ourselves and those are the most difficult ones. He who conquers himself is stronger than he who conquers a city.

That is why Paul declared before that we should "Set our minds on things above, not on earthly things." Our vision of glory will determine what we do with our earthly urges and lusts. D.L. Moody once used the beautiful image of a baby who played with a pair of scissors. He dropped the scissors when his sister held up an orange in front of him. That illustration expresses the essence of our putting to death whatever belongs to our earthly nature.

Every man has impure desires, but not every man commits fornication in the physical sense of the word. Nobody escapes the definition of adultery which Jesus gives in Matt. 5:28: "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."



“Whatever belongs to your human nature” is rendered in the KJV as: “your members which are upon the earth.” This expression suggests that some of our members would be in heaven and some on earth. This cannot be literally true, of course. But the image pictures the essence of that contradictory combination which we humans are. We are destined for God’s glory and at the same time we live in the gutter. It needs no explanation that this cannot continue to be so; we have to remain in either one or the other condition. One of the two will have to be eliminated. Paul’s thought may be based on Jesus’ words in Matt. 5:27-30: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” Here too, it is obvious that Jesus does not advocate amputation of members of our body, but He shows how radical we ought to be in our rejection of sin.

Both Paul and Jesus say those things in connection with sexual sins. This does not mean that there are no other sins, or that sexual sin is the greatest sin. In fact, I take sexual sin to be a lesser one. But because almost every man has sexual desires, sins in this realm form the easiest port of entrance for the enemy. If we can reclaim our sexuality from the power of the enemy and bring it under the dominion of God, we have denied Satan an important bridgehead in our life.

Sex within the bond of marriage, accompanied by love and a sense of responsibility, surrender, and obedience is an expression of the most intimate relationship of man with God. Paul calls the becoming “one flesh” the profound mystery of Christ and the church. In Eph. 5:31,32 he says: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery; but I am talking about Christ and the church.” If we go wrong in our sexual life, we make a parody of the most holy and intimate relationship that exists: the love between God and us.

Sin almost always enters our life via the eye. That is how it began. Gen. 3:6 tells us: “The woman saw ... took ... and ate.” Job teaches us an important lesson when he says: “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl” (Job 31:1).

“Put to death,” “gouge it out,” and “cut it off” belong to the same category of admonition. We cannot trust ourselves, and consequently we have to be radical in the measures we take against ourselves. It is not sufficient to make promises to ourselves not to commit certain sins. It is not even enough to make those promises to God. Only if we confess before God what we are, and if we put our trust in Him to change us, will we be delivered from impurity, desire, and passions of the wrong kind. Only God, the Holy Spirit, can protect us from the wrath of God. Faith and unbelief, willingness and unwillingness will keep on battling within us, but the Lord can make us share in His victory.

## **2. Relationships within the church. 3:9-17**

Changes in our relationships begin with the recognition of the fact that we are no longer what we were. We have taken off our old self with its practices and have put on the new self. It is our responsibility to be renewed constantly in His image.

There may still be “anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips,” If this occurs in our relationship with others, we must confess it as guilt. Those things do not just go away by themselves. To have to go to a fellow human being and to ask for forgiveness is a very humiliating experience. This feeling of shame is salutary. It will help us not to fall into the same trap again.

Our greatest help will be, though, when we see that God is in the process of renewing His image in us. Jesus was serious when He said that He would build His church. He straightens our warped desires and purifies us inwardly and brings us into a relationship in which we are being healed and we can then become healers.

The first thing that must disappear in our new relationship with others is lying. We may ask ourselves if this piece of advice is really necessary. We may suppose that we may have to tell this to people in churches in Asia, but we do need to admonish Christians who belong to a Western culture? The answer is of course, Yes! In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the father Polonius says to his son Leartes: “This above all, to thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.”

The problem starts on a higher level. We can only be true to our “own self” if we are true to God. Lying to others always indicates self-deception, and that self-deception means that the Spirit of truth is not in us. If we lie before God, we devalue our words, that devaluation is nothing less than lying. It is in our speaking that we show how true we are. The more genuine we become the more our words will resemble the Word of God. Truth is the most essential part of the renewal of God’s image in us.

Another vital evidence of our inner renewal is the disappearance of discrimination in our thinking about and in our conduct toward other people who belong to a different race, culture, class, or caste than ours; because we see them as bearers of God's image. In the context of the text this pertains to fellow believers, fellow members of the body of Christ, fellow Christians are people who have been washed from their sins by the same blood as we were.

It becomes so much easier for us to behave as Christians if we realize what we have become in Christ. Much of our deceit and finagling is a defense against our feeling of inferiority. The realization that God loves us, that He has sanctified us and chosen us, allows us to be compassionate toward others: to be kind, humble, gentle, and patient. Each of those words that Paul uses in vs. 12 is worth a separate study.

When Paul says in vs. 13, "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you," he doesn't mean to say that we would necessarily be ahead of other in spiritual things. Our being forbearing and forgiving is no proof of superiority. To the contrary, we can only bear with others and forgive others if we realize that God bears with us and has forgiven us. I ought to say that if the Lord has forgiven me that much, the least I can do is to forgive others their faults. Jesus illustrates this in the parable, in Matt. 18:23-35, of the slave who received forgiveness himself, but did not want to forgive others.

The fact that we must continue bear with each other implies that no one on earth reaches perfection. Gal. 6:2 says: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Literally the text says: "Bear each other's difficulties," in the sense of idiosyncrasies that irritate. If we can see ourselves as irritating people who sometimes get on other people's nerves, we ought to be able to bear the irritations of others. After all, we are all in the middle of the process of renewal and rehabilitation. God is not finished with any of us. Jesus emphasizes this in a unique way in Matt. 7:3-5 where He uses the image of the speck and the plank. We read: "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." Note that He calls those who see the speck but not the plank "hypocrites." The Holy Spirit judges us very sharply for the faults in ourselves to which we are so blind!

For the second time Paul uses the expression "put on," as if it pertains to a piece of clothing we wear. In a sense the image is very fitting. In our nakedness we are vulgar, dirty people. That is the way in which Adam and Eve saw themselves (and each other?!) after their first sin. We read in Gen. 3:7 that their eyes were opened and they saw themselves as naked. But in vs.21 we read: "The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them." God covers us, but He does not cover up our sins. The cover He gives to us is only the beginning of our rehabilitation; the process of purification takes place under the cover of the new man and of the banner of love. As we start to love, that love develops roots in our heart also.

In vs. 15 Paul says the same things that he says in Phil. 4:6,7; the peace of Christ in our hearts and gratitude are mentioned. In the Philippian epistle it is called "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding." Paul speaks there from personal experience. In the letter to the Colossians, peace is presented as the result of the church's healthy functioning as the body of Christ. Peace and harmony among members of the body is one of the goals of God's calling. The *ekklesia*, "the called-out ones," come from the confusion and darkness of this world to the peace of Christ.

Paul finishes this statement with the exhortation: "Be thankful." The sin that ultimately caused the fall of the people of Israel in the desert was ingratitude. In Num. 16:13 the people said: "Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert?" The suggestion is that God had led them into the desert with the purpose of killing them. There was no realization that they had been redeemed from their enemies who had wanted to kill them and that God kept them alive in the desert in a supernatural way.

A lack of gratitude comes from shortsightedness. For us who are on earth it is sometimes hard to understand why God does certain things in a certain way. It seems that God could have avoided problems and traumatic events, such as, the massacre of infants at Bethlehem. In Ps.103:7 we read: "He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel." It was not given to the people to understand His ways; they only saw His deeds.

Ps. 138:5 says about the kings of the earth: "May they sing of the ways of the LORD, for the glory of the LORD is great." This presupposes that they would have insight in the "why" of God's acts; not that

they will only admit that God did everything in the most efficient and effective way, but also that the way God acts is part of His glory.

Ps. 25:10 declares: "All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant."

Ps. 77:13 - "Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God?"

Ps. 145:17 - "The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made."

The apostle Paul concludes in pure worship as he speaks about the ways of the Lord. In Rom. 11:33 he says: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" If we acquire this kind of insight we will have no problem with gratitude.

A practical help which is of vital importance in the overall functioning of our spirituality is found in vs. 16. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." The primary meaning of this is probably that we should be full of the message of the Gospel. The facts of salvation: the incarnation, the crucifixion, the death and resurrection should be constantly and vividly before us. We must determine that we want to fully understand the words Christ has spoken and that we commit some of them to memory. Some part of the Gospel of John lend themselves very well to this method. In John 14-17 Jesus Himself stresses the importance of His words. Some examples are John 15:3,7; 17:14; 14:10,15,21,23,24,26.

The word of Christ makes us wise men who can teach and correct others. Paul indicates that a process is taking place in this respect. There is an exchange; we are all on the giving end and on the receiving end. We admonish others and we are being admonished by other. No one owns the whole truth; therefore we are to admonish one another.

This makes us praising people. Paul recommends praise, not in the first place as an outward demonstration, but as an inner one, from our heart toward God. It cannot be helped, of course, if the mouth overflows from a the heart that is full. But very often outward demonstrations are a cover up for inner emptiness. People who habitually say, "Praise the Lord" are often more bent on convincing themselves than on praising the Lord. All this does not exclude a praising of God in fellowship with one another, but Paul's admonishment will help us to avoid the traps.

The Word of Christ will make us witnesses of Christ who are conscientious and full of gratitude. If everything we do is done in the Name of Christ, we live in this world as His representatives. This is the result of Jesus' command in John 20:21, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

I am trying to imagine how obedience to this command would influence my acts and attitudes in this world. There is much in my conduct that strives to keep outside of this mandate. Speaking and working, the words I say and the deeds I do, are all included in this command. The realization of this makes me more and more aware of the fact that if I live like this, the Lord will have to live His life through me.

### **3:18-21**

***"Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.***

***Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.***

***Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.***

***Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."***

### **3. Relationships in the family 3:18-21.**

In these verses Paul addresses the women as wives of their husbands and the men as marriage partners and in their relationship as fathers to the children.

#### **a. The submission of wives to their husbands**

This kind of admonition we find also in the other apostolic epistles, like Eph. 5:22 and I Pet. 3:1. Peter's argument is that submission may be a way to draw an unbelieving husband to the Lord. Paul penetrates the core of the matter in Eph. 5:22-33 by showing that marriage is a shadow, a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. Relationships in marriage should correspond to the relationship of the church with Christ. This means that obedience and authority should be of the same kind as in the reality which is being portrayed.

In modern times the admonition for wives to submit to their husbands sounds archaic and irrelevant. Emancipation of women is an established fact, and it has generally been accepted. We will not try to prove that this emancipation is the result of the preaching of the Gospel, although that is true. I believe that most of the verses in which submission is preached indicate that the emancipation of women in the first century because of the Gospel went so fast that the surrounding cultures could not keep up with it, and for that reason the testimony of the Gospel suffered. It was so that pagan and Jewish outsiders would not be shooed away that women were asked to remain silent and to retreat to the background

There is no indication in the Bible that a woman would be inferior to man. In the Old Testament five women are designated as prophetesses. (Miriam, Deborah, Hulda and Naodia [the woman who opposed Nehemiah] and Isaiah's wife). In the New Testament are Anna and the four daughters of Philip in Acts 21:9. Prophecy uttered by women was generally accepted in the New Testament church (See I Cor. 11:5). And that in Christ all differences between sexes and classes are wiped out is clear from Gal. 3:28 where Paul says: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Therefore, the submission of a wife to her husband as head of the home has nothing to do with male superiority because a man is not above a woman. It is also not because a man is more intelligent than a woman, since in some cases the opposite is true. The reason for the submission is to give expression to the reality of the relationship of Christ to the church. In this respect do many women fulfill their roles better than the men. It has to be admitted that it is easier to give expression to the role the church plays than to the role of Christ. It is easier to give oneself soul and body than to love another and sacrifice oneself for that person, as Christ did for us. That is one reason that often women are better representatives of Christ than men are. If they learn to give themselves to their husbands, obedience to Christ becomes easier also. The opposite is also true.

On the other hand it will be easier for a woman to submit if her husband fulfills the role of Christ well. It is not too difficult to submit to one who shows in every respect that he is willing to protect her with his own life. If we consider the situation in which we live in this world and if we are aware of the condition of our own heart, it is not amazing that the role both partner are supposed to play is played so poorly.

#### b. Men and the love for their wives

I have often wondered why Paul directs the admonition to love only to the men, as if love would not be a requirement for women. I believe that Paul takes it for granted that love comes more naturally to a woman than to a man. This is an unspoken compliment for the women. The advice "do not be harsh with them," is also not very flattering for the men. Paul knows his people.

In Eph. 5:25-33 the exhortation is more elaborate and penetrating. The man has to keep the image of Christ before his eyes continuously in his relationship with his wife, and he has to endeavor to express in his words and deeds towards his wife what Christ has done for both of them. In a certain sense, this goal is as unreachable as the stars. But, if it is true that marriages are made in heaven, they have to be lived in heaven too. Without the help of the Holy Spirit, there is no guarantee that a marriage will not end up in a shipwreck.

In I Pet. 3:7 Peter says more or less the same as Paul. He calls the woman the "weaker partner" (KJV - "weaker vessel"). Peter also puts man and woman on the same level because they both receive the same heritage. A unique remark Peter makes is about the man's prayers being hindered. What he is actually saying is that relationships in our marriage affect our relationship with God. The opposite is true also. If there is love for God, there will also be loving and honoring of one another in the marriage.

In vs. 21 Paul gives the same challenge as in Eph. 6:4, using two verbs with the same admonition: "embitter" and "exasperate." The Holy Spirit gave the apostle a deep psychological insight. It is true that fathers should demand obedience of their children, but this ought to be done in a reasonable and constructive way. We have the duty to educate our children, not to train them as we do an animal. Our children are bearers of God's image, just as we are, and as such they have the right to express their personality. To demand absolute obedience with the intent to "break their will" amounts to ungodly tyranny. Our children should be able to discern in us the love and authority of Jesus Christ, so that they will be able to submit to the real authority when they grow up. After all, a father's authority is derived from the authority of Christ.

J.B. Phillips gives an interesting paraphrase of this verse: "Don't overcorrect your children." It is amazing to see how many educators act out of fear that they will not be able to keep the situation in hand. I remember the screaming of teachers in the elementary school I attended as a kid. They tried to create an atmosphere of fear because they were afraid that they would not be able to maintain order.

#### 4. The relationship between employer and employee. 3:22 - 4:1

*"Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, Since you know that you will receive an inheritance*

***from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism. Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven."***

Our present social relations are very different from those in Paul's time, but this doesn't mean that these verses are irrelevant to us. Paul was not trying to change the existing structure of the society of his time. We read nowhere that he disapproved or approved of slavery. If we reproach him for this lack of moral insight, we have lost sight of all historical perspective.

It needs no argument that slavery was never ordained by God as marriage and family were. Slavery was a problem of enormous proportions, and we can hardly blame Paul for the fact that, from his perspective, he was unable to look over the mountain in front of him.

We do better to realize that Paul's advice contains the seed that would lead about eighteen centuries later to the abolition of slavery. But there are some clear spiritual and practical lessons which we can apply directly to our time.

a. There are more important things in life than social injustice.

This is not meant to be a fiat for slavery or any other form of injustice. But Paul puts the importance of the Kingdom of Heaven and the preaching of the Gospel above the problems of society. There came a time, however, both in Europe and America, when maintaining slavery became a hindrance to the preaching of the Gospel. In Paul's time the opposite was true. Abolition of slavery would have hindered the spreading of the Gospel.

b. Slavery does not diminish the worth of a human being in the eyes of God.

As the apostle says in I Cor. 7:22 "For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave." In Paul's days there were masters who were slaves and slaves who were free. We should make a difference between the seed and the peeling of the fruit.

c. There is a relationship between obedience to man and obedience to God.

Slavery was, in a sense, a paradoxical expression of the obedience a man owes to God. Because slavery in the human society is usually accompanied by injustice, it is rather difficult to see the image and its meaning. In our relationship with God, there is no question about injustice. There were situations in biblical times in which slavery was not synonymous with injustice, as when a man sold himself to pay off his debts. In Ex 21:5,6 we even read that it is possible for the slave to say: "I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free"; therefore he would become a bond slave who served out of love.

The principle Paul expounds in these verses is that our work ethics are based on our relationship with God. If we love God we will obey Him and if we obey God we will submit ourselves to human authority. If our obedience is based on fear of men, then we are indeed poor creatures. But if we obey because of love for God, we are free men inwardly. A shining example of this is in the life of Joseph who served Potiphar and the jailer because he had surrendered his life to God. His testimony has spoken clearly throughout the centuries.

I Cor. 7:21 indicates that Paul does not favor a defeatist attitude. He urges slaves to become free men if they have a chance. The main thing is that we serve the Lord in everything we do. Paul considered himself to be a servant or slave of Christ and a "prisoner of Christ Jesus" (See Phil. 1:1; Tit. 1:1; Philemon vs.1). I remember complaining about the monotony of the work I had to do at one of the large banks in Amsterdam. The Lord dealt with me by asking if I thought that He would trust me with tasks in the Kingdom of Heaven if He couldn't trust me with simple additions of figures.

In the parable of the talents, the Master of the slaves says: "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matt. 25:21). And in Luke 16:10-12 Jesus adds: "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"

The recompense, but also the punishment for injustice committed, is contained in the admonitions to the slaves, not in those to the masters. A slave who cheats his master is just as much a thief as a master who mistreats his slave. God looks upon us as men, not as masters and slaves.

Also, the masters should not lose sight of the fact that they are not the highest authorities. Any authority one man has over another is delegated authority, and it is temporary. Anybody who exercises authority will have to give account. If we keep this in mind it will keep us from corruption.

#### 4:2-4

***Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.***

#### 5. A request for intercessory prayer.

The request for intercession is part of a general call to prayer. Three things are important in connection with prayer:

- a. perseverance,
- b. watchfulness and
- c. thankfulness.

a. Perseverance, which is implied in the word "devote yourselves," insinuates the weakness of our human nature which tends to give up before the project is finished. The people of the Ekagi tribe in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, would start making a dug-out canoe by felling a tree, and the owner would come back every day till it was done. The greatest hindrance in prayer is lack of perseverance. We often do not continue to pray till we receive an answer. People who pray should give themselves with perseverance to their work, and prayer is work!

b. Watchfulness relates to danger that threaten us from the outside. The devil will try to hinder answers to prayer and, if possible, he will hinder prayer itself. Our eyes should be open to this danger so that the enemy will not be able to ambush us.

c. Gratitude or thankfulness sets the tone for prayer. We know that the Lord doesn't do anything without reason. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose," says Paul in Rom 8:28. Gratitude recognizes that difficult circumstances have a place in God's plan. Prayer without thankfulness shows a lack of sense of reality, and without being realistic we cannot make intercession.

Seen from a human viewpoint, Paul finds himself in an impossible and undesirable situation as he writes this epistle. It would have been more logical had Paul asked his reader to pray for his deliverance from prison. But Paul mentions his imprisonment only in passing. He is more concerned about the fact that his imprisonment might limit his ability to lead people to Christ. He also knows that in order to lead people to the Lord intercession is indispensable. In the same way as a military operation on the ground has to be covered by planes in the air flying above the troops, so witnessing is dependent upon intercession. Paul's request for prayer indicates that he understands the purpose of God's plan in his present circumstances. He expects an open door for his testimony, (a humorous metaphor for someone who is in prison). He must have found a rich harvest field among the soldiers who watched over him and probably also among his fellow prisoners. His imprisonment did not interrupt his ministry; his imprisonment was his ministry.

#### 4:5-6

***Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.***

#### 6. Advice regarding our relationship to people outside. 4:5,6

The apostle mentions four characteristics which should make our witness to non-believers attractive.

- a. Wisdom
- b. Pragmatism
- c. Wittiness
- d. Propriety

All of this sounds easier than it is. It should also be clear that the factors Paul mentions are human factors which can be used as helps to lead other to the Lord. They do not assure success. The

conversion of people is the work of the Holy Spirit and not the result of our sharpness of mind or our sense of humor. Many conversions are brought about in spite of our lack of the healthy attributes Paul mentions. But this doesn't mean that we should not reach for the things Paul recommends.

a. Wisdom in the Bible begins with the fear of the Lord.

Prov. 1:7 says: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline." If we live in fellowship with God, we will learn to apply knowledge to our practical every day life. God will give us wisdom and insight and knowledge for the purpose of leading others to Jesus. This is both the beginning as well as the essence of wisdom.

b. Pragmatism

"Make the most of every opportunity." The KJV translates this with "redeeming the time." The expression is borrowed from the market place. It means buying when the price is right. We have to look for opportunities, but we also have to watch for the opportunities God opens up for us. The image Paul paints for us is of someone going to the market to look for a bargain.

c. Wittiness.

We are expected to have a sense of humor. The word used here is related to the word for "grace." Our speech should be as sparkling and refreshing as the grace of God. "Seasoned with salt" is an interesting translation which may bother people with high blood pressure and those who have to follow a low salt diet. The intent is that we keep the attention of the people we talk to, because what we say is palatable.

d. Propriety.

We have to answer people's questions. Jesus did not dismiss the questions of the Samaritan woman. Her question regarding the proper place of worship was probably a maneuver to evade Jesus' penetrating statements. But Jesus gave her an answer which has enriched eternity. (See John 4:19-24). We cannot be too serious about our conversations with others who do not know the Lord.

## **Conclusion.**

**4:7-18**

***"Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.***

***I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.***

***He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.***

***My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)***

***Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me.***

***Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.***

***I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.***

***Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings.***

***Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.***

***After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.***

***Tell Archippus: 'See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord.'***

***I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you."***

In these last verses Paul mentions some names of co-workers. We should have a closer look at these people. There are Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus-Justus, Epaphras, Luke, Demas, Nympha and Archippus - a total of ten.

Three times Paul assures the church that the person who brings this letter will tell them orally what his present condition is. There is a possibility of government censorship for letters written by prisoners and that Paul had to be careful what he wrote.

The first mentioned is Tychicus. He accompanies Paul during his trip from Greece to Jerusalem, according to Acts 20:4. Paul calls him here "a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the

Lord." According to Luke, he originated from Asia, probably Ephesus. We do not read if he had been involved in the planting of the church in Colosse. As we saw already, Paul mentions Epaphras as the original planter of the church. (See 1:7). We further meet Tychicus in Eph. 6:21; II Tim. 4:12, and Titus 3:12.

We know Onesimus from the epistle to Philemon, whose slave he was. He originated from Colosse as is evident from the phrase "who is one of you" in vs. 9. We conclude from this that this letter to the Colossians was written after the one to Philemon and that Philemon acted favorably on Paul's request to free Onesimus. It was up to Tychicus and Onesimus together to inform the church of Paul's circumstances in prison. In Eph. 6:21 Paul describes in almost the same words Tychicus' task. This is another reason for me to presume that the Ephesian epistle was actually the one written to Laodicea.

The next person we meet is Aristarchus. His sending greeting to the church implies that he is known to the church. We meet him for the first time in Paul's company in Ephesus. In Acts. 19:29 he is mentioned as one of Paul's traveling companions. In Acts 27:2 Luke calls him "a Macedonian from Thessalonica." During the uproar in Ephesus he was, together with Gaius, beaten up by the crowd. At that point Paul had not been to Thessalonica, yet and we get the impression that the fact that Aristarchus was a member of Paul's team has a lot to do with the planting of the church in Thessalonica. He, supposedly, accompanied Paul on his trip to Jerusalem, according to Acts. 20:4 and after that on the journey to Rome, according to Acts. 27:2. Whether he was imprisoned with Paul in Jerusalem we don't know. But in Col. 4:10 Paul calls him "my fellow prisoner." The above seems to indicate that it was during Paul's imprisonment in Rome that this epistle was sent.

Mark was not one of Paul's fellow prisoners, but he was one of the members of Paul's team. He is, of course, best known as the writer of the second Gospel. In the early stages of the Christian church, he witnessed the growth of the Gospel in the church which gathered in his mother's home. In Acts 12:12 and 25 his name is given as John Mark. He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their return to Antioch after those two had handed over an offering to the church in Jerusalem, which had been taken on the basis of Agabus' prophecy about the coming famine. He made his first missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas, and he became after that the cause of the separation between Paul and Barnabas, according to Acts 15:27-39. The fact that we find him again in Paul's company after so many years is probably material for an interesting biography. We meet him also in II Tim. 4:11; Philemon vs. 24 and I Pet. 5:13. Peter calls him "my son Mark." Probably, Mark joined Peter after the death of Paul. Here, in Col. 1:10 we read that Mark was the cousin of Barnabas. So it could be that the Mary in Acts 12:12 was Barnabas' sister. All this throws some interesting light on the things that happened in the relationship between Paul and Barnabas.

About Jesus Justus we don't read anything else in the Bible. He was, together with Paul and Mark, the only Jew on the team. Paul calls the whole group "fellow workers for the kingdom of God." As far as the world was concerned, these prisoners of the Roman Empire with their adherents, were totally insignificant. Yet, they were the ambassadors of the highest authority in the universe. They were of enormous comfort to Paul. This little sentence in vs. 11 gives us a little glimpse of the misery of the life of a prisoner. Paul needed human warmth and encouragement to make his suffering bearable.

Epaphras was the original messenger of the Gospel in Colosse, according to ch. 1:7. From 4:12 we understand that he originated from Colosse. His intercession for this church was just as intense as Paul's. It is even possible that Paul's intercession was inspired by Epaphras'. In Philemon vs.23 we read that he had been imprisoned together with Paul. We may suppose that, here also, he was in prison with Paul. Probably three members of the team were incarcerated: Paul, Aristarchus, and Epaphras. Epaphras did not limit his evangelizing to Colosse alone. He had also worked in Laodicea and Hierapolis. Probably those churches, also, were the fruit of his labor.

Luke and Demas are the last ones on the list. Luke is mentioned three times in the New Testament (Col. 4:14; II Tim. 4:11 and Phil. 1:24). In the book of Acts, Luke never mentions his own name. Evidently, he joined Paul's company in Acts 16:10. From that moment, he starts to use the word "we." He must have remained faithful to Paul till the very end because we find him still in II Tim. 4:11, shortly before Paul's execution. As a medical man he probably functioned as Paul's personal physician. The world owes a lot to this modest Greek.

Demas is mentioned twice with Luke in the same verse. In II Tim. 4:10 we read, however, that he deserted Paul "because he loved this world." Pressure became too much for him and he quit. What happened and whether he lost his faith, we are not told. This desertion must have hurt Paul deeply; his heartache is evident from his urgent request to Timothy in II Tim. 4:10 to come as soon as possible.



The name Nympha is only found in vs. 15. Archippus is mentioned again in Philemon vs. 2. We could suppose that Nympha was Archippus' wife since Paul speaks about a church that meets at their home. It could be that Nympha is the same person as Apphia in Philemon vs. 2. If we suppose that the epistle to the Colossians was written after the one to Philemon, Archippus must have backslid spiritually in the meantime; hence, Paul's admonition to him in vs. 17. He was probably the pastor of the church.

A greeting in Paul's own handwriting we also find in I Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; II Thess. 3:17, and Philemon vs. 19. This must have been a substitute for a signature because in each of these verses Paul emphasizes that this is his way of identifying himself. It is possible that there were fraudulent letters in circulation.

Again, Paul make mention of his imprisonment and, just as in ch. 4:3, he asks for prayer. This short remark makes us understand how much Paul must have suffered.

The epistle concludes with the greeting with which it started. "Grace" (*charis*). In conclusion, we can say that this epistle gives a sublime exposition of what kind of life a man has to live who has been rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son God loves. This is the way we ought to live, and this is the way we ought to pray for each other.

## EPHESIANS

It is a good thing to first study Philippians and then Colossians before tackling Ephesians. Since Ephesians is considered the summit of Paul's writings, if not of the whole of the New Testament, we are wise not to start at the summit. In these three letters Paul reaches the pinnacle of spirituality. There are many parallels in the history of the fine arts, of men who, at the end of their lives created masterpieces that have stood the tests of the ages. Mozart's last three symphonies, Beethoven's last piano sonata and string quartets, to list just a few. In these three epistles the Holy Spirit is present in a way in which He is not involved in monuments of human achievement on another level. We could not place Mozart's or Bach's music in the Canon of Scripture, no matter how much spiritual value their works may have.

### TO WHOM WAS THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS WRITTEN?

The question seems superfluous. The answer, however, is not "to the Ephesians of course!" In most manuscripts, the words "in Ephesus" in 1:1 is lacking. In most versions it is in parentheses. Some expositors suppose that we may have here the epistle to the Laodiceans, which Paul mentions in Colossians: "After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea."<sup>132</sup> I agree with this hypothesis.

There are several instances of resemblance between the Colossians epistle and the one to the Ephesians. This resemblance suggests that Paul wrote the two at the same time. It would be strange, however, that Paul, who spent about three years total in Ephesus, would say that he had "heard of their faith," whereas, he witnessed most of it himself.

He arrived for the first time at Ephesus in Act 18:19- "They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews." But according to Acts, when he returned for the second time, he spent most of his time in the hall of Tyrannus and taught the disciples for two years. We read: "But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord."<sup>133</sup> And when Paul says farewell to the church leaders, he says to them: "So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears."<sup>134</sup> In the Ephesian epistle he says almost literally the same as in Colossians: "Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing."<sup>135</sup> And in Colossians: "Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord."<sup>136</sup>

It would also seem strange that the epistle to the Laodiceans would not be preserved in the Canon of inspired Scriptures. Or would we believe that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul when he wrote to Colosse and not when he wrote to Laodicea? There is no definite proof of all this, but it is very plausible, and we will treat this epistle as the one written to Laodicea.

The church in Laodicea is further only mentioned in the book of Revelations as one of the seven churches to which the prophecy is given. In Rev 3:14-16 we read: "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm; neither hot nor cold; I am about to spit you out of my mouth." After Paul's departure for heaven not much of the glory of this epistle, that must have shone upon and from the church at Laodicea, seems to be left. The second and third generation Christians there had lost touch with the reality of the risen and glorified Savior of which this epistle is so full.

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<sup>132</sup> Col. 4:16

<sup>133</sup> Acts 19:9,10

<sup>134</sup> Acts 20:31

<sup>135</sup> Eph 6:21

<sup>136</sup> Col. 4:7

## ANALYSIS:

## CHAPTER ONE

## 1:1-14

*Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:*

*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*

*For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will -- to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment-- to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.*

The beginning of the epistle is almost identical to the opening verses of Colossians. Timothy is omitted in this letter and the words "from our Lord Jesus Christ" are added to the greeting. There are no new observations to be made. So let us enter into the main body of the epistle.

Verse 3-14: In Greek these verses form one whole uninterrupted sentence. I do not know if there is any parallel in world literature, maybe in length, but certainly not in content. It is hard to read these words and not get lost. It seems almost irresponsible of the Apostle to pour such a current of thought and riches upon people, whom he has never met in person. This is no sentence to be read hastily, but it needs to be studied and analyzed.

Vs. 3- "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." The three words that stand out in Verse 1 are "praise," "blessing," and "blessed." The rest of the verses analyze the content of the spiritual blessings. We have to realize though that the first thing mentioned is praise to God. The words "praise, blessing and blessed" are all related. "Praise be" (*eulogetos*), "blessed" (*eulogesas*), "blessings" (*eulogia*).

First of all, we should praise God for what He has done for us. It is through our experience of forgiveness, salvation, and healing that we come to praise Him. It would be impossible for us to worship God in reality, if we had not felt in our own lives the impact of His being. It is the affinity between Him and us that makes praise well up out of our hearts. An unconverted person has no idea Who God is and sees no reason for praise. Jesus says: "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."<sup>137</sup> It dawns anew upon me what an awesome task it is to enter this epistle and to try to understand its content. Charles Erdman in his commentary on Ephesians says: "If the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians is rightly celebrated as Paul's 'Hymn of Love,' this opening thanksgiving in the Epistle to the Ephesians may properly be designated as Paul's 'Hymn of Praise.'" The grace that is given to us is not secondary in these verses, but the full emphasis of the text is upon "praise." The KJV makes the unity of words clearer: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." The intent is that we bless God because He has blessed us.

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<sup>137</sup> John 3:3

The question is how can a man bless God? The NIV obviously circumvents the problem by translating the word with "praise be," but that does not solve the problem. Also the writer to the Hebrews says that the lesser is blessed by the greater. We read in Hebrews: "And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater."<sup>138</sup> The fact that Paul purposely chooses these words shows that he wants to draw us to a height that is far beyond our common human experience. If we, as creatures, can bless our Creator, that presupposes at least some equality with Him. And that turns out to be the purpose of God's grace to fill us with His glory, with His holiness, and with Himself. Eph. 1:3-14 is more than a hymn of praise. But I do not know what to call it. God's blessing elevates us to priesthood, in the exercise of which we do not only bless man with what we have received, but first of all God Himself.

Obviously we have nothing in ourselves with which to bless God. The only blessing we have is the one we have received from Him. Blessing God is similar to the throwing down of our crowns at the foot of the throne.

The second important point in this 3rd verse is that God is addressed as "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." With this appellation Paul indicates the mode of blessing and the essence of our relationship with God. Nothing is given directly to us; everything comes to us through Jesus Christ. This recognition is of vital importance. It sets Christianity apart from Judaism and from all other religions in the world. Outside of Christ there are no blessings for man. In Him all spiritual blessings in the heavens are ours.

The next important point is the indication of the place or the sphere in which these blessings are given: the heavenly realms, or heavenly places (KJV). The Greek says "the heavnlies." Paul uses the term five times in this epistle. Ch. 1:3 - "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." Ch. 1:20 - "Which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms." Ch. 2:6 - "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus." Ch. 3:10 - "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms." Ch 6:12 - "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

As we see, the context is different in every verse. A synopsis of these verses follows:

- a. Our blessings are in the heavnlies,
- b. Christ is in the heavnlies after His resurrection,
- c. Having been raised with Christ, we are in the heavnlies now,
- d. God's wisdom is manifested in the heavnlies through the church,
- e. our warfare is in the heavnlies against demonic powers.

So what is meant by "the heavnlies"? Since it is the place where Christ is seated now at the right hand of God, we conclude that it is the throne of God. Paul states that in Christ Jesus we are at present sitting with Him on God's throne. As we said before, this goes far beyond any human experience we have in this life. But the fact that we will not experience it until we get there, doesn't mean that this is not a reality at present. It is God's reality against which our reality is of little or no importance. In Rev. 3:21 Jesus says: "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne." So Paul speaks from the viewpoint of a conqueror. The victory is not something in the future; it is in the past.

The irony is that, if our theory is correct, both Paul's words and those of Jesus are directed to the same church of Laodicea. The fact that God's reality is in the present tense, does not mean that we cannot blow it. And obviously the church of Laodicea did not celebrate victory in Christ at the time John wrote the book of Revelation. Boasting on our being seated with Christ in the heavnlies can easily deteriorate into thinking that we amount to something in ourselves. There is always the tension between God's reality and our actual experience. The writer to the Hebrews occupies himself with this thought. He shows the importance of Christ's entering the Holy Place, so that we would be pulled towards Him in our daily walk. We read: "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain."<sup>139</sup> In our everyday life we feel the pull of the anchor chain which keeps us in a position of victory.

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<sup>138</sup> Heb 7:7

<sup>139</sup> Heb. 6:19

In this situation, that is in Christ and in the heavenlies all spiritual blessing is poured out upon us. Here again we have very little notion of what is being talked about. Most of the blessing we know is physical and material. Jabez is an example of this type of blessing. We read: "Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, 'Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.' And God granted his request."<sup>140</sup> But this kind of blessing is only a shadow of the real thing. Riches upon earth provide an image of real riches. The streets of Jerusalem are made of gold, and the gates are pearl to express, not that the city is built of that kind of material, but that there are unseen values and realities of which those elements are pictures. Just as a photograph can picture a person of flesh and blood and even describe the mood of the person, it is not the person himself, similarly, earthly riches and values can only point in the direction. Real blessing is not physical well-being or material wealth, or even emotional happiness, it is a spiritual unseen entity, much more real than we can comprehend. It is too big for us to see or handle in our present state; yet, it has a full and decisive impact upon every thing we accomplish in this world. A person in Christ has the real thing, whether he is a rich man or a pauper. That is why slaves can be freer than masters and prisoners than jailers. Poor people can be richer than millionaires. Again we return to the irony of the church in Laodicea. They thought themselves to be rich, but they weren't. The shadow of the picture often blinds our eyes to the light. That is why Jesus says: "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."<sup>141</sup>

The content of "all spiritual blessings" is that we fully share in the nature and glory of God. If sin is defined by Paul as "coming short of the glory of God,"<sup>142</sup> then being blessed means to receive the full measure of this glory. Again we have to say that we are not capable of grasping the full meaning of this, but that doesn't change the reality of our position. As far as our being in Christ is concerned, the half has not yet been told, to quote the Queen of Sheba: "But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard."<sup>143</sup> And we are talking about the real thing.

Starting with vs. 4 through vs. 14 Paul defines the content of "all spiritual blessings." There appear to be five: Vs. 4: God chose us; vs. 5: He predestined us; vs. 7: He redeemed us; vs. 9: He revealed His mystery to us; vs. 13: He marked us with the seal of the Holy Spirit. Actually these verses do not speak so much about the content as of the way the glory of God comes to us.

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." (Vs. 4). We need not discuss Calvin's doctrine of predestination, since "God's choosing" here does not seem to pertain to salvation, as much as to holiness. There is in this verse no trace of God choosing one person to be saved and another, not being chosen, to be lost. Salvation is, of course, the beginning of the process of sanctification. Without salvation there would be no basis for holiness. But the point of importance, I believe, is that Paul doesn't say: "He chose us before the creation of the world," but "He chose us in Him." The object of God's choice is Christ, not individuals outside of Him. Whoever is in Christ is chosen; therefore this leaves the choice to be in Christ or not to be in Christ, to us. The account of Noah in the Old Testament provides an illustration of man's opportunity to choose.<sup>144</sup> Peter tells us that: "He did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness."<sup>145</sup> This would imply that, while building the ark, Noah announced the judgment to come and thus invited his generation to flee it by entering the ark. The ark must have been open to everyone who wanted to enter. Noah surely called for confession of sin and repentance, and salvation was there. In the same way as God chose the ark as a place of salvation, and did not restrict it to Noah and his family, so He chose Christ, who invites "all who are weary and burdened" to come to Him. And the goal is to be holy and blameless in His sight. If we have turned our lives over to Jesus Christ and we are "in Him," there is no reason ever to doubt what God intends to do with our lives. Long before our physical existence, God had His plan for each of us.

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<sup>140</sup> I Chr. 4:10

<sup>141</sup> Rev. 3:17

<sup>142</sup> Rom. 3:23

<sup>143</sup> I Kings 10:7

<sup>144</sup> Gen. ch. 6-8

<sup>145</sup> II Pet. 2:5

He thought of us as holy and blameless. This thought reveals to us the picture God had in mind, when He created man. Paul speaks of course of the church in these verses. But before sin came into the world, there was no distinction between believers and unbelievers. Therefore God's choosing has no bearing upon salvation, but upon the whole of His plan with mankind. He created man to "be holy," that is to be like Him. The Bible gives nowhere a definition of what holiness is, but it equates holiness with glory. In Isaiah we read: "And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."<sup>146</sup>

I believe that the word "holy" stands for the total of God's eternal attributes. If this is true, God chose us, as human beings, to be what He is. Sin came in between, but this did not cancel God's intent for man. It does mean that some will never become what they were meant to be because they chose darkness instead of light, death instead of life. But that does not mean that God changes His mind toward man. To interpret this verse to mean that God determined before creation that some would be saved and others would not, misses the point completely. The fact that He chose us in Christ, implies that sin did come in and that salvation is necessary. It should make the wonder so much the greater for us, that our fall from glory did not cancel the reaching of God's goal with us.

Verse 5 continues: "in love, He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." Here the outlines of sin and salvation are clearly drawn. The coming of Jesus into this world, and His obedience and death on the cross put an end to the era of sin. The question was settled. As Hebrews says: ... "After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."<sup>147</sup> So through the forgiveness of our sins and the cleansing thereof, God made us, through adoption, heirs and joint-heirs with Christ. Adoption in Paul's time was a common concept in the Roman world. A man could adopt a boy, to whom he was physically unrelated, to become a member of his family, as if he had begotten the child himself. In our present day adoption is very common. However, we cannot create a blood line where it doesn't exist in reality. God solved this problem through the blood of Christ and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We do become part of His being, in an even more real sense than my sons and daughters are part of my being. We cannot say that Jesus is God's real Son, and we differ from Him because we are adopted. The way God draws us into His family cancels this difference completely. The secret of this mystery is His love. "...in love, He predestined..." It is legal, it is real, it is true. If anything should draw our eyes away from the problems we have with the manifestations of our present sinful nature and the world we live in, it is this: the execution of God's eternal plan within us to make us what He is. The fact that this surpasses our earthly experience does not change the facts.

Verse 6 explains why: "To the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." When our eyes are opened to the facts and we become aware of what God has done for us in Christ, we will be filled with praise for "His glorious grace." The KJV puts it probably more directly when it says: "wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." Christ is simply designated as "the Beloved." God loves us because He loves Christ. Jesus says: "...the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God."<sup>148</sup> God loves the world, says John 3:16, but the experience of God's love is only felt if we accept Jesus as our Savior.

Verse 7 continues: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace." This is the third facet of "all spiritual blessings." The reference is obviously to the death on the cross of our Lord. No love for Jesus is possible without the acceptance of His death on our behalf.

In the Old Testament sin committed was covered by the blood of an animal that was slain in the place of the sinner. Acceptance of the death of Christ in our stead means much more than covering up sin. It means redemption from sin, its power and its consequences. Redemption means salvation, freedom from imprisonment. Paul says: "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves."<sup>149</sup> The blood of Christ saves us from the power of the evil one. It also gives us forgiveness of sins. In the New Testament this means much more than the covering up of transgressions, which was the meaning of the Old Testament word *kaphar*. The blood of Christ wipes our slate clean. The fact that Christ took upon Himself our sins means that His righteousness is put upon us.

<sup>146</sup> Isa. 6:3

<sup>147</sup> Heb. 1:3

<sup>148</sup> John 16:27

<sup>149</sup> Col. 1:13

This Paul states so beautifully in II Corinthians: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."<sup>150</sup>

We would have made this the first facet of "all spiritual blessings," wouldn't we? The sin question is still so urgent in our lives, that we feel it would be of primary importance to God too. As it turns out, sin is for God a temporary interruption in the plan He had for us from before creation. And for Him the interruption has been taken care of, and it is in the past. This doesn't mean that we should take sin lightly, but we should realize that if God put it behind Him in Jesus Christ, we should consider it the same.

Verse 8 states: "That he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding," adds the way in which the Lord has bestowed this forgiveness upon us; "with all wisdom and understanding." That is not our wisdom and understanding, but His. God is wise and understanding in the way He forgives us. If we make a confession of our sins and declare that we are genuinely sorry for what we have done, there will be no reproaches. I will never forget the first touch I felt of God's love, when I was afraid He would hang out all the dirty laundry of my life; He confirmed to my heart that my sins were forgiven and will be remembered no more. He said: "We do not talk about that any more." The parable of the prodigal son is a most beautiful illustration of this truth. When the son comes home and says: "Father I have sinned," the chapter closes and the father says "Let's have a feast and celebrate!"<sup>151</sup> James says: "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."<sup>152</sup> And in the psalms we read: "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him, for He knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust."<sup>153</sup> After the cruelty of the crucifixion, God is infinitely tender in applying forgiveness to our lives. The wisdom of God stands for His compassion.

In a sense the terms "wisdom and understanding" do apply to us also, although this is not the primary meaning in this verse. It is through the experience of being forgiven that we understand and partake in the wisdom of the Lord. Knowledge of salvation is the result of the forgiveness of our sins, as Zacharias says in his song of praise: "To give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins"<sup>154</sup>; God makes diamonds out of our mud and filth.

Verse 9 starts introducing us to the mystery with which the rest of this epistle is filled. "And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ," The significance of this is not only that the second Person of the Trinity is put into a certain supreme office, but that the headship of all is bestowed upon a man: Jesus Christ and that we are included in this mandate. Christ is seated upon the throne of the universe, and we are placed with Him. That is basically what the rest of this paragraph says.

Watchman Nee has given a very interesting outline of the epistle to the Ephesians in his booklet *SIT, WALK, STAND*. We sit with Christ in the heavenlies; we walk worthy of this Gospel and we stand against the powers of evil in the heavenly places.

For the second time in this chapter the Apostle uses the word predestined here. (See Verse 5). Our sharing of power with Jesus Christ on the throne of the universe is not an afterthought, a touch of kindness, but one of the basics of God's plan when He created man. I believe that it was God's intent in the creation of Adam to have him subdue Satan, who had fallen previously and to bring back under God's dominion that section of God's creation that had fallen with the enemy. When Adam failed through falling in sin himself, God transferred the mandate to the new man He created, Jesus Christ. The plan remained the same and through redemption the mandate is falling back on our shoulders, in communion with Jesus as our Lord. Paul does not speak in these verses particularly about victory over the evil one, but he speaks about things that will be "put in effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment." The struggle against the devil will not be an everlasting one. It is hard to imagine what our active role will be. Jesus describes our part in heaven as being responsible for the "true riches." "So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?"<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> II Cor. 5:21

<sup>151</sup> Luke 15:21-23

<sup>152</sup> James 1:5

<sup>153</sup> Ps. 103:13,14

<sup>154</sup> Luke 1:77

<sup>155</sup> Luke 16:11

A very important principle in connection with our responsibility as man under the leadership of our Lord Jesus Christ is the fact that God will be justified by His own creation in the face of Satan. It would of course have been no effort at all for the Almighty to crush the devil at the first sign of rebellion. But it could always have been held against God that He had not given His opponent a fair chance. The enemy must have claimed equality with God, as we read in Isaiah's prophecy: "I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High."<sup>156</sup> God has given him more than a fair chance. And at the end of time it is man, who fell into sin, and who will stand up and condemn the evil one and justify God.

As man we play a part in the demonstration of God's humility. But then comes that which exceeds our wildest imagination, the fact that God will demonstrate His glory through us and in us. Twice Paul states that we, who put our hope in Christ, will be to the praise of His glory: (vs. 12) "In order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory." and 14 "Who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession; to the praise of his glory." The link between the day of glory to come and our present life on earth is the Holy Spirit. Paul says that the Holy Spirit seals us for the inheritance. He is a deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance. Paul says that God: "Set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."<sup>157</sup>

It seems to me that this is the real predestination in the sense in which Calvin uses the word, the eternal security. God puts His seal, the Holy Spirit, the proof of His ownership upon our lives as a guarantee. "Christ in you, the hope of glory."<sup>158</sup> Again, as Paul puts it: "However, as it is written: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.'"<sup>159</sup> Moses asked to see God's glory. The only thing he received was a partial rear view, but it was enough to shine through him, so that Israel could not stand the sight of it. What will it be when we will be to the praise of His glory? "No eye has seen, no ear has heard!"<sup>160</sup>

Nowhere does Paul refer to our exalted position in Christ as something that draws the glory to ourselves. We will be glorious, but it is the glory of God. We are what we are "to the praise of His glory." The irony is that Satan wanted to make himself like the Most High, and he fell because he sought his own glory. We will receive what he failed to grasp, because we will be His glory. All honor and glory we will receive, will be for Christ's sake. This is more realistic and it is safer anyhow. Let us not fall into the same trap as the enemy of our souls did.

### 1:15-23

*For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.*

*I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.*

*I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*

*And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*

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<sup>156</sup> Isa. 14:14

<sup>157</sup> II Cor 1:22

<sup>158</sup> Col. 1:2<sup>7b</sup>

<sup>159</sup> I Cor. 2:9

<sup>160</sup> Cf. Ex. 33:18 and 34:29-34



This next section starts with the words “for this reason,” which obviously refers to the content of the preceding verses. Paul prays for the church he addresses, which we believe to be the Laodicean, and he utters an intercessory prayer which consists of three requests.

The prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving. As in the epistle to the Colossians, Paul goes by reports by others. Other people told him about the faith of this church.<sup>161</sup> The intercessory prayer is more concise than the one in Colossians, where it is the main body of the epistle. In a certain way this epistle is also basically an intercession, but the emphasis is different. The glory of the hope is presented more elaborately and the tone and color are richer.

The word that reached Paul was that these people believed in Jesus Christ and that this faith was demonstrated in a healthy love for all the saints. Faith was demonstrated in works. It was their love that gave Paul the full assurance that their faith was real. Because of this, Paul doesn't stop thanking God for them. This kind of gratitude should be the basis of all intercession for fellow believers.

On the other hand, the fact that Paul intercedes means that he does not consider them to have arrived. He has not, so why should he think they have. He says in Philippians: “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect ... Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.”<sup>162</sup>

He asks for three things for them, which should keep them on the right track, and which are essential in our Christian life.

Verse 17: “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.” He prays for the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, “so that you may know HIM better.” That is the core. Nothing is more important than knowing God. Jesus defines this as the essence of eternal life: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”<sup>163</sup>

Verse 18: “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,” The second thing of importance is to know the hope which is the content of the first part of the chapter.

Verse 19: “And his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength,” and the third is the power.

Knowing God is both the basic and the eternal goal. Knowing the hope draws us into the right direction to reach the goal. Knowing the power provides the fuel for our daily operation. All three persons of the Trinity are mentioned in vs. 17. The glorious Father is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God was known in the Old Testament, of course. He comes to us as the Creator and as the Savior of His people, that is Israel. There are prophetic indications of the coming of the Messiah. But it isn't until we come to the New Testament that things fall in place and we see the Father revealed in Jesus. Nobody explains this better to us than the Apostle John, when he says: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”<sup>164</sup> The NIV translates “the only begotten Son,” with “God the one and only,” which does not seem to clarify the relationship. Jesus specifies the “declaration” even more clearly in John. Upon Philip's question He answers: “Do not you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”<sup>165</sup>

But there is also the human aspect of Jesus' relationship with the Father, which is of the utmost importance to us. God is the God of the man Jesus. Jesus did not only show us Who the Father is, He also demonstrated in His relationship with God, who man is. His perfect obedience, His love, His faith in God, His communion with the Father, His prayer life show us what it means to be human and how to live in relation to our Creator. In that sense the Holy Spirit reveals just as much about ourselves to us as about God. The Spirit of wisdom and revelation makes us grow in this understanding. Growing in knowledge about God goes together with growing in knowledge about ourselves.

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<sup>161</sup> See Col. 1:4

<sup>162</sup> Phil. 3:12,13

<sup>163</sup> John 17:3

<sup>164</sup> John 1:18 (KJV)

<sup>165</sup> John 14:9

This is quite different, of course, from the modern fad about finding our identity. Finding ourselves without finding God keeps the attention drawn to ourselves. Knowing God results in inner healing, deeper surrender, and being filled with the Holy Spirit. The knowledge of God will be the only topic in eternity to keep us occupied eternally. We are faced with the marvelous fact that we may make a small start now in time and space.

We have to realize the importance of intercessory prayer in connection with this. If the knowledge of God were an automatic process, there would be no need for Paul's prayer. The working of the Holy Spirit in our lives will increase with the measure of our surrender to Him. The enemy will make every effort imaginable to thwart this kind of surrender. This is where prayer for each other comes in. The recipients of this epistle had faith in God and love for the saints, as we see in vs. 15, but this doesn't mean that they knew the glory of God. With them we should all strive for God's glory.

In vs. 18 Paul draws the attention to man, which is the logical consequence of what we saw in the preceding verse. He speaks about the hope to which He called us and the riches of His inheritance in the saints. So the focus is not merely, or even mainly upon ourselves. The saints are the others. There is a not-so-subtle danger in being preoccupied with the crown we will receive. If we concentrate, however, on the glory that will be revealed in other people, we give the devil less chance to inflate our ego.

The tendency in considering others is usually to exercise our critical faculties. Thinking about Christ's inheritance in the saints gives us a positive attitude. This may be hard to imagine in some cases. I think of the humorous couplet:

"To live above, with saints we love, that will be bliss and glory.

To live below with saints below, is quite a different story."

The problem is that we use the wrong organ to look at others. Our natural eye sees only the outside of things and people. Remember what God said to Samuel: "The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."<sup>166</sup> When the eye of our heart is enlightened, Paul says, we start seeing things in other people that our natural eye does not observe. How different would our world of humans be if we would start looking at each other in the right way. How different would the church be! This does not imply that we have to be blind to other people's sins and failures, but, generally speaking, this danger is not too great.

There is a connection between the way we live with others and the realization of the hope within ourselves. At least Paul puts both in one sentence.

The third thing Paul prays for is the experience of the power of Jesus' resurrection in our daily life, our present condition. Vs. 19 and 20 capture this truth: "And his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, Which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms."

The experience of this power is always linked in Paul's epistles with our identification with the death of Christ. We read in Romans: "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him."<sup>167</sup> The same is true in Galatians: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."<sup>168</sup>

The recognition of the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, working in our daily lives, is the second result of the enlightening of our spiritual eyes. We should try to examine how this power manifests itself in our daily experience. The first result of the power of Jesus' resurrection is our justification. That is not only the forgiveness of our sins, but the rehabilitation of our relationship with God, including the return of our honor and dignity. Paul says in Romans: "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."<sup>169</sup>

Secondly this power is manifested in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. This Jesus promised in Acts: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses ..."<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> I Sam. 16:7

<sup>167</sup> Rom. 6:8

<sup>168</sup> Gal. 2:20

<sup>169</sup> Rom. 4:25

<sup>170</sup> Acts 1:8

Thirdly, the resurrection power of Jesus is His enabling us to serve Him. This is already implied in the Romans: "But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."<sup>171</sup>

Fourth, the resurrection power working in the present condition of our bodies is a power of healing. We read in Romans: "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you."<sup>172</sup> This may imply more than physical temporary healing, but it does not exclude this either.

Finally, it is through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that we shall be raised from the dead and our bodies will be transformed. Paul confirms this in Philippians: "Who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."<sup>173</sup> This does not exhaust the content of the power of Jesus' resurrection in our lives. It gives us merely a rough outline of what we can look for. Obviously, the subject is so vast that we cannot even start to exhaust it in the context of this study. If some of the excitement of the thought gets through, it will be enough to lift our spirits for days to come.

The knowledge of this power in all its aspects is first of all the result of the enlightenment of the eyes of our heart. In the same vein Jesus tells Nicodemus that one has to see the Kingdom of God before he can enter it and that the key to seeing and entering is the new birth through the Holy Spirit. "In reply Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.'<sup>174</sup> And again: "Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.'<sup>175</sup>

It is obvious that Paul is speaking to born again Christians, but it is also clear that experiencing the power of Jesus' resurrection is not the automatic result of conversion and regeneration, otherwise the explanation would have been superfluous and there would have been no need for intercessory prayer. It is good to pray for one another in this way, but how can we ask for others what we have not received ourselves? Elisha could only ask for his servant's eyes to be opened because he saw the heavenly reality himself. We read that Elisha prayed: "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."<sup>176</sup>

But the most important of all is that when we start seeing the power of Jesus' resurrection at work on earth, our eyes will be drawn to heaven, where the source of the power is. The resurrection power of Jesus could corrupt us in the same way that all power corrupts man. "Absolute power corrupts absolutely," as Lord Acton said. But if we stop gazing at what is happening on earth and start looking to what happens in heaven, as Paul suggests in the vs. 21-23, we see how the picture fits together. The safeguard per excellence against corruption is to see Christ, seated on the throne of the universe, as the highest authority over all authority. And then, we realize that this Man, the Second Person of the Trinity, is the head of the church, His body, of which we are members. We then understand that the working of God's power in us is not just meant to make us feel good, but to make us function. Feel good we will, but that is not the point. We have been predestined and elected in Him to shine forth His glory. We are His bride, the New Jerusalem of which John says: "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." "It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal."<sup>177</sup>

As we said at the beginning, Paul pulls us up to heights that surpass by far our daily experience. We cannot even imagine a fraction of this reality in our present condition, but there is no argument against it. It is true and there is no reason that we should not, from time to time, get a taste of eternity and long for more

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<sup>171</sup> Rom. 7:6

<sup>172</sup> Rom. 8:11

<sup>173</sup> Phil. 3:21

<sup>174</sup> John 3:3

<sup>175</sup> John 3:5

<sup>176</sup> II Kings 6:17

<sup>177</sup> Rev. 21:2,11

This vision of reality is also the best stimulant for worship and adoration. Who can see the glory of Christ and not fall on his face? The first chapter of Revelations describes Christ: "And among the lampstands was someone 'like a son of man,' dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.'"<sup>178</sup> Finally, Paul says that the power that works in us now is the same power which worked in the dead body of our crucified Lord and which raised Him from the dead. We understand as little about death as we do about life. The only thing we know is that when man severed the relationship with God, death came into the world. In Romans Paul says: "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned."<sup>179</sup> Jesus overcame death by paying for our sins. Sin is obviously the only grip death has upon us. Therefore, we can conclude that the power that works in us is the power to overcome sin and eradicate it eventually completely. It is the power Jude describes: "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy ..."<sup>180</sup> Some of what happened in the realm of death, when Jesus descended into "the prison" and wrenched the keys from the hands of the devil, is replayed in the lives of those who are in Christ. Restoration of fellowship with God, which was ruptured when Adam and Eve sinned, means victory over death and subsequently glory.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2:1-3

***As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.***

***All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.***

With these thoughts we have entered into the second chapter. Here Paul goes back to our BC (before Christ) condition. It is important to think back from time to time, because we have a tendency to forget what we were and so we do not realize deeply enough what has actually happened to us.

In ch. 2:1-3 Paul mentions five things which define our previous condition: Verse 1 - "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins." Due to the fact that we are descendants from Adam, who severed the lifeline with God, we enter this world as people who are spiritually dead. This condition is not just inherited, something that happened to us beyond our control, but it is also the result of our behavior. We are dead and we behave like dead people in that we transgress and commit sins.

When Adam sinned, his spirit died. That sin and death caused the organ with which he could fellowship with his Creator to function no longer. Being cut off from God's glory resulted in Adam's losing his bearings both mentally and emotionally. He started to feel ashamed for the wrong kind of thing, (he said he was naked, but there was nothing shameful in nakedness) and he blamed his wife for acts for which he bore the responsibility. Eventually his body stopped functioning also. We bear all the marks of Adam when we enter this world through birth. Legally God classifies us as "Adamites," that is, as sharing Adam's responsibility and guilt. Paul exemplifies this truth particularly in Romans.<sup>181</sup> God considers that the whole of humanity is represented by one man, so that one man can also be the Redeemer of all of humanity. So our condition before we came to Christ was "dead." That is the first point.

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<sup>178</sup> Rev. 1:13-17

<sup>179</sup> Rom. 5:12

<sup>180</sup> Jude vs. 24

<sup>181</sup> Rom. 5:12-14

Secondly, spiritually dead people flow with the current of the world. A dead person cannot swim upstream. The world goes to hell and we follow even when we know it is the wrong way. We follow the ways of this world. It is important that we understand this since even after conversion we may not immediately turn away from what everybody else is doing. It is much easier to follow than to resist. God says: "Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong."<sup>182</sup>

Thirdly, this is a spiritual battle. People who do not know the Lord very seldom have a notion that they are being influenced by evil powers. "The ruler of the kingdom of the air," as Paul calls him, has a very good system of propaganda to persuade people to do things that are bad for them, without their being aware of what they are doing. He uses man's spiritual blindness in order to lure him into his net. Paul says: "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."<sup>183</sup> Most people outside of Christ do not even believe in the existence of a devil, and all the while they are being manipulated by him. Fourth, except for fellowship with God, we live to gratify our own desires. Paul says of this gratification: "Gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts."<sup>184</sup> All the while we think that we are only pleasing ourselves. In the book *Watership Down* there are a number of wild rabbits, which live well by feeding from food that is put out by a farmer, who sets a trap from time to time when he wants to eat rabbit. This allegory demonstrates the outcome of gratifying our cravings; the punishment is to be eaten by the one who set the trap.

Finally; although we are the object of God's wrath, He loves us. The whole Bible confirms this, and the offer of His love stands throughout eternity. We know that He hates sin and despises the devil, and so should we. However, if we turn against God and side with the enemy, we will share in the wrath that is upon him. "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."<sup>185</sup> The worst thing that can happen to a man is that he is born into this world and remains all his life in the condition in which he was born, that is under the wrath of God. We cannot help that we are descendants of Adam, but we are responsible if we refuse to allow God change our desires and to be regenerated by the Spirit of God into sons of God in Jesus Christ. We could say that the wrath of God turns from a primal condition to an active punishment.

## 2:4-10

*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved.*

*And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.*

*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.*

*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

In the verses 4-7 Paul goes on to describe our salvation. He uses in connection with this the words "great love," "mercy" and "grace." These words indicate God's motive for saving us. The act of salvation is described with the words "made us alive" (the KJV says: 'quicken us'), and "raised us up."

<sup>182</sup> Ex. 23:2

<sup>183</sup> II Cor. 4:4

<sup>184</sup> Eph. 2:3

<sup>185</sup> John 3:18, 36

The making us alive is the bringing back to life of our dead spirit, the one we inherited from Adam. This means that the organ for fellowship with God is restored to its proper function. In John 3:3 this is called being "born again."

Paul does not elaborate on the subject here. After all, he speaks to people who have had the experience and who know they are born again. In our contact with human beings, we usually do not start by convincing them that they are born into this world. But sometimes it is helpful to make people realize how great the miracle is that they are alive. The miracle in the new birth is even greater. In our natural birth we come from non-existence into existence. In the new birth the process of death is reversed. That is what makes it so marvelous. In John 3 Jesus explains the process to Nicodemus in detail. The image of the brass serpent in John 3:14 and 15 explains it all. "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, That everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

The next description of our being raised up with Christ does not speak about Christ's resurrection from the dead, but about His Ascension to heaven. The context makes this clear. "Made alive" and "raised up" do not say the same thing here.

But we should go back to the words and phrases that show us God's motive for saving us, "His great love for us." The miraculous aspect of this love is better explained in Romans: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."<sup>186</sup> God did not love us because we were lovable since in our natural condition we are repulsive to the highest degree. In Romans Paul describes us as "the ungodly," "sinners," and "enemies." The basis of God's love is not in us, but in Himself. God loves us because He is love. We will never be able to fully understand this. But it seems to me that the fact of God's love for us makes our lostness so much worse. This person, who is dying in his sin, is the person God loves so much that He was willing to die in his place.

The second phrase Paul uses is "rich in mercy." The aspect of God's righteousness is not mentioned in this context, but it is never far away. God's mercy does not mean that He takes our sin lightly. However, because the price was paid, God can act as if our sin doesn't matter. Like the father of the prodigal son, He doesn't talk about it any more. In the parable we read "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."<sup>187</sup> When sin has been confessed and atoned for, God lets his compassion run freely. He runs to us, throws His arms around us and kisses us. God, the Creator of heaven and earth, God the Almighty welcomes us. That is the display of the riches of His mercy. The third word is "grace." Grace rules out any merit on our side. Paul uses the word three times in these few verses (5,7,8): in vs. 5 it is salvation while we are dead in sin; in vs. 7 it is the demonstration of His riches of kindness to us, as a testimony to the rest of creation; and in vs. 8 it is God's gift to us, which we receive by faith. The way Paul expresses it, grace is the beginning, the end, and the means. Grace begins while we are dead, and it comes to full bloom in the apotheosis, when in glory the fullness of what God has done in us will be manifested. Grace is grasped by faith. The second phase, the one painted in Verse 7 is what these chapters are all about. Here again we are pulled up to a level that is far beyond what we can presently see or understand. The third phase shows the present; it is by faith that we grasp and start experiencing. We trust that it is true, although we cannot see it. The best illustration of what faith is not, is given in Thomas' words after Jesus' resurrection. In We read: "But he said to them, Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."<sup>188</sup> And Jesus answers him: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."<sup>189</sup> We will not be able to touch, or see, or taste. But for most of us the relief to feel the load of guilt slide from our shoulders is enough proof that it is true. The Hebrew epistle says: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."<sup>190</sup> And the KJV expresses it: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." I prefer the KJV in this particular verse.

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<sup>186</sup> Rom. 5:8

<sup>187</sup> Luke 15:20

<sup>188</sup> John 20:25

<sup>189</sup> John 20:29

<sup>190</sup> Heb 11:1

When we start trusting God, knowing that if He would lie the universe would fall apart, spiritual things become tangible to us. That is why I believe that when John says: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched; this we proclaim concerning the Word of life,"<sup>191</sup> he does not merely talk about the physical observations he made when Jesus was on earth; He wants to give "substance" to our faith.

The idea that faith would be any kind of achievement on our part is ridiculous. It doesn't even take courage to believe since often it is our last resort. It is true, however, that faith grows with use, just as a muscle becomes stronger with use. But for salvation we need as little muscle strength as a baby needs it to be born. Salvation is a gift of God.

Verse 10 is one of the great verses in the Bible. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." In order to understand what Paul is saying here, we have to realize that "created" applies to the new creation, not to the creation of Adam or our natural birth. "Created in Christ Jesus" has the same content as "blessed in Christ" and "chosen in Christ" in ch. 1:3,4. The verse: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"<sup>192</sup> says the same. If we do not see this, we should understand that God has predetermined what we should do and should not do, which would rob us completely of the dignity of choice. But if we see this as a completely new spiritual universe in which God has reserved a place for us with functions to exercise and responsibilities to take, we get a better picture.

When Paul says: "We are God's workmanship," he does not speak about the fact that God created us, but that He saved us from our sins, gave us new life in Christ, and seated us with Him in the center of the new heaven and earth. I read once a translation that sounded rather fascinating: "You are God's masterpiece ...." In the physical, mental, and spiritual sense, this is true, but that is not what the text is about. It is also true that God's new creation is a masterpiece, even of greater proportions than the first one. But the issue can be obscured by using flowery language. Verse 10 states in a nutshell what Paul has been singing about in the first fourteen verses of this epistle.

## 2:11-22

***Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men) -- remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.***

***But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.***

***For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.***

***He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.***

***For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.***

***Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.***

***In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.***

***And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.***

Beginning with 2:11, the Apostle starts to explain what turns out to be the essence of his letter: the mystery of the Gospel. In ch. 3 he uses the term four times (3:3,4,6,9). Obviously this is what he refers to in ch. 6:19: "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel."

<sup>191</sup> I John 1:1

<sup>192</sup> II Cor. 5:17

In our present age the church is mainly a body of believers of non-Jewish origin. It is very hard for us to imagine the immense struggle that took place among the Jewish believers when the first heathen came to accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Although Jesus' mandate to the disciples clearly included heathen, ("But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth,"<sup>193</sup>) it took specific intervention by the Holy Spirit two times to make the Apostles understand that the Lord was serious about Samaria and the ends of the earth.

In Acts 8:5 we read that the deacon Philip was the first one to go to Samaria to preach the Gospel. From ch. 5:14-17, we understand that the Apostles in Jerusalem did not know what to make of Philip's ministry. It took Peter's and John's prayers to have the Spirit come upon these people, so that nobody could say that there was any difference between them and the believers in Jerusalem. The Samaritans worshipped the God of Israel and they kept the law of Moses; so that even though the Jews did not approve of them, there was enough of a common basis between them to justify what happened. And when Philip led the Ethiopian eunuch to the Lord, he was dealing with a proselyte, a non-Jew who had embraced Judaism.<sup>194</sup> The real problem arose when Peter entered the house of Cornelius. It took a vision of a sheet with unclean animals, which Peter was commanded to eat, a vision that had to be repeated three times, and it took a baptism in the Holy Spirit of a house full of heathen, to convince the Jews that God made no difference between Jews and Gentiles. Then it took a special session of the general assembly of the church in Jerusalem to approve what the Holy Spirit had done to make it official. God in heaven must have laughed loud and long. It had not been easy to convince the people He had chosen to be a kingdom of priest in this world, that the Gospel was for the whole world, not just for themselves. Even Paul's excitement in this epistle shows how deeply ingrained the Jewish prejudice was. We, believers from among the heathen, should not take this lightly.

Most of the things Paul says in the verses 11-22 can be taken in two ways. They have a personal application and a collective one. The mistake is often made to pay attention only to the personal aspect. This evolves from our misunderstanding which is caused by the distance that removes us from the problem that was so acute in Paul's time. There was more at stake than a prejudice on the side of the Jews toward the Gentiles. We get a clearer understanding of this when we read Paul's treatise of the subject in Rom. 9-11. There Paul says of Israel: "Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."<sup>195</sup> Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: "Salvation is from the Jews."<sup>196</sup> It is my understanding of this epistle that Paul says, this is no longer true. It is the church of Jesus Christ, consisting of Jews and Gentiles, that has become a kingdom of priests. We, as members of the body of Christ, have the task to announce God's salvation to a lost world.

Further in Rom. 11:17-24 Paul argues that the Gentiles have been grafted into the olive tree in the place of some branches that have been broken off.

Much has been said and written, especially in the last 200 years about Augustine's dogma that the church is the spiritual Israel and has replaced Israel as the recipient of God's promises. It was felt that the church went overboard on this issue and that Israel's role in the world was not finished, as most Christians thought. The dispensationalists in the previous century argued correctly that Israel would be restored and the events of 1948 proved that they were on the right track in their prophecy. But it seems that the evangelical community is in danger of going as much overboard as Augustine did. It is true that Israel no longer occupies the place of a kingly priesthood in this world; in fact they do not even claim to. Judaism is concerned with the maintaining of the Jewish identity and little else. What John says in the introduction of the book of Revelations pertains to the church: "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."<sup>197</sup> So when Paul says "remember" in vs. 11 and 12, he does mean to embarrass

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<sup>193</sup> Acts 1:8

<sup>194</sup> See Acts 8:26-39

<sup>195</sup> Rom. 9:4

<sup>196</sup> John 4:22

<sup>197</sup> Rev. 1:5b, 6 (KJV)



them, but he wants them to marvel about the fact that people, who were dead and did not have any chance to be saved, have been elevated to the status of "kings and priests," that is, to missionaries!

Although he speaks collectively, as we said before, the private implications of these things are tremendous, and we do well to ponder them. The term "uncircumcised" stands here for the whole concept of not being included in the promise of God to Abraham. The Jews had a birthright that we as non-Jews did not possess.

It would have been easier to recognize if Israel as a nation would have lived as a kingdom of priests. During its long history those moments were rare and far apart, and never did the whole nation live up to its calling. As we said before, the fact that this is now history, since the death of Jesus on the cross changed all that, does make it hard for us to understand what it must have been.

We can still see some of the value of the original condition when a modern Jew accepts Jesus as his Messiah. A whole heritage comes alive of which we, as heathen, know nothing. The only thing in vs. 12 we can relate to now is that we were "without hope and without God in the world." The Christian hope is the realization of everything that God promised in terms of restoration of dignity, fellowship, and incorruptibility. It is the fullness of resurrection and glory. For a person outside Christ, death is the end, and at best an "undiscovered country from which bourn no traveler returns," as Shakespeare expressed his concept of death. For the child of God, real life starts where life on earth ends. What people call "hope" in this life has nothing in common with the reality of God's hope. We are talking about what Paul calls in 1:3 "every spiritual blessing in Christ."

"Without God" is the translation of the Greek *atheoi* from which our word atheism is derived. This does not necessarily mean that the heathen did not believe in the existence of a Supreme Being, but that because of a lack of revelation, such as Israel possessed, they had no real knowledge of God. In most cases those fragments of knowledge which mankind must have possessed when they were dispersed over the earth after the flood and the tower of Babel, must have been lost, or so badly deluded by other cultural influences that they were beyond recognition. There are very few places on earth where those traces were kept for centuries. Traces of this knowledge were found among the Stone Age tribes of New Guinea (Irian Jaya) when the first missionaries entered.

Even in our present time, people who are not acknowledged materialistic atheists, live in practice as if no God exists to whom they have to give an account of their lives, and even people who, know there is a God, live as if there is no God, like the fool in the book of Psalms.<sup>198</sup>

In ch. 2:13 Paul says: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ." This means that in reality we have been accepted as a Jew. In a sense the Judaists were right when they said that only Jews could be saved. They were wrong in assuming that heathen had to submit themselves to bodily circumcision. The blood of Christ accomplished in our life that of which circumcision was a shadow. As Paul says in Romans: "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God."<sup>199</sup> Physical circumcision foreshadowed the renewal of our heart.

The real issue of Judaism is not to keep the Jewish identity, but entrance into the presence of God and fellowship with Him. Because of the blood of Christ we enter hand in hand with people who are Jews by physical descent and worship God with them. There is no difference.

What Paul says about peace between Jews and Gentiles can be applied in a more pertinent way in our present time to our fellowship with other human beings, particularly fellow believers. If Jesus is the peace between Jew and gentile, He must be the peace between me and you. "I and Thou," as Martin Buber calls it. This places my relationship with other Christians on a basis that is quite different from any other relationship. Most relationships that we consider good are based on "chemistry." We like each other, and things click between us. The first lesson the Lord taught me as a new Christian was that I could no longer divide mankind into two groups: the ones I liked and the ones I disliked. (The first group was much smaller). I felt compelled to go to someone who irked me and to be kind to him, as if I really liked him. I realized that I could be in trouble if God would divide humanity as I did. The death of Christ shows that God loves the world, and we are supposed to do the same.

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<sup>198</sup> See Ps. 14:1

<sup>199</sup> Rom. 2:28,29

It is of the utmost importance that we understand that this goes absolutely against our natural experience; truly loving takes supernatural intervention. If Christ is not our peace, there is no peace between one human being and another. Differences in temperament, character, and approach can only be overruled by the presence of Christ between you and me. The hardest test the Lord gave me was in being in the same Bible school with another student, whom I felt was the most obnoxious creature I ever met. And I still say to myself that it must have been he who made it difficult, not I!

Paul's quote in Verse 17 comes from Isaiah: " 'Creating praise on the lips of the mourners in Israel. Peace, peace, to those far and near,' says the LORD. 'And I will heal them.' "<sup>200</sup>

When Adam severed the line of fellowship with God, he alienated himself also from the fellow human who was his wife. His sinful nature was inherited by his descendants, and accounts for the first murder when Cain slew Abel. That is how hatred and wars came into this world, but hostility was put to death on the cross. We, who are saved by Jesus' death on the cross, should be the first ones to put into practice that hostility is no option for a Christian. The terms foreigners, aliens, and fellow citizens must have been very meaningful to people in the Roman empire. Paul uses the same thought in Philippians, where he says: "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>201</sup>

The expression "members of God's household" brings it even closer to home. There is an intimacy, when we are born in a family which is not present in citizenship. Paul says in Galatians: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."<sup>202</sup>

Paul really piles up the metaphors in the last verses of this chapter. The fellowship of believers makes them citizens of the same city, members of the same family, and parts of the same building, that is the temple in which God dwells through the Holy Spirit. Once again he talks primarily about the unity between Jews and Gentiles in Christ, but the present application for us should be within the gentile church. I see little reason, as some evangelicals do, to side with the State of Israel in everything they do, on the basis that they are God's chosen people and we should side with them. I understand that Israel's role in the plan of God with this world is not finished. But we have presently as little in common with a nation that rejects its Messiah, as the returning Jews did with the transmigrants they found in their country after captivity. In the book of Ezra we read: "They came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, 'Let us help you build because, like you, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.' But Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered, 'You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us.' "<sup>203</sup> This last image stresses again the thought of the priesthood of the church of Jesus Christ. Every believer is individually a temple of the Holy Spirit, as Paul says: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own."<sup>204</sup> But collectively, and I would say on a higher level, we are the dwelling place of God and as such we function as priests in this world, building the bridge between those who are still in darkness and those in the kingdom of light. Peter says much the same in his first epistle: "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ Jesus."<sup>205</sup>

Concerning the foundation of this temple, Paul says in vs. 20: "Built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." These words are apocalyptic. John wrote: "The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb."<sup>206</sup> Christ is referred to as the cornerstone, (or capstone) an image that is transferred into the New Testament from the book of Psalms: "The stone the builders rejected has become the

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<sup>200</sup> Isa. 57:9

<sup>201</sup> Phil. 3:20

<sup>202</sup> Gal. 3:26,29

<sup>203</sup> See Ezra 4:2,3

<sup>204</sup> I Cor 6:19

<sup>205</sup> 1 Peter 2:5

<sup>206</sup> Rev 21:14

capstone.”<sup>207</sup> The inference is also in Zechariah's vision: “See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,’ says the LORD Almighty, ‘and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day... What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of ‘God bless it! God bless it!’”<sup>208</sup> Jesus Himself quotes Ps 118:22 in Matt. 21:42. Paul uses the image also in First Corinthians: “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”<sup>209</sup>

It is clear why Christ is called the cornerstone, or capstone or foundation of the temple in which the Holy Spirit lives. Without His death on the cross, the Holy Spirit would not indwell any human body. It is because of what He did that He could pour out His Spirit upon us. But why are the Apostles called the foundation? According to the biblical definition, an Apostle is a man who witnessed the resurrection of Christ. The Apostles were the first ones who spread the message of salvation in the blood of Christ and the proof of the truth of this was the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. As John states it in his first epistle: “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us.”<sup>210</sup> And in Acts Paul says: “For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”<sup>211</sup> Peter states it most clearly when he says: “But God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen; by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.”<sup>212</sup> The fact that the Apostles are part of the foundation of the church is more due to their being witnesses of the facts of salvation than to their persons. The content of their message is more important than who they are.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### 3:1-13

*For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles -- Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.*

*In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy Apostles and prophets.*

*This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.*

*I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.*

*Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.*

*His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.*

*I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.*

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<sup>207</sup> Ps 118:22

<sup>208</sup> Zech. 3:9; 4:7

<sup>209</sup> I Cor. 3:11

<sup>210</sup> I John 1:3

<sup>211</sup> Acts 17:31

<sup>212</sup> Acts 10:40-42

In chapter 3 Paul starts a sentence which he does not finish: "I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus." He uses the same expression several times in his epistles. ("As a prisoner for the Lord,"<sup>213</sup> "So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner."<sup>214</sup> "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus"; "Yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul; an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus."<sup>215</sup>)

The gist of what he says is that his imprisonment is no accident. It isn't even the result of human efforts, such as the instigation of the Jews or measures taken by the Roman government. Paul is in a Roman prison, but in reality he is the prisoner of Jesus Christ. The sublimation of his circumstances, which from a human viewpoint are not enviable, is the greatest victory a human being can gain.

If we can draw glory from our handicaps, we are invincible. We owe some of Beethoven's greatest music to his deafness. Joni Eareckson-Tada considers her paralysis her greatest blessing. Paul says that his imprisonment is the glory of the church. "I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory" ch. 3:13. If we can understand the reason for what God is doing with us in circumstances that are adverse, they do not only become bearable, but they are positive experiences.

Paul also draws the spiritual implications of what happens to him on the physical level. Being a prisoner of Christ means to be completely dependent upon His commands and permissions. A prisoner can't do anything without permission from him who put him in prison. Christ put Paul in a Roman prison to reveal to him the mystery of the church. To a large degree the rejection of the Gospel by the Jews in the cities Paul visited made this mystery more and more visible. It had been Paul's policy to go first to the Jews in every city and speak to them in the synagogue; then only after being rejected by the Jews, he would turn to the Gentiles, as for instance, Luke writes in Acts: "Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: 'We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.'" The repetition of this phenomenon must have made more and more clear to Paul what the Holy Spirit had in mind. Isn't it amazing how God works so positively through our rejections almost more than through what we consider to be positive experiences? Paul saw how the Jews who believed, together with the Gentiles who responded were bonded together in the one body of Christ. It is probably because of this pattern of negatives that Paul comes to accept his imprisonment as the imprisonment of Jesus Christ.

It must have been during Paul's imprisonment that the fullness of the mystery was revealed to him. Twice Paul mentions in his epistles that God directly revealed certain things to him. He also makes statements that imply a special revelation.<sup>216</sup> Another statement about a direct revelation we find in Galatians: "I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."<sup>217</sup> There Paul probably speaks about the truth that Gentiles do not have to pass the rite of circumcision in order to be saved.

I believe that the Holy Spirit uses the written Word to reveal the will of God to men. In cases where there is no written scripture, as on some mission fields, direct revelation is much more common than in countries where the whole Bible is accessible. But in any case, the content of the revelation should be compared to what is written in the Bible. Revelations that add new truths to the Scripture should not be considered as coming from the Holy Spirit. We have to be very cautious in regard to this. Of course in Paul's time the New Testament was still in the process of being born. It could be that much of the revelation was given to Paul at the moment Christ showed Himself to the Apostle on the way to Damascus. Sometimes we see in a glimpse so much truth that it takes us months or years to work it all out in detail. It is clear however, that Paul had more than one supernatural experience. Paul says in Acts: "When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance. And saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick!' He said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.'" <sup>218</sup> In Second Corinthians he says: "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third

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<sup>213</sup> Eph. 4:1

<sup>214</sup> II Tim. 1:8

<sup>215</sup> Philem. vs. 1,9

<sup>216</sup> See I Cor. 15:51 and I Thess. 4:13-17

<sup>217</sup> Gal 1:12

<sup>218</sup> Acts 22:17,18

heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that this man; whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows; Was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell."<sup>219</sup> These are two examples of other revelations.

*The Tyndale Commentary* suggests that the verse 1 should be linked to the 14th verse of this chapter, where Paul starts out by saying "For this reason...." He seemingly became sidetracked in vs. 1 and his original intention was to say that he meant to bow his knees before the Father because of the mystery he was trying to explain. From Vs. 5 we understand that Paul does not claim exclusive knowledge of this mystery. The Holy Spirit revealed it to "God's holy Apostles and prophets ... Which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy Apostles and prophets." Peter states this truth in similar fashion in his first epistle. Speaking about the Old Testament prophets, he says: "It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things."<sup>220</sup>

Even before the death of Jesus, the disciples were told: "But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."<sup>221</sup> This revelation was confirmed during the first Council of the church in Jerusalem. The Jewish congregation says boldly to the believers from among the Gentiles: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..."<sup>222</sup> In vs. 6 Paul explains again, what he already stated in ch. 2, that the Gentiles have been joined into the family of God together with the Jewish believers. He says that this is the result of the preaching of the Gospel. At this point, he does not elaborate on the contents of the Gospel. It is understood what the message is: that there is forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ and justification through His resurrection. The promise in Christ is the promise of the Holy Spirit, that was given to Abraham: "All peoples on earth shall be blessed through you."<sup>223</sup> In Galatians Paul explains this as follows: "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."<sup>224</sup>

God revealed to His Apostles that the Gentiles were to become members of the body of Christ by giving them the Holy Spirit in the same way as the Spirit was given to the Jews on the day of Pentecost.

Paul sums it up in three parts: not only is there no need for Gentiles to become Jews through circumcision before they can be saved, but "the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus." When the vastness of this penetrates his thinking, he sees himself as David under the stars, where he said: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"<sup>225</sup> Nothing should make us more humble than the realization that God uses us to accomplish His purpose. If we start to feel ourselves important because we serve the Lord, we have lost all sense of proportion. When the glory of God is revealed to us, it reduces us to size. It is only when we understand the greatness of the message and our own smallness that the Lord will be able to send His power through us. In Second Corinthians Paul ponders the same points, when he says: "And who is equal to such a task?... Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God."<sup>226</sup> Paul calls himself here "the least of all God's people." Elsewhere he says: "For I am the least of the Apostles and do not even deserve to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> II Cor 12:2-4

<sup>220</sup> I Pet. 1:12

<sup>221</sup> Matt. 13:16,17

<sup>222</sup> Acts 15:28

<sup>223</sup> Gen. 12:3

<sup>224</sup> Gal. 3:14

<sup>225</sup> Ps. 8:3,4

<sup>226</sup> II Cor. 2:16; 3:5

<sup>227</sup> I Cor. 15:9

Evidently the memory of his former life keeps on pursuing him. It makes the call of God upon his life so much more wonderful. We find the same thought in First Corinthians, where he says: "Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me."<sup>228</sup>

It was not completely true of course that Paul had no choice on the road to Damascus. But what can a man do when all of a sudden God's glory shines upon him? Nobody who really sees the light chooses darkness. What initially looked like the second best choice: preaching to the Gentiles, because the Jews rejected the Gospel, turns out to be "the grace ... to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ." The word "unsearchable" means that the mystery is hidden from our natural senses. The Spirit within us understands. Also, insight is multiplied within the body of Christ. One individual member cannot understand completely, but when the members function together as one body, the horizon of knowledge is pushed back. The word translated with "administration" is *oikonomia* in Greek. It is the same word as in 3:2. There Paul says that he was trusted with the administration of God's grace to men. Our word economy is derived from the same root.

The dispensationalists see in Vs. 9 the indication of the "Great Parenthesis"; meaning that God interrupts His plan with Israel in order to use the church to reveal Himself in the world, and that this role will be handed back to Israel in the end times. I believe that Israel will play a role in God's revelation at some point in history. Otherwise, the preservation of the Jews would make no sense. But Paul does not speak about the role of the church as some parenthesis. The revelation of the mystery of the church is a vital part of God's eternal purpose in Jesus Christ. Also Paul's mentioning of God, as the Creator of all things, indicates that the mystery is part of the whole creation plan.

So the function of the church is to make known the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. To start with the latter, Paul distinguishes two kinds of rulers. He states in ch 6:12: "for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Those are the powers of darkness. They will have to admit grudgingly the implication of Jesus' victory over them through His death on the cross and His resurrection. On the other hand, we see the angels and other heavenly being, who, according to Peter "long to look into these things."<sup>229</sup> I suppose that Paul includes both kinds of rulers and authorities in this verse.

"The manifold wisdom of God" is a beautiful expression. According to *the Tyndale Commentary* the word is *polypoikilos* which means a variety of color such as in flowers or in cloth.

Paul does not elaborate upon how God's wisdom will be revealed through us. It will be on the one hand the fact that we are what we are: people who were lost in sin, and who were washed in the blood of the Lamb, and who were elevated to the position of sitting on the throne of God together with the Father and the Son. The church of Christ, however, will not just be a bunch of puppets. If God makes known His wisdom through us, then He will share His wisdom with us. We will be, as Peter calls it, "partakers of the divine nature."<sup>230</sup> It is hard for us to imagine this transformation, as John says: "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."<sup>231</sup> These thoughts, however true they are, can be dangerous to our sanctification. We do better to concentrate on the wisdom and glory of God than on ourselves and our sharing in this.

In vs. 12 Paul draws the practical implication of this for the present. "In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence." This is the same conclusion that is drawn by the writer to the Hebrews. "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, And since we have a great priest over the house of God, Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed

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<sup>228</sup> I Cor. 9:16,17

<sup>229</sup> 1 Pet 1:12

<sup>230</sup> II Pet. 1:3 (KJV)

<sup>231</sup> I John 3:2

with pure water.”<sup>232</sup> This is the kind of encouragement we need in our present condition. Living in the darkness of this world, mankind finds it easy to be influenced by the propaganda of the enemy and to think that access will be denied if we try to come to God, but the hope of glory makes us bold.

Sometimes we may think that the price we pay here is too high. Some people are killed because of the Gospel, others are imprisoned and suffer sickness or hunger. Paul says that his imprisonment is the glory of the church. If we keep harping on the price that we have to pay, the devil will make us pity ourselves. But if we keep our eyes on the glory to come, we see things in their right perspective. In Rom. 8:18 Paul says: “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” God’s grace is not cheap.

### 3:14-21

***For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.***

***I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.***

***Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.***

Verses 14-21 contain Paul’s intercessory prayer and doxology and is considered to be one of the greatest sections of the Bible. I believe *the Tyndale Commentary* is correct in saying that Paul takes up the sentence he left unfinished in vs. 1: “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles;... I kneel before the Father,” In the Old Testament God was seldom addressed as Father, but in the New Testament, Jesus puts the full emphasis upon the fatherhood of God. He calls God: “The Father.” The name is used 67 times in the Gospels, 55 of which are in the Gospel of John. So we can say that Jesus puts the full emphasis upon the fact that God is the real Father, the original one, of whom all fatherhood on earth is derived. When Paul says about the God, the Father: “From whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name,” he may be saying this very thing. *The Tyndale Commentary* objects to the translation “the whole family” for the Greek *pasa patria*. It says: “The word cannot quite be translated ‘fatherhood’ (RV mg.). It means strictly ‘lineage’ or ‘pedigree’ (on the father’s side) or more often ‘a tribe’ or even ‘nation’, but by the context and the derivation of the word (‘father’ is *pater* in the Greek), the idea of fatherhood is there.” So we are close enough if we say that all earthly fatherhood is derived from the Fatherhood of God. Therefore we affirm that He is the real father and that all fathers on earth are a shadow of the reality of God, who created us. The context makes us understand that God is our Creator, not only in the sense that our being alive on this planet is due to His act of creation, but that He has made us a new creation in Jesus Christ. Paul speaks about the Father as the one Who makes His Spirit dwell within us and Who imparts to us the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. This is no result of our natural birth, but of our identification with the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the first place we must recognize that Paul utters a prayer of adoration. He kneels before the Father to worship. The glory of the Gospel always brings us to this place, where we realize that what God has done for us surpasses our wildest imagination. It is inexpressibly glorious; it makes us worship and adore.

This prayer is lofty, as it reaches to the highest spheres, and at the same time it is very practical. Paul makes appeal to the greatness of God as the source of our new life, in order that the fullness of this life be applied in a very practical way in our present situation. The strengthening of our inner being by the Holy Spirit applies to our weakness in the life we live at present. This weakness is a prerogative for the strengthening from above. If we are strong in terms of earthly energy, resilience, character and so on, the divine strength will conflict with our natural strength. Weakness in these areas is a must. Paul describes this in Second Corinthians, where Christ says to him: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made

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<sup>232</sup> Heb. 10:19-22

perfect in weakness.” And Paul’s reaction is: “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”<sup>233</sup>

The strength of the Spirit is the presence of Christ. Now if we have invited Christ into our hearts, there should be no doubt as to whether He lives in us or not. In Revelations the Lord says: “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”<sup>234</sup> The “I will come in,” is our life long guarantee if we have opened the door for Him. Faith is the key to the experience, not to bring about the reality. The Lord may be in us without us being aware of it. If we trust the truth of His promise ‘I will come in’ we will soon be filled with a sense of His presence. And even if we do not feel something, we may lean on the promise. We should never lean on our feelings. The strength is not derived from our experience, but from our conviction that He said it and He cannot lie. Paul tells this church basically the same things as he told the church in Colosse. To them he speaks about “the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”<sup>235</sup> The hope of glory is the strength for daily living. The essence of his prayer is “God give them faith, so that they will experience this strength.”

The next imperative is love. Paul prays that the believers may be “rooted and established in love.” That is first of all in the love of Christ and then in the love to one another. The reference here is to the great commandment. “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ” If Christ lives in our heart and we know it, love we be the natural manifestation of His presence. Once Paul starts thinking about the love of Christ, he gets carried away. John is more practical and in a certain sense even more powerful in his expression when he comes to the conclusion “God is love.”<sup>236</sup> “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.”

In vs. 18 power and love are combined to form knowledge. But knowledge that carries with it a dimension that earthly knowledge does not know. It is the knowledge that surpasses understanding. The expressions “wide and long and high and deep” try to describe eternity in human terms. They cannot be taken literally. As humans who live in the boundaries of time and space, we cannot picture eternity. Therefore, we have to put it in dimensions we know. The key to understanding is in the “together with all the saints.” Only in the fellowship of love to one another do we start to see something of the ocean in which we live. Most Christians have no idea what Paul is talking about here, because the demonstration of love in the church which is necessary for this understanding is almost nowhere to be found.

“That you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” (vs. 19). Our understanding the love of Christ opens the door for us to be filled with God Himself, that is the fullness of the Holy Spirit. What Paul says is an impossibility. God is measureless. There is no measuring of eternity, because a measure presupposes boundaries. So if we are filled to the measure of all the fullness of God, we are plunged into an eternity that is as far above our comprehension as God Himself. In Philippians Paul uses the same kind of language: “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”<sup>237</sup> The measure of our being filled is the measurelessness of God. This glorious paradox should make us shout “hallelujah”! What Paul says in First Corinthians is true: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.”<sup>238</sup> Even after hearing these things, our minds are not able to conceive the truth. It is probably a good thing that we cannot fathom what God has planned. It would make us unduly proud, and we would lose it.

The chapter ends with a doxology. But Paul weaves a reference to our prayers in the praise, which should greatly encourage us. The measure that was mentioned above becomes ‘unmeasurable’ here. God “is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within

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<sup>233</sup> II Cor. 12:9,10

<sup>234</sup> Rev. 3:20

<sup>235</sup> Col. 1:27

<sup>236</sup> I John 4:8,16

<sup>237</sup> Phil. 4:19

<sup>238</sup> I Cor. 2:9



us..." If this does not stimulate our faith when we pray, nothing will. When we pray for something or somebody, we should always remember to Whom we are talking. God stopped the sun when Joshua prayed.<sup>239</sup> He raised Jesus from the dead, and He is able to move mountains.<sup>240</sup>

When Paul says: "according to the power that works in us," he appeals to our experiences with God. Each child of God, each person who has accepted Jesus Christ as Lord of his life, has tasted something of the power that broke the grip of sin upon his life and that transformed him from a wretch to a new creature. In this appeal Paul wants us to realize what it is that caused the transformation. We have to be aware of our riches, otherwise the enemy will close in upon us again in order to bring us back under his influence.

In his doxology Paul says the glory of God is manifested in two ways, which become one: in the church and in Jesus Christ. It does not just say that the church has to praise God, because that would put the same obligation upon Jesus as upon us. Now it is true that Jesus glorifies the Father, but that does not seem to be what Paul is saying here. "To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." God's glory becomes evident in the church and in Jesus Christ. He states a fact, and at the same time he admonishes us as he puts the goal before our eyes. He indicates that our way of glorifying God is in essence the same as the way in which Jesus Christ glorified the Father. He brings out the same principle in his epistle to the Thessalonians: "On the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed."<sup>241</sup> The glory of God is to shine through us. O, miracle of all miracles! And who is equal to such a task? The answer is obvious: Our competence comes from God.<sup>242</sup>

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4:1-16

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called -- one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) It was he who gave some to be Apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

In this chapter and the following Paul switches from the doctrinal mode to the practical, although in the first three chapters the practical application was always present and in these chapters there is a constant reference to the doctrine that supports the practice.

<sup>239</sup> Joshua 10:12-14

<sup>240</sup> Matt. 17:20

<sup>241</sup> II Thess. 1:10

<sup>242</sup> See II Cor. 2:16 and 3:5

As he did in ch. 3:1, Paul refers to himself as a prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ. What we have said there applies to this verse also. Paul's imprisonment is no accident. He is in a Roman prison because Jesus wants him there. As a bond slave of the Lord he is no longer the master of his own life, but he owes complete obedience to the One Who set him free.

Paul's imprisonment lends a lot of weight to his admonition. His life for the Lord speaks more loudly than his words. In vs. 1 he tells the church that their life, the way they live, should be the core of their testimony. The KJV puts it a little more penetratingly: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called," "Walk worthy of the vocation." The KJV uses the expression "walk" seven times in this epistle. The NIV translates it six times with "live." The message of the Gospel has to be translated in our behavior. This is the message that James proclaims so forcefully in his epistle. There seem to be two sides to our being a new creation in Christ: the Holy Spirit generates new life in us, but it is our responsibility to live it. This responsibility can only be carried out in close fellowship with the Lord. Our walking consists of a series of acts of surrender. When we realize that our behavior is not consistent with the salvation we received, we have to confess and to ask Him to bring about in us the changes that are necessary. Our walk with the Lord will be worthy of the message only if we lean upon Him.

There is a lot of similarity between Paul's advise to the church in the verses 2 and 3 and parallel portions in Philippians and Colossians. The emphasis in these verses is upon unity. We understand what threatens to break up unity, if we turn Paul's words around. Unity will be disrupted if we have a lack of humility, gentleness, patience, and love. In any case of a church split, we will find this evinced. Unity has to be maintained, not organized. People who share the experience of salvation will find unity among themselves. The realization that we have been washed by the same blood and that we are loved by the same Person will automatically bond us together. The enemy of our souls will make every effort to disrupt this. And he does this by stimulating our pride, making us unkind toward others, impatient, and lacking love. As soon as we concentrate upon these points, his strategy will become obvious. Splits occur because people are blind toward the enemy's wiles.

Then Paul proceeds to show the foundation of our unity in a series of seven "one's": one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. This is the reality we are facing. The body has started to fall apart, because we change the definitions. Some of the expressions of unity are doctrinal, such as "hope," "faith," "baptism," others are experimental. The breakdown of doctrinal definitions occurs when there is a lack of humility, gentleness, patience, and love. When our behavior deviates from the text, we change the text. We see how important doctrine is. Unity does not mean uniformity. The use of the image of the body illustrates this. In Romans and I Corinthians Paul explains this in quite some detail. "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."<sup>243</sup> And: "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I do not need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I do not need you!' And the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unrepresentable are treated with special modesty."<sup>244</sup>

"One Spirit!" The unity of the body is the unity of the Spirit. Paul does not so much stress the singleness of the Holy Spirit here, as if he wants to say that there are not two or three Holy Spirits, but that it is the same Holy Spirit, who is in each one of us. Paul expresses this beautifully: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body; whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free; and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Rom. 12:4,5

<sup>244</sup> I Cor. 12:12-23

<sup>245</sup> I Cor. 12:13

The unity of believers is a spiritual matter. True unity is found only among people who are filled with the Holy Spirit. The unity that modern Christians try to sell us in these days is a vague feeling of belonging, but it has nothing to do with the biblical concept of unity. Malcom Muggeridge said that it is easier now for Christians to become one, because there is less and less they have to agree about. But unity that is the result of an erosion of doctrines, is no unity. To the contrary, the only real unity is based on a clear understanding of the message of the Bible.

The word for "one hope" seems to have lost its meaning in the church. So few people are taking the "Parousia," the return of the Lord Jesus, seriously. At best we hope to die well. The comfort of the early church was that Jesus would return with their loved ones who had gone ahead of them. As Paul states in his letter to the Thessalonians: "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words."<sup>246</sup>

And elsewhere Paul speaks of this hope as "the blessed hope," by which he means the return of the Lord. "While we wait for the blessed hope; the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."<sup>247</sup>

"One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (vs. 5). The three terms refer basically to the same thing, the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. It starts with the recognition of the lordship of Jesus. This implies submission and obedience. It is only if we accept His supremacy that our confession that He came to earth to take upon Himself our sins makes any sense. Paul condenses the faith to these three basic facts: Christ died for our sins, He was buried and raised on the third day. "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, That he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."<sup>248</sup> The baptism, referred to, is not necessarily baptism in water or the mode in which this was done, but the baptism in the Holy Spirit, which is mentioned in the Corinthian epistle: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body; whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free; and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."<sup>249</sup> I suppose that in Paul's days there was no diversity of mode of water baptism, but I am sure that the reference here is not to the outward sign, but to the inner reality.

Ultimately all that Christ has done for us in salvation and regeneration leads to fellowship with the Father. "Who is over all and through all and in all." Of course Paul does not mean to imply here that God is the Father of all creatures in a universal way, regardless of whether they have repented or not. The topic is the unity of the church. We are only one in God, the Father, if we acknowledge one Lord, have one faith and are baptized in one Spirit. Only then will the love of Christ unite us, according to what He said in His prayer: "That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."<sup>250</sup>

Paul never confuses unity with uniformity. Therefore he adds in vs. 7 and following that there is great diversity in the body. No two members are exactly the same. Christ apportioned different grace to each one of us. The gifts mentioned in this chapter are functions of leadership, as stated in vs. 11: "It was he who gave some to be Apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers."

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<sup>246</sup> I Thess 4:13-18

<sup>247</sup> Titus 2:13

<sup>248</sup> I Cor. 15:3,4

<sup>249</sup> I Cor. 12:13

<sup>250</sup> John 17:21,23

The quotation in vs. 8 comes from the Psalms: "When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious; that you, O LORD God, might dwell there."<sup>251</sup> The reversal of "you received gifts from men" to "gave gifts to men" is due to the fact that Paul quotes from the Septuagint. Evidently, the Hebrew would allow either interpretation. The Holy Spirit takes great liberties with words and often exploits double meanings. A good example of this is in the Gospel of John: where Caiaphas unwittingly prophesied: "You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish. He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation."<sup>252</sup>

In Psalm 68 David describes a military victory, in which God intervened and received the tithes of the spoils, in a similar fashion as Abraham tithed after defeating the kings.<sup>253</sup> But in Ephesians Paul describes the Ascension of Christ. He elaborates on this in vs. 9 and 10 by alluding to the incarnation, the death, and resurrection of our Lord. All this is done for us, in rather veiled terms. It could be that he quotes from an existing hymn, and that the sound would be more familiar to the readers of his time than to us.

*The Tydale commentary*, quoting Bruce, suggests that this psalm was associated with Pentecost in the synagogue lectionary. In a footnote the commentary says: "The Targum on the Psalms, that may involve an interpretation going back to pre-Christian times, has 'Thou ascendedst up to the firmament, O prophet Moses, thou tookest captives captive, thou didst teach the words of the law, thou gavest them as gifts to the children of men.' " Other commentators feel that either Paul changed the words, or used a changed version that was common to the readers of his time.

It is important to see the main thought, that is, that Jesus connected His Ascension with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit when He says: "But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."<sup>254</sup> The coming of the Holy Spirit upon believers and their placement in the body of Christ as members with separate functions, is inseparable. The Spirit melts us together in love, but, at the same time, He brings out the distinctions that make us unique.

Quite a bit is made of the verses 9, and 10 where Paul backtracks and mentions the incarnation and death, and the descent into hell. ("What does 'he ascended' mean except that He also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.") I believe that Paul merely wants to emphasize the price that was paid for our unity and diversity in the outpouring to the Holy Spirit. Jesus could say easily: "I am going away." But what an exodus! It implied the agony of the crucifixion, the shame, the mockery and the rejection. It was the deepest point in the history of the universe, that had to be passed in order for us to be baptized in the Holy Spirit and to be made living members of the church of Christ.

I do not believe in the misinterpretation of the words of Peter: ("through whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water ...") as if Christ actually preached after His death to people who were in hell. The logical interpretation seems to be that it was the Spirit of Christ, who preached when Noah preached to the people of his time, the ones who are now in prison because of their disobedience.

In 4:10: "He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe," Paul is speaking about the gifts the Lord gave to the church on earth through His Ascension. But at the same time he links the church to the fullness of Jesus' glory in His Ascension. He fills the whole universe. In ch. 1:23 he calls the church: "The fullness of Him who fills everything in every way." Paul speaks in this chapter not only about the maturity of the church, although that seems to be the main purpose for the giving of the gifts, but also that the ultimate purpose of our maturity is the filling of the universe with the glory of God.

The gifts Paul mentions in vs. 11 are people whom the Lord appointed to certain functions in the church. "Some to be Apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers." They may be complemented by the gifts of the Spirit, such as are mentioned in the Corinthian epistle: "workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of

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<sup>251</sup> Ps. 68:18

<sup>252</sup> John 12:50,51

<sup>253</sup> See Gen. 14:20

<sup>254</sup> John 16:7

administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues,"<sup>255</sup> but they are not the same. In this context the emphasis is on the person, not primarily on his ability, although it is hard to separate the one from the other.

The "Apostles" form the first link between the Lord Himself and those who believed without having seen Him. From I Cor. 9:1 we may deduct that an Apostle was a person who had witnessed the resurrection of Jesus. Their testimony was proof of the truth of Jesus' victory over death, and as such they formed the foundation of the church. They are the fulfillment of Jesus promise: "on this *petra* I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."<sup>256</sup> From this definition we conclude that there was only one generation of Apostles.

The second group mentioned are the "prophets." In the Old Testament the prophets were men or women upon whom the Spirit of God descended so that they could pass on God's Word to men. Although this kind of prophet has not completely ceased to exist in the New Testament, the establishment of the Canon has brought about fundamental changes. Probably the best definition of a prophet is: "everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort."<sup>257</sup> This can mean speaking under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, about things that are not mentioned in the Bible; it can also mean, and probably this is most applicable in our time, giving an exposition of biblical truth under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; that is preaching in the right sense of the word.

The word "evangelist" is also found in Acts where it is used of Philip, "one of the Seven."<sup>258</sup> He must be the Philip who was chosen to be a deacon.<sup>259</sup> Paul charges Timothy to do the work of an evangelist.<sup>260</sup> *The Tyndale Commentary* takes this to mean that the evangelists were itinerant preachers. *Barclay* calls them "the rank and file missionaries of the Church." According to *Tyndale* the words "pastors" and "teachers" are linked together by the same article in Greek. So we should read pastor-teachers. The commentary says: "It is possible that this phrase describes the ministries of the local church, whereas the first three categories are regarded as belonging to the universal Church." Jesus gives Peter three times the charge to feed His lambs and to take care of His sheep, and again to feed them.<sup>261</sup> The pastor is the shepherd of the flock, under the direct supervision of the Lord Himself, "the Good Shepherd" as He calls Himself;<sup>262</sup> and "that great Shepherd of the sheep,"<sup>263</sup> as the writer of the Hebrew epistle calls Him. The task of the pastor-teacher was to feed the flock by bringing the word of God home to them. Jesus says to His disciples: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."<sup>264</sup> In order for the words of Christ to remain in us, we will have to be taught those words.

In summary, we can say that the Apostles assure us of the truth that Jesus defeated death for us all. The prophets speak to us in behalf of God and bring us into fellowship with Him. The evangelists travel around to bring the word to those who have not heard yet, and the pastor-teachers feed the local church. This last category does this by putting their lives on the line. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus gave His life for us. Any shepherd should be willing to give his life for his flock. This is what John says in his epistle: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."<sup>265</sup>

The purpose of these functions of leadership in the church are, according to vs. 12, "To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." In order for the church to start moving, to produce the "works of service," there has to be a celebration of Jesus' resurrection; there has to be prophecy, outreach and teaching, backed up by sacrificial love. Jesus builds His church in

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<sup>255</sup> I Cor. 12:28

<sup>256</sup> Matt. 16:18

<sup>257</sup> I Cor. 14:3

<sup>258</sup> Acts 21:8

<sup>259</sup> Acts 6:1-6

<sup>260</sup> II Tim. 4:5

<sup>261</sup> John 21:15-17

<sup>262</sup> John 10:11

<sup>263</sup> Heb. 13:20

<sup>264</sup> John 15:7

<sup>265</sup> I John 3:16

order to fill "the whole universe." The preparation on earth aims for spiritual maturity. In vs. 13, our goal is stated: "Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." If one observes the practice of the average church almost anywhere in the world, it seems like a caricature of what we read here. The church of God that is supposed to march like a mighty army, looks like a group of kids, playing war with toy arms. Very rarely, like during the Welsh revival, or in the church of Blumhardt in Möttlingen, or at the meetings with Herman Zaiss in Germany, do we get the feeling that there is a power within the church, that makes the devil tremble. We should be dissatisfied with the present in a holy fashion. We should protest against the social entertainment clubs, by, first of all, becoming mature members of the body and looking to the goal to achieve, the fullness of the universe, and by starting to claim territory for our Lord on earth.

Maturity consists of "unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God." The word love is written all over this. If we love the Lord with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves, we cannot miss growing in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was Paul's passion, as he states in Philippians: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, And so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

The mention of "the works of service" brings to mind also the parable of the talents Jesus uses in Matthew.<sup>266</sup> Our works of service are supposed to increase with use. What we do on earth has a bearing on what our occupation will be in heaven. In Luke Jesus uses a similar parable, which is slightly different in that every servant receives the same amount. To the servant that multiplied his "mina" ten times the master replies: "Well done, my good servant! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities." To the one that gained five "mina" he says: "You take charge of five cities."<sup>267</sup> We learn more about the correlation between what is done on earth and the responsibilities in heaven from Jesus' remark: "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"<sup>268</sup>

Our functioning as members in the body of Christ is a small matter compared to our reigning with Christ in eternity. But what makes us think that we will be able to do the task then, if we are not faithful in the smaller things on earth?

#### 4:13-16

*... until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.*

*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*

*From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

In vs. 14 Paul refers in passing to the dangers of false doctrine and probably the alluring influence of Judaism. He warns against being "tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming." Functioning as

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<sup>266</sup> Matt. 25:14-30

<sup>267</sup> Luke 19:12-27

<sup>268</sup> Luke 16:10-12

members of the body involves being rooted in the truth of the Word of God. Sound doctrine is no luxury, and it is no matter of personal opinion. The Holy Spirit does allow for different shades of understanding in peripheral matters, but heresy in the basic matters is sin. It is also important to discern the spirits, as John says: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, But every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world."<sup>269</sup> Behind "the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming" is the spirit of the enemy that tries to distract us from our vital and meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ.

In vs. 15 the words "speaking the truth in love" refers to the intimate and open relationship that should exist between believers. We should not be critical of one another, but if we see that our brother or sister has a problem that harms the fellowship with the Lord and with each other, the matter should not be left untouched. Truth and love do not exclude each other. Love may cover a multitude of sins,<sup>270</sup> but it does not ignore them. It accepts the sinner, but it rejects the lie. Jesus gives specific instructions concerning this point in Matthew on what to do if we are witnesses to the sin of a brother.<sup>271</sup> Again love should be written in fat letter over these words. Verse 15 implies that there is growth in confession, in uncovering of the truth. The lie makes sick, stunts growth, and eventually kills. Love stimulates health and growth. Growth is in Christ. "We will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ." This strengthening of intimacy with the Lord will inevitably result in the bonding together with one another. If love for the Lord does not demonstrate itself in brotherly love, we deceive ourselves into thinking that we love the Lord. If only we would realize how our exercise down below would benefit us eternally, we would make more of an effort to play our part as members in the body.

#### 4:17-32

***So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.***

***They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.***

***Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.***

***You, however, did not come to know Christ that way.***

***Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.***

***You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.***

***Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.***

***"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.***

***He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.***

***Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.***

***And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.***

***Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.***

***Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.***

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<sup>269</sup> I John 4:1-3

<sup>270</sup> I Pet. 4:8

<sup>271</sup> Matt. 18:15-17

Beginning with vs. 17 through the end of the chapter, Paul compares these Christians with their heathen counterparts. Not too long ago they were in the same category, but we get the impression that not all the traces of the old life have disappeared. Especially toward the end of this chapter, Paul goes into quite some detail, and this makes us understand that the old heathen habits die slowly. It is good to realize how patient the Lord is with us. We are often so little aware of the gravity of things we do and how dishonoring our habits may be to the Lord. David's prayer: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting,"<sup>272</sup> should be our constant prayer.

I believe that the purpose for painting the picture of the heathen in the verses 17-19 is not only to remind the believers where they came from, but also to have them mentally turn this negative into a positive, so that they can know what they should be. Paul calls the thinking of the Gentiles "futile," that is, it does not produce anything of worth. He calls them "ignorant" because they have no fellowship with God, and he says that lack of fellowship has caused a hardening of the heart. He also charges that their excessive preoccupation with sexual matters is caused by a loss of "sensitivity."

If we turn this negative picture around, we get a clear image of what a Christian is like. Contrary to the common concept, Christians are thinking people and their thinking produces tangible results. Fellowship with God produces knowledge and sensitivity. Atheists deny that man can have true knowledge. Francis Schaefer says that man does not have complete knowledge, but this does not mean that he does not have true knowledge. Paul confirms this by putting it in an indirect way.

It is beautiful that the word "sensitivity" is used in connection with sexuality. Paul does not use the word "sexuality" but sensuality, which means an uncontrolled or uncontrollable desire for sex. The word sensitivity in this connection implies that sex is meant to be experienced within the framework of love and commitment, such as in a marriage relationship. Sensitivity is the respect for the other person, his (or her) needs and desires. Sensuality considers the other party as an object upon whom one's desires can be satisfied, instead of a person with whom joy and intimacy can be shared. That is the difference between a believer and an unbeliever in this domain of life.

In the NIV vs. 20 says: "You, however, did not come to know Christ that way," and it speaks about a knowing that is more than getting to know a person. The KJV expresses it: "But ye have not so learned Christ." Paul speaks of the knowledge that is the result of the indwelling of Christ in our hearts. This is what happens when the words of Jesus become a reality in us: "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."<sup>273</sup> The transformation is not automatic; love will not force obedience, but we will start to realize that if we really love the Lord, we cannot continue to live as we used to. The indwelling of Christ is no tyranny, but the conflict between His presence and the sin in our lives will become unbearable to us. There are things we will not be able to change without His help, but He leaves the initiative with us.

That is why Paul puts it in a way that may sound awkward to us. "Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus." It is up to us to put the two and two together and to realize that the old and the new do not fit together and that we should do something about this. God has made us a new creation, but we have to start wearing the clothing that corresponds with this newness. Paul says the same in Colossians: "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices. And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."<sup>274</sup> It is a matter of starting to behave according to what we are.

In vs. 24 the Apostle says that this "new self, [is] created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." The transformation of our self is a process that we develop more rapidly as our relationship with God becomes more intimate. Our vision of Jesus Christ will become clearer, and in the end the transformation will be complete, as John says in his epistle: "But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."<sup>275</sup>

Having said this, Paul goes into quite some detail that may sound shocking to us. Few Westerners realize how much their culture has been influenced by Christian morals. Even atheists have notions about what is right and what is wrong. It is hard for us to imagine how difficult it is for people from a third world

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<sup>272</sup> Ps. 139:23,24

<sup>273</sup> John 14:23

<sup>274</sup> Col. 3:9,10

<sup>275</sup> I John 3:2



culture to make the break with things that were culturally acceptable to them. John Harvey told me of the shock Western Christians received when they heard how much Christians from former communist countries, people who love the Lord, would lie. Paul did not address a society steeped in Christian values. We are presently at the point in our Western society where many traces of Christian heritage have been lost, and we are discovering that there is a difference between “decency,” “family values,” and “holiness,” based on an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul mentions five sins by name: lying, anger, stealing, dirty talk, and bitterness. Even in our Western society, where, as mentioned above, Christian values are still held as a norm, it is shocking to see how much of these five are well and alive, even in the church. Each point is worth individual consideration.

“Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body” (vs. 25). Each of the points is a hindrance to the normal functioning of the body. But not being open and above board is the first one mentioned. Often this is related to the fact that we are not open to ourselves. Nobody puts it better than Shakespeare in *Hamlet*, where Polonius says to his son Leartes: “This above all, to thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.” We do not have to tell everybody what we think of him or her, and we are under no obligation to proclaim the “four-square truth” in every case, but every lie draws us away from the Lord and brings us closer to the devil.

“In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (vs. 26). Not all anger is sin. God is angry. The word most commonly used in the New Testament about God's anger is “wrath.” But in Hebrews we read: “So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’”<sup>276</sup> And in John's Gospel we find a demonstration of Jesus' anger, when He cleans out the temple with a whip.<sup>277</sup> There is such a thing as righteous anger. There is, however, anger that is sin. What is called “psychological anger” is a complex of signals, received in childhood, that have been wrongly digested. Psychologists may consider this as a sickness. If this is true, anger is connected with the fall. There may be a cause for our anger, such as was the case with Jesus when He cleansed the temple. But in sinful human beings even anger-with-a-cause will start a chain reaction of emotions and actions that are sinful. Psychological anger will often cause reactions that are way out of proportion to the thing that initiated it. I believe that this is what Paul means. He does allow for anger, but he warns against the duration of it. We should not let ourselves go and draw it out. Feeling angry and giving vent to our emotions may be experienced as a relief. But we should be careful in that condition, because the devil knows how to take advantage of us. Every evening we should clean our slate.

Our challenge to work is given in vs. 28: “He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.” Paul addresses Christians here! Even after regeneration, the habit of stealing may take a hard time to die. There are some sins the Lord convicts us of immediately at our conversion, but some will come slowly to the surface and will have to be dealt with as we become aware of them. Stealing does not always mean emptying the boss's cash box. It may consist of taking things that we consider too trivial to worry about. Sanctification will bring about honesty in detail. Evidently, Paul talks to people who made stealing their livelihood. Maybe we should put the stress more upon “doing an honest day of work” instead of the taking of other people's possessions. If we do not earn our own living, we live on other people's earnings. The context of this verse implies that this is a form of stealing. In modern welfare states, this mentality that believes that the world owes them a living, has taken a hold of Christians also. Paul clearly condemns this here. Elsewhere Paul says: “For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat.’”<sup>278</sup> But Paul says more than that a man should support himself; the thrust of this verse is that we should make money so we can give it away! This is exactly the opposite of stealing. Stealing is taking someone else's goods for ourselves. Paul's definition of working is making money to benefit someone else. Very few people get this far, but the power of the Holy Spirit can and will transform us into humans that are unselfish and generous. He then makes us aware of the needs of other people.

Paul, vs. 29, continues with admonitions that we bless others in our conversation: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to

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<sup>276</sup> Heb. 3:11; 4:3

<sup>277</sup> John 2:14-16

<sup>278</sup> II Thess. 3:10

their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” We characterized “unwholesome talk” above as “dirty talk,” and that is probably the intent of the Apostle. The KJV calls it “corrupt communication.” I do not believe that Paul rules out humor with this verse, but as Christians we have to be selective in our jokes. It certainly does not mean that we have to preach at each other. I can imagine that the Lord’s table conversation with His disciples and the discussions during their travel on the road must have been entertaining to the highest degree. Nobody ever made more penetrating remarks than our Lord; His words hit the core every time. Pious talk can be a cover-up of inner insincerity, but if our hearts are full of the presence of the Lord, our conversation will be clean and sparkling. In Colossians brings Paul this out clearly: “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”<sup>279</sup> We should be fun to listen to. James exposes our duplicity clearer than anybody else. “Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.”<sup>280</sup>

It is in connection with our conversation that Paul says, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit.” The presence of the Holy Spirit in us, which is actually the presence of Christ Himself, should govern the things we say. It is comparatively easy to say the right things when we talk about spiritual issues, about the Bible, or about God. It is in our small talk that we so easily lose grip. I do not believe that the Lord objects to our talking about the weather, or other trivial things, but we have to be conscious of the fact that the Lord is the silent listener to our conversation. Some of the things we say make the Spirit of Jesus in us cringe. If we love Him, we will keep our mouths shut. David prayed: “Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips.”<sup>281</sup> This prayer, uttered in sincerity, will keep us from grieving the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah records his experience in seeing the Lord: “ ‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty,’ ” This is probably the best illustration of awareness of the presence of God and how He influences the way we speak.

Paul sums it all up in vs. 31: “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.” Bitterness and anger are closely related to since their roots are usually the same. Bitterness is mostly anger against God, and it is easy to blame God for the wrong signals we received in our childhood. Unless we understand what happened to us, and why we feel the way we do, and tell God about our feelings against Him and ask Him to take them away, we will have a hard time overcoming bitterness. God is not responsible for the sinful environment in which we were born and grew up. What God said to Moses: “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering,”<sup>282</sup> can be applied to most of us. God loves us and is concerned about our suffering. Jesus came to earth and died on the cross, to forgive our sins and also heal us of the scars of our youth. Bitterness can be forgiven and taken away.

The KJV talks about “clamor” instead of “brawling.” Probably the meaning of the word has to do with our being noisy, our shouting and ranting. Maybe even the slander fits the whole picture of blaming others for what happened to us. The problem is that we live in an environment created by the devil. And when we react wrongly to the things that happen to us, he turns the circumstances around and uses them as a weapon against us. He delights in our anger and bitterness. That is why he made the mess we are in to start with. He entices us into sin and then he turns around and accuses us before God. Seeing through his devices is a great help in getting out of our misery. There is healing for everything in the love of God.

Paul directs his followers in verse 32: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” The sins mentioned in the previous verse govern our inter human relationships. The only antidote against lying, anger, stealing, dirty talk, and bitterness is the Holy Spirit, whom God has sent into our lives as a seal, a guarantee for the heritage that is waiting for us. The fruit of the Spirit will be kindness and compassion for our neighbor. The key in our relationship is our realization of being forgiven. If I understand what God has done for me in acquitting me of the guilt of my sin, I will never have much of a problem to forgive others.

There are several parables in the New Testament that elaborate upon this theme. Jesus tells Simon, the Pharisee, the parable of the two men who owe a money lender 500 and 50 denarii. Neither of them can

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<sup>279</sup> Col. 4:6

<sup>280</sup> James 3:10

<sup>281</sup> Ps. 141:3

<sup>282</sup> Ex. 3:7

pay and both are forgiven. Simon never got the point that he was as much forgiven as the woman, who poured ointment on Jesus feet.<sup>283</sup> Jesus tells another parable of the servant who was forgiven ten thousand talents, but who did not want to forgive a fellow servant, who owed him only 100 denarii.<sup>284</sup> It is amazing how much more alert we seem to be concerning other people's sin, than we are with our own. Again in Matthew Jesus asks: "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?"<sup>285</sup> This sums it all up. We will have to ask the Lord to remind us from time to time how much He has forgiven us, lest we have a tendency to forget. The sentence in the Lord's prayer: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors,"<sup>286</sup> should help to keep us on the right track. It is exactly the realization that our brother has been washed of his sin in the same blood as we were, that creates the strong bond between us.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5:1-20

***Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.***

***But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.***

***Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.***

***For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person-- such a man is an idolater-- has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.***

***Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.***

***Therefore do not be partners with them.***

***For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.***

***Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.***

***For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.***

***But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."***

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

***Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.***

***Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.***

***Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

In this chapter and in the next Paul continues the exhortations he started in chapter 4. Most of what he says here parallels Col. 3:18-4:8. In this epistle the Apostle goes deeper in his advice, and he elaborates more on the demonic background that governs human sinful behavior. Ch. 6:10-17 is a classic statement on the powers of darkness.

The first two verses connect chapter four to the previous one. We should forgive as we have been forgiven by God. Here he goes further: "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children. And live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Not only should we forgive the sins of others, we should be ready to sacrifice our lives for others as Christ sacrificed His life for us. We find this same thought, that is to imitate Christ, in Philippians: "Your

<sup>283</sup> Luke 7:41-48

<sup>284</sup> Matt. 18:23-35

<sup>285</sup> Matt. 7:3,4

<sup>286</sup> Matt. 6:12

attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."<sup>287</sup> In John's epistle we read: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."<sup>288</sup> God expects us to love our fellow men to the point that we are willing to lay down our lives for them. This, of course, is completely opposite from our natural tendencies. Unless we have accepted the sacrifice of Christ in our behalf and have been regenerated and filled with the Holy Spirit, this is an impossibility. I do not believe that we can work ourselves up to this point. We should not even try to imagine ourselves dying for other people. If we think ourselves capable of doing such a thing, we are treading on dangerous ground. Peter's confession in Matthew: "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you."<sup>289</sup> led to his immediate downfall. There is no point in deciding to die for someone else in a hypothetical situation. We can only pray that the Lord will make us willing when we are called upon to offer the ultimate sacrifice.

On the other hand, we cannot love others with the love of Christ, unless we are willing to go the whole way for the other person. John defines love by saying: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."<sup>290</sup> It is true in general that we cannot live to the full until we have faced the issue of death. This pertains to our serving others in love also.

Most of what Paul says in vs. 3-7 should be seen within the framework of marriage. The subject is treated more elaborately in vs. 21-33. In the same way the first mention of the influence of the powers of darkness is given in vs. 8-14, and the fuller scope is shown in ch. 6:10-17.

The Apostle goes into more detail about the sin of sexual immorality than anywhere else in his epistles, with the exception of Rom. 2. These verses give the strongest condemnation of pornography in the Bible.

Sexual desires are part of God's creation. He invented sex. In the end of this chapter Paul explains the actual meaning of sexual unity in marriage. Because it expresses more clearly than anything else the intimacy between Christ and His bride, the church, the devil has gone overboard in trying to let men make a caricature of it. Pornography has as much in common with real sex as a caricature with a real person. For some reason which I do not understand, the enemy has managed to entrench himself more deeply into this part of the sinful behavior of men than in any other domain. The "fragrant offering and sacrifice" of vs. 2 is a reference to the first three sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus. (The burnt offering, the grain offering and the fellowship offering). There we find the phrase "an aroma pleasing to the LORD." The phrase is also mentioned once in connection with the sin offering. It seems to me that it is particularly in the offerings that have no reference to sin, the ones that express the surrender to the Father of Christ out of love, that Paul draws his example. After all, we cannot imitate Christ in His death on the cross to pay for our sins. But there is a sense in which we can surrender ourselves to God because we love Him. The burnt offering expresses the love of the Second Person of the Trinity to the First Person. This, of course, is something completely beyond the realm of our comprehension.

Throughout the ages, Christians have struggled with the problem of sexual immorality. Often the issue has been grossly misunderstood. Some have come to the conclusion that the sex drive itself was wrong, as if God had nothing to do with that. Paul does not advise abstinence in marriage, except for some specific purpose for a short period of time. In the Corinthian epistle he says: "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."<sup>291</sup> Augustine, Tolstoy, and Gandhi had opinions about this that deviate clearly from the Lord's intent. The problem is that many do not understand that the devil hates sex that is an expression of true love in the framework of marriage. I believe that there are demons that are particularly specializing in tempting people in their sexual life. They make us concentrate on the wrong person in order to have us

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<sup>287</sup> Phil. 2:5-11

<sup>288</sup> I John 3:16

<sup>289</sup> Matt. 26:35

<sup>290</sup> I John 3:16

<sup>291</sup> I Cor. 7:3-5

commit adultery, fornication or homosexual acts. Sex-demons hate real sex; their only intent is to remove the sanctity from it and rob it of its meaning.

All of the above does not mean that born again Christians are not susceptible to sexual temptations. It is easy to say "there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality," but the hint is there. Paul doesn't mean the temptation, of course, but the practice. Since we know how susceptible we are, there are several things we must do. Job said: "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl."<sup>292</sup> We have to realize that the temptation starts with our eyes. If we can keep ourselves from looking at the wrong thing, we have gained the first victory. Sometimes we cannot help seeing, but it is certainly our fault if we look for the second time. We can ask God to keep a guard in front of our eyes, just as we can ask Him to keep us from saying the wrong thing.

Secondly we can flee. Joseph did this when Potiphar's wife tempted him. We read: "She (Potiphar's wife) caught him by his cloak and said, 'Come to bed with me!' But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house."<sup>293</sup> It is foolish to think that we will be stronger than the temptation. It is in connection with temptations from which we should flee that we can quote David, who says: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."<sup>294</sup>

Then we can put our trust in the Lord, remembering Paul's words: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."<sup>295</sup> Jude calls God "Him who is able to keep you from falling"<sup>296</sup> This should be our confidence.

The verses 5-7 are a strong condemnation of the attitude that once we have accepted the Lord Jesus as our Savior, nothing can keep us from going to heaven. If we refuse to be sanctified, we have no guarantee. As a matter of fact Paul says clearly that "(we) can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person; such a man is an idolater; has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." And the writer to the Hebrews says: "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." This is a very serious injunction. I am afraid that many people who say they have accepted Christ as their Savior will be disappointed at the day of judgment, because they have not drawn the consequences of this acceptance. Accepting Christ, without surrendering our lives to His lordship, is useless.

This is no effort to add to our salvation by doing good works. There are two dangers that threaten us. The one Paul argues against in the epistle to the Galatians, is to try to be saved by keeping the law. The second is to deny the Holy Spirit access to our lives, so that the law can be fulfilled in us. As Paul says in Romans: "... that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."<sup>297</sup>

Paul continues to warn us in vs. 6: "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient." We may believe in eternal security, as the Calvinists do; we should, however, live our daily lives as Armenians, fearing that we can lose our salvation. Obedience does not cause our salvation, but without obedience we are not saved. How can we accept the love of Christ and not demonstrate any love in return? And love without obedience is not love. Jesus says: "If you love me, you will obey what I command."<sup>298</sup> Any preaching that does not emphasize obedience is qualified by the Apostle as "empty words."

In the verses 8-14 Paul makes reference to the darkness. Obviously, this has to do with the influence of the devil upon human lives. Peter speaks about this when he says: "... that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light."<sup>299</sup> Paul says the same in the epistle to the Colossians: "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom

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<sup>292</sup> Job 31:1

<sup>293</sup> Gen. 39:12

<sup>294</sup> Ps. 46:1

<sup>295</sup> I Cor. 10:13

<sup>296</sup> Jude vs. 24

<sup>297</sup> Rom. 8:4

<sup>298</sup> John 14:15

<sup>299</sup> I Pet. 2:9

of the Son he loves,"<sup>300</sup> or as the KJV says: "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." God has freed us from the power of the devil and He called us to His wonderful light. We have to obey that call, otherwise we will find ourselves sliding back into the influence of the darkness.

In ch. 5:8 Paul declares poignantly: "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light." Not only did we live in darkness, we were darkness. In the same way have we, who live in the light, become light. God's light does not only shine upon us, it shines through us. Jesus says: "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden."<sup>301</sup> Darkness hides, light exposes. Light has a condemning quality, as well as a transforming one. That is why Jesus says in elsewhere: "Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."<sup>302</sup> David confirms the same truth in the psalms: "The LORD is my light and my salvation."<sup>303</sup> It is through exposure to the light that we are saved. That is, we have to see ourselves in the light of God and confess the ugliness of what we see, so that the Lord can take the filth and make it into something beautiful.

I do not know how much solid ground there is to accept the Dutch translation of vs. 13 "All that is exposed becomes light."<sup>304</sup> The inference seems to be that our exposed sins become fuel for the grace of God, so that what was corruption in us becomes luminous. The Greek word *phaneroumenon* evidently leaves open a wide variety of interpretations. There is enough proof in the Bible that what the Dutch expresses is true. It is through the forgiveness of our sins that we obtain knowledge of salvation. Zacharias says this in his song of praise: "To give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins."<sup>305</sup> What God does with our sin is beyond human comprehension. I do not mean only the way He brings about cleansing through the blood of Christ, but the fact that He touches that which is evil and makes it into a positive factor, and more. Joseph expresses this to his brothers who had meant to kill him, but who sold him for a profit instead. He says: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."<sup>306</sup> Or as the KJV puts it: "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good..." The same thought seems to be the theme of the parables of the yeast.<sup>307</sup> God permits evil for the purposes of increasing the effect of His grace. That which the devil intended to be our undoing, becomes our crown when God touches it.

Verse 14 is probably part of a first century Christian hymn. "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." *The Tyndale Commentary* points out the scriptural background of this quotation in Isaiah: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."<sup>308</sup> And elsewhere in Isaiah: "But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead."<sup>309</sup> "Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor, O Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again."<sup>310</sup> "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners."<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Col. 1:13 (NIV)

<sup>301</sup> Matt. 5:14

<sup>302</sup> John 3:20,21

<sup>303</sup> Ps. 27:1

<sup>304</sup> "Want al wat tot het licht komt, is licht"

<sup>305</sup> Luke 1:77

<sup>306</sup> Gen. 50:20

<sup>307</sup> Matt. 13:33

<sup>308</sup> Isa. 9:2

<sup>309</sup> Isa. 26:19

<sup>310</sup> Isa. 52:1

<sup>311</sup> Isa. 61:1

However the hymn combines these scriptural thoughts into a verse that speaks of the work of Christ. Augustine was converted when he heard a voice singing the verse from Romans: "The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed."<sup>312</sup> We have to remember, though, that Paul writes here to Christians. This is not an appeal to unconverted people to repent and accept forgiveness. It is addressed to Christians who either have not completely severed the bonds of darkness in which they used to live, or who have slipped back under the spell of the evil one. A clear understanding of what is meant in the truths, expounded in the beginning of this epistle, the content of "all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies" and our being seated with Him in the heavenlies, should help us to compare our position with our present life style and make the necessary corrections. As children of light, we are called to walk in the light. We become light when Christ shines on us.

Sin makes us fall asleep. It is only in the presence of the Lord that we wake up to the reality of life. Zechariah expresses his spiritual experience as a waking up in his fourth vision: "Then the angel who talked with me returned and wakened me, as a man is wakened from his sleep."<sup>313</sup>

The wisdom Paul advises us to practice in vs. 15 is a practical discernment of how to apply salvation in the situation in which we find ourselves every day. In ch. 1:17 Paul has already said: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." Here this knowledge has to be applied. The word "be very careful" is in Greek *akribos*. Moffat translates it: "be strictly careful then about the way you live." *The Tyndale Commentary* quotes Andrew Murray, who says: "He bids them keep a close watch on the principles by which they are regulating their lives." In Colossians Paul said: "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity."<sup>314</sup> Here he says basically the same. Our careful way of living is meant to be a testimony to the people outside, who observe us. But in the context of this chapter, the motive is not in the first place to show others what it means to be a Christian, but to be pleasing to God. This becomes obvious in vs. 17, where understanding the will of God is the goal of wisdom.

In verse 16: "Making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil," Paul uses a term that is borrowed from the market world. *Exagorazo* means to buy up. The RSV margin gives the reading "buying up the opportunity." This is the wisdom Paul mentioned in the previous verse. It is probably best illustrated in Jesus' parable of the shrewd manager in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus' condemning conclusion in is: "For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light."<sup>315</sup> God expects us to be shrewd in the affairs of the kingdom. I believe that this is the underlying truth also in the parables of the talents and the mina.<sup>316</sup> The man who does not make an effort to understand the will of the Lord is a fool, according to vs. 17. There are general areas in which the will of the Lord is clear because it is expressed in the Scriptures. Paul probably talks here about the personalized aspect of the will of God. Each one of us has to discover the plan that God had for our lives before we entered the world. For the majority of mankind this question is never considered. Many go through life, not even bothering to find out what God had in mind for us, thereby wasting many years that could have been fruitful. The only way to find the will of God is to surrender to it. God does not tell us His will in order that we may decide whether we will do it or not. The first step is our decision to be obedient.

The above is true as far as the direction of our life in general is concerned. It is also true in the framework of our daily walk. That seems to be the context in which Paul places it here. We have to make choices in our daily life that are in accordance with the will of God. When Paul says: "Therefore do not be foolish..." it commands literally "do not become morally foolish," *aphrones*. This implies the possibility, as *Tyndale* points out, that we may start out as wise and then backslide.

Verse 18 gives the only command in the Bible to be filled with the Holy Spirit. "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." *The Tyndale Commentary* says

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<sup>312</sup> Rom. 13:11

<sup>313</sup> Zech. 4:1

<sup>314</sup> Col. 4:5

<sup>315</sup> Luke 16:8

<sup>316</sup> Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-27

beautifully about this verse: "...the Christian knows a better way than by wine of being lifted above the depression and the joyless monotony of life, a better way of removing self-consciousness and quickening thought and word and action than by the use of intoxicants. It is by being filled with the Spirit." The same commentary also emphasizes that the tense of the verb used, (present imperative), expresses "that the experience of receiving the Holy Spirit so that every part of life is permeated and controlled by Him is not a once-for-all experience. In the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles it is repeated a number of times that the same Apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit. The practical implication is that the Christian is to leave his life open to be filled constantly and repeatedly by the divine Spirit. No NEB "let the Holy Spirit fill you."

There are different references in the Bible that compare the effect of wine upon a man with the effect the Holy Spirit has upon one's life. The exhilaration caused by the Spirit is by far the stronger.<sup>317</sup> In Jesus' last words to His disciples there is an indirect reference to a comparison between joy that is the result of drinking wine and the joy that emanates from the indwelling Holy Spirit.<sup>318</sup>

The result of the filling by the Holy Spirit is praise and thanksgiving. Paul recommends in the first place singing: "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord," (vs.19) does not necessarily mean literally quoting hymns. I suppose that "to one another" can also be taken as "with one another." The singing of some never rises above the level of "make a joyful noise." I believe it is good to maintain a balance between what is esthetically acceptable and spontaneous. The emphasis in these verses is on the joy that flows out of our fellowship with the Lord. I do not believe that the mentions of "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" is meant to limit any expression of joy to these categories. Singing is a thermometer of the spiritual life of a congregation. Unfortunately, the tendency of our time is to rub the thermometer, as if that would make the temperature go up! Some of the in vogue ways of praising the Lord are just as much the copying of a cliché as the chants of another spiritually dead church. I would be very happy if at least a few people would look for a balance between beauty and joy.

The challenge of vs. 20: "Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" should be taken in connection with the hymn singing of the previous verse. Our singing should be an expression of our gratitude to God. Paul gives the same admonition to the Thessalonians: "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." It is not only Paul's idea that we should praise God under adverse circumstances,<sup>319</sup> but the most powerful language comes from James. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds."<sup>320</sup> It takes maturity to see through the outward circumstances into the purpose of God, who allows them to happen. God is more interested in our character than in our comfort. We tend to have the opposite view, and giving thanks seems to deeply thwart the plans of our enemy. Not only are we kept from discouragement, but also our spiritual foe cannot reach his goal. There is always a shift in power in the heavenlies when God's children start to give thanks.

Giving thanks to God in everything also expresses the conviction that God is in control of our circumstances and that all circumstances can work together for good, if we love God. As Paul says in Romans: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."<sup>321</sup>

## 5:21 - 6:9

***Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.***

***Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.***

***For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.***

***Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.***

<sup>317</sup> See Ps. 4:7; Acts 2:13

<sup>318</sup> John 15:1-11

<sup>319</sup> See also Rom. 5:3-5

<sup>320</sup> James 1:2

<sup>321</sup> Rom. 8:28



***Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.***

***In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.***

***After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-- for we are members of his body.***

***"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."***

***This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church.***

***However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.***

***Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.***

***"Honor your father and mother"-- which is the first commandment with a promise-- "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."***

***Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.***

***Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.***

***Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.***

***Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.***

***And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.***

Verse 21 starts a new section: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Beginning with the following verse, through vs. 9 of the following chapter, Paul works this out in different categories. Submission to one another is a principle of the functioning of the body of Christ, and it is applied to various circumstances, such as a marriage relationship, parents-children relations, and slave-master relations. I believe what Paul is saying here is that submission begins at home. There will be no normal functioning of the body in the church, if there is no healthy relationship between husband and wife, or parents and children or those in the work place.

This submission has nothing to do with rank or ability. There is no reference to superiority; a wife does not submit to her husband because of his intelligence or strength, but because of Christ. The same goes for the church. Obedience to authority is derived from our obedience to Christ. If we cannot submit to other human beings, we demonstrate that we have not surrendered to the Lord either. It is also obvious that obedience is not above being questioned. The reference to Christ means that He is the highest authority. We should not obey human commands that go against the Word of God. If the question is whom to obey, God or man, the answer is clear. Peter's answer to the Sanhedrin was: "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God."<sup>322</sup> I believe that Paul's admonition to submit to one another is written above the whole section on relationships. So in principle submission in marriage is a mutual obligation. Obviously submission does not mean that we have to obey the whims of others without questioning. All submission to human authority, all sensitivity to the needs of others, should be within the framework of submission to Christ. The word submission sounds too harsh to us, because we take it usually to mean obedience without questioning. This is not the meaning of the word in the context in which we find it here. The husband is to be as sensitive to the needs of his wife as the wife is to be to her husband. Submission means more than being sensitive to one another. It means recognizing the order of creation. The man is the head of his wife, not because he is better, but because God has put him in that position. Somebody has to take the ultimate responsibility for what happens in a family. It is only in as much as we surrender to Christ that we will see the purpose of Paul's advice.

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<sup>322</sup> Acts 4:19

All submission is to be “out of reverence for Christ.” I believe this means that we have to submit to what is right, to what is the will of God, to love and happiness and a harmonious life together, to a normal functioning of the body of Christ. I admit that this can be a very complicated problem. Sin has given people, both men and women, a desire for power. There is no place in the body for tyranny, but tyranny is a human tendency. If Christ is the example, the way He makes His will known to His people should be our example in our relationships. The man's authority over his wife is his willingness to serve her and to lay down his life for her, just as Jesus came to serve and lay down His life for us. Jesus says about Himself: “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”<sup>323</sup> Submission by a wife to her husband should not be a problem if she has a husband who portrays the Lord Jesus to her in his attitude. Often, it turns out that the church submits herself as little to Christ as a wife submits to her husband. It is sad, but it is true. Actually the husband's task is much more difficult than the wife's. The husband has to be willing to lay down his life for his wife, though no such requirement is stated for the woman.

Actually, submission means the ultimate sacrifice. All submission that is partial is no submission at all. The husband has to follow the example of Christ, the wife has only the church's role to play. Which is easier?

The deep lesson of this whole portion is, of course, that a marriage is to express the relationship between Christ and His church. That is what gives content and meaning to a marriage. Many people get married, but few know why. When Paul says in vs. 25: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,” he uses the word *agapao* which is the word for divine love, not *erao* or *phileo*. This is significant. The real marriage is the relationship between Christ and the church. The union between husband and wife is the shadow or the picture. That is why Paul talks in the following verses about the results of Christ's love for the church: the church's sanctification, cleansing, and glory. None of these things applies to a human marriage. In presenting this comparison, Paul hopes to kindle the vision of the man concerning what he should strive for in his relationship with his wife.

Then the Apostle appeals to the basic egoism of the man. After all, a man who loves his wife, loves himself, because she has become his own flesh and blood in their sexual unity. The way the Bible seems to make no difference between *erao* and *agapao* shows that there is no difference as long as both are seen in a relationship to Christ. In quoting from Genesis: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh,”<sup>324</sup> he gives the most beautiful definition of marriage that is found in the whole Bible. In vs. 32 he says: “This is a profound mystery; but I am talking about Christ and the church.” Sexual relations in a marriage are “a profound mystery.” Nobody who is married understands fully all of God's plan in the unity of this relationship. The fact that we portray a spiritual reality does in no way diminish the mystery. It makes it only more profound.

What else can we say about this? The last question I have is why Paul says that the husband has to love his wife, but to the wife he only recommends respect. I have always thought that this shows that the female tendency to love is so strong that it doesn't have to be mentioned. And this may be true. But it seems to me that there is also the fact of the “ego” of the man that demands respect, because without it he will not function as he should. Some women are amazed by this, some appalled. But could it be that this too, in its sanctified form is an expression of a spiritual reality? I do not say this to justify inflation of egos in men, of which there is enough, but to point out that there is a similarity between God's need to be recognized and glorified and the need of the human male. God says: “I will not yield my glory to another.”<sup>325</sup>

It is hard to leave this section. Because of the way Paul goes back and forth between the picture and the reality, in one breath speaking about Christ and the church and then about husband and wife, we get a glimpse of a vast panoramic view. In marriage we are enacting something that is far beyond our comprehension. This is the impression the Apostle wants us to receive. We have to ask ourselves which subject he is discussing: Christ and the church or husband and wife? The answer is, of course, both. But it seems that the emphasis is stronger on the Christ-church relationship. That is that he pays so much attention to what Christ has done for His bride. “To make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, And to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Verses 26,27). These verses do not apply to the human marriage relationship. The

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<sup>323</sup> Matt 20:28

<sup>324</sup> Gen. 2:24

<sup>325</sup> Isa. 48:11

husband does not contribute to the salvation of his wife; as a matter of fact, many women are spiritually ahead of men. Paul says these things, first of all, because he is carried away at the thought of what Christ's love for the church has brought about, and secondly because, remembering these things, a man will ask himself, "If Jesus did these things for me, what can I do for Him in my relationship with those I love?"

The above mentioned verses link this portion to the rest of the epistle. In 1:4 we read the theme: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." It seems that Paul's mention of the word water in vs. 26 is no reference to baptism as a ritual. The cleansing is done by the word. Jesus says the same in His prayer for the disciples: "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."<sup>326</sup> It is through confrontation with the Word of God, that the Holy Spirit can bring about in our lives the characteristics that are acceptable to God.

## CHAPTER SIX

In chapter 6:1-4 Paul proceeds by applying the above truth to family life. If the relationship between husband and wife portrays the reality of Christ and the church, we can assume that life in the family has a spiritual counterpart also. Of course the fact that God is called "the Father" indicates that human fatherhood is an image of the spiritual reality. We refer to ch. 3:14,15. As fathers and children, we both play a role. The relationship within the family on earth helps us to understand our relationship with God, the Father. As fathers we act the role of God toward us, and as children we portray what it means that we are God's children. We have a model to go by, even though sin has done much damage on this level. Ideal relationships between parents and children are as rare as are ideal marriages. We can imagine how much damage this does to the understanding of our relationship with God.

There seems to be a difference between the submission which the wife is required to show to her husband and the obedience that the children are called upon in this verse. This should explain the difference of both relationships to us. Submission does evidently not mean unquestioning obedience. Children, however, are ordered to obey. No age limit is given. This last point was an important factor in my own experience. At the age of 21, I felt that the Lord called me to go into full-time service. But when I told my dad about this, he opposed me and told me to find a job. The Lord used this verse as a guideline, and I realized that, if the Lord had really called me, He could overrule my father's objection. He eventually did this. It is obvious, though, that a person is not required to follow his parents' commands into old age. The word for children in Greek, *teknon* indicates this.

These verses are parallel to what Paul says in Colossians: "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."<sup>327</sup> But the Ephesian version adds the reference to the fifth commandment: "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you."<sup>328</sup> This reference replaces the "for this pleases the Lord" in Colossians.<sup>329</sup> The quotation is from the Septuagint, with the variation of the change of "the land the LORD your God is giving you" into "That it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." This is an adaptation to the changed situation. There was no longer a Canaan to be conquered. We could call what Paul is doing "contextualisation."

The word "honor" is given the specific meaning of obeying here. Jesus enriches the word "honor" by giving it the meaning of giving financial help.<sup>330</sup> In the same context "honor" is set as opposite to curse, so it also has the meaning of "to bless." The impact of it all is that if families function in a healthy way, as God intended them, there will be health and prosperity on earth. Or what other meaning should we give the "enjoy a long life on the earth?" In the Old Testament spiritual blessing is expressed in earthly terms, but it seems that Paul does not spiritualize the idea of enjoying a long life on the earth here.

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<sup>326</sup> John 17:17

<sup>327</sup> Col. 3:20,21

<sup>328</sup> Ex. 20:12 and Deut. 5:16

<sup>329</sup> Col. 3:20

<sup>330</sup> Matt. 15:4-6

This world may not be our home, and it is true that we are “at home in the body we are away from the Lord,”<sup>331</sup> but evidently we are supposed to enjoy our time on earth, in spite of sin and suffering.

Verse 4 is also practical: “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” From the children, Paul turns to the fathers. We suppose the mothers are included here. We saw already that Paul says the same thing in Colossians: “Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.”<sup>332</sup> As Christian parents, we have to ask ourselves the question of how we can exasperate or embitter our children. We are supposed to give them the signals that would make them understand what it means that God is their real Father, by surrounding them with a strong, protecting love that gives them a feeling of security. Demanding obedience does in no way subtract from this. As a matter of fact, strict, but reasonable discipline enhances the feeling of security. A child who is left to do as he wishes feels himself abandoned and unprotected. I do not know if this is true, but I have an idea that a child has a sharper perception of the spiritual darkness that surrounds him than an adult has. We seem to lose that perception as we grow up and are no longer afraid of the dark. When a child is afraid of the dark, he may be closer to reality than we think.

Somehow obeying orders helps to make a child secure. It gives him the idea “my dad is in charge.” Orders have to be reasonable, and demanding obedience, just for the sake of imposing our will upon the will of a child, has no validity and certainly exasperates or embitters the child. I quote from an often remembered source: “Know what you ask, but insist that it be done.” Here again the key of our behavior towards our children is that we “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength,”<sup>333</sup> and “love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>334</sup> If we love the LORD more than our son or our daughter, we will want him or her to get into a living, loving relationship with Him. I believe this is what is meant by “bringing them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” Verses 5-9 run parallel to Col. 3:22-4:1. Paul says basically the same things in both epistles. He makes no effort to abolish slavery, but he attacks the core of the problem, that of respect for a human being by another human being. In both epistles he states that all obedience to another human is in fact obedience to God. That sanctions both the act of obeying and the content of it. If we obey our masters just as we would obey Christ, in sincerity of heart, we will keep ourselves out of immoral affairs. Again we have to emphasize that Paul precept laid the basis upon which eventually slavery was abolished over the whole world. In modern times, wherever forms of slavery or debasement of human beings is practiced, it is because the image of God is not being recognized in man.

Also in all human suppression the factor of accountability is lost. As soon as we lose sight of the fact that we will have to give account to the Lord of our acts towards others, the power we have over them will start corrupting us. Jesus deals with this in the parable of the slave who has dominion over his fellow slaves.<sup>335</sup>

## 6:10-18

***Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.***

***Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.***

***For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.***

***Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.***

***Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.***

***In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.***

***Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.***

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<sup>331</sup> II Cor. 5:6

<sup>332</sup> Col. 3:21

<sup>333</sup> Deut. 6:5

<sup>334</sup> Lev. 16:18

<sup>335</sup> Matt. 24:45-31

***And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.***

With this we enter the last section of this epistle, a classic treatment of spiritual warfare. Verses 10-18 deal with our preparation to meet our real enemy. The amazing part of this picture is that Paul nowhere speaks about our authority. He does not speak in terms of "binding the strong man," as Jesus calls it. "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house."<sup>336</sup> And elsewhere we read: "He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness,"<sup>337</sup> but the armor Paul describes in these verses are for our protection and the weapons are defensive. This doesn't mean that we cannot have authority over demonic powers, but it stresses the importance of being protected first.

We read of the experience of the sons of Sceva, who tried to exorcise a demon in Jesus name without this protection: "The evil spirit answered them, 'Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?'"<sup>338</sup> How important it is for us that the enemy knows us! As a man once prayed: "Lord, let my name be known in hell!"

In this section particularly it is important that we get the whole picture of what the Apostle is saying. We should not take anything out of context. Some people read only part of the verse in ch. 6:12, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms," and leave the rest.

Now in any war it is important that we know the enemy, before we do anything else. It has been said that Napoleon lost the battle at Waterloo because he didn't bother finding out who Wellington was. His opponent, on the other hand, studied Napoleon's strategy carefully and acted accordingly. We have to realize that the devil is behind all evil human behavior, and we have to know his schemes.

Even more important is the realization that we need the power of God's protection before we do anything else. Paul speaks of God's mighty power which is there to protect us. We have to see ourselves as Jesus pictures us as "sheep among wolves."<sup>339</sup> We are vulnerable to the extreme. The key word in this whole section is not "conquer," but "stand." The victory is ours in Jesus Christ, for He has vanquished the foe already. We have to be aware of our position and take caution so we shall not fall.

The truth that there is demonic activity that influences human behavior is best demonstrated in a portion of Daniel. The prince of Persia and of Greece are mentioned as the real authority behind the human empires.<sup>340</sup> The viciousness of some human actions against believers demonstrates that more is involved than just human cruelty. It is helpful to see the real enemy behind human opponents.

Paul begins out this last section with the word "finally." In this epistle he has painted the church as God's masterpiece, prepared for the most glorious future in the heavenlies in fellowship with her Lord Jesus Christ. Now he is back on earth, where the church is struggling and plodding away in less than glorious conditions. And he says: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." The words "be strong" can be taken as a passive present tense in Greek, which would make them read "be (constantly) made powerful." I like this because it shows that the power comes from outside of us. It is our being in the Lord Jesus Christ that empowers and protects. The idea of the armor of God is borrowed from the prophet Isaiah.<sup>341</sup> The person wearing the armor there is obviously the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah only mentions the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation and from there he goes to vengeance and zeal; that emphasis seems to speak of the coming judgment.

As mentioned before, the task of the Christian and the purpose of the armor is not offensive, but defensive. The word "stand" appears three times in vs. 13,14.

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<sup>336</sup> Matt. 12:29

<sup>337</sup> Matt 10:1

<sup>338</sup> Acts 19:15

<sup>339</sup> Matt.10:16

<sup>340</sup> Dan.10:20,21

<sup>341</sup> Is. 59:17

The armor is called "the full armor of God." It is God's armor and God's power. But God doesn't force it on us. We have to put it on ourselves. In the same way as Jesus says: "Take my yoke upon you,"<sup>342</sup> so here we are invited to put on God's armor.

The enemy we are facing is found "in the heavenlies" *en tois ouraniois*. *The Wycliffe Commentary* points out that the expression occurs five times in this epistle.<sup>343</sup> It is in the heavenlies that we are blessed in Christ and seated with Him. It is to those who are in the heavenlies, both friend and foe, that God reveals His wisdom through the church, and it is in the heavenlies that we stand against the foe. What we do on earth is only part of reality. *Wycliffe* also gives the three key works of this epistle from which Watchman Nee gets the title of his book on Ephesians: *Sit, Walk, Stand*.

Paul uses the image of the armor several times in his writing. In Romans he calls it "the armor of light."<sup>344</sup> In Second Corinthians he speaks of "the weapons of righteousness,"<sup>345</sup> and in First Thessalonians he mentions "faith and love as breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet."<sup>346/347</sup> But in this epistle we get the complete picture. It has been suggested that Paul dictated this letter while he was chained to a Roman soldier, and possibly this made it easier for him to draw the word picture.

Paul mentions six pieces in this armor: 1-- the belt, 2-- the breastplate, 3-- the shoes, 4-- the shield, 5-- the helmet and 6-- the sword. The image is drawn in sharp, clear lines. They speak to our imagination, but what do they say?

I remember the story of a student in Spurgeon's class on homiletics who preached on these verses and gave a very vivid demonstration of how to put on the various parts of the armor. When he was fully dressed, he shouted: "Where is the enemy?" Spurgeon whispered: "He is inside the armor!"

Paul must be talking about the armor the church is wearing collectively, as well as what the individual member wears. The characteristics of the armor are 1. truth, 2. righteousness, 3. readiness, 4. faith, 5. salvation, 6. the Word of God. These, are not like the fruit of the Spirit or demonstrations of the divine nature in us; although the Holy Spirit and the character of God certainly have something to do with this. The features Paul mentions do not bring about personal salvation. In this picture forgiveness of sin is something that took place in the past; it is behind us. These pieces of armor are what Jesus gives to His church, so that "the gates of Hades (or hell) will not overcome it,"<sup>348</sup> or as the KJV puts it: "The gates of hell will not prevail against it." These pieces of armor serve a double function, our protection and our advance.

1. The belt of truth. In most commentaries the point is stressed here that a man put on his belt to tie his flowing garments together in order to leave. But a Roman soldier did not wear flowing garments. It could be that Paul mixed his metaphors here. Readiness, or preparedness, seems to enter the picture. The truth stands probably for more than the truth of the Gospel, although in Revelation we read: "The overcame him [the devil] by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."<sup>349</sup> Probably truth stands here for the whole of all that comes from God, as opposed to the lie that comes from the devil. The Word of God is an expression of that truth. Putting on the belt of truth we take our stand with God. Moses exemplifies this as he stands at the entrance of the Israelite camp, and says: "whoever is for the Lord, come to me."<sup>350</sup> If we put on the belt of truth, we identify ourselves with God, and we stand with Him. It also means a complete break with the devil. If we take our stand publicly, we have gone through confession and conversion, and we have accepted the lordship of Jesus Christ over our lives. The shadow of the lie is not easily removed from our lives. But if we confess every lie that comes out of us, our lives will be more and more filled with God's truth. David

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<sup>342</sup> Matt.11:29

<sup>343</sup> 1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10 and 6:12

<sup>344</sup> Rom.13:12

<sup>345</sup> II Cor. 6:7

<sup>346</sup> I Thess. 5:8

<sup>347</sup> See Thompson Chain Reference Bible no.362

<sup>348</sup> Matt. 16:18

<sup>349</sup> Rev. 12:11

<sup>350</sup> Ex. 32:26

speaks about "truth in the inner parts" in the Psalms.<sup>351</sup> Only if the truth has penetrated to the root of our being, can we put on truth as a belt that keeps our armor together.

In a collective sense, in the sense that the church as a whole wears this belt, Paul suggests here the importance of the church holding up the right doctrines. It is relevant that the church preaches the objective truth. Truth is not subjective; it is absolute. As finite human beings, we may not be able to grasp the whole truth, but that does not make the truth subjective or less absolute, or less true.

*Vincent's Word Studies* defines truth as: "The state of the heart answering to God's truth; inward, practical acknowledgment of the truth as it is in Him: the agreement of our conditions with God's revelation."

2. The breastplate of righteousness. We mentioned before the similarity of Isaiah's text: "He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak."<sup>352</sup> *Vincent* describes righteousness here as "moral rectitude." Undoubtedly, that is the finished product. Righteousness is an imputed entity; as Paul puts it elsewhere: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."<sup>353</sup> This righteousness that is the righteousness of Christ becomes our protection against attacks of the enemy. Eventually, this righteousness will become more than a protective layer on the outside, and it will penetrate our heart and mind until ultimately the beauty of Jesus will be seen in us.

The Roman breastplate was a mail shirt, the ancient equivalent of a bullet proof vest. As we saw before, in First Thessalonians Paul speaks of the breastplate as consisting of faith and love.<sup>354</sup> There appears to be a contradiction. In the epistle to the Romans, righteousness is a word borrowed from the judicial lexicon, and it has a two-sided meaning: for sinners it implies condemnation and punishment, and for God's children it means salvation, because God let the punishment fall on Jesus Christ. It is this aspect which speaks of God's love that let the lightning of His wrath fall on the lightning rod Jesus Christ. That is the protection of our heart, our very life.

3. The shoes of readiness. Our defense is not static since we are not defending a place, but a position. The Roman sandal was bound with leather straps and the soles were studded with nails, according to *Vincent*. It made the soldier sure footed. The shoes in Paul's picture are put on as a sign of readiness. After all, what are feet for? Paul's quotation of Isaiah sheds more light on this picture: "And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"<sup>355</sup> Paul leaves Isaiah's "on the mountains" out. It is obvious that not all are called to preach. The shoes do not only fit the preachers, they stand for readiness. Peters says: "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."<sup>356</sup> We are not called upon to buttonhole everyone in the neighborhood, but we should always be ready to tell others what the Lord has done for us. We turn again to, where we read: "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."<sup>357</sup> This does not mean that victory depends on our eloquence. The man who said "me too!" in a testimony meeting was just as effective, if not more so, than those who had the words to explain it all. God can give us eloquence when we need it, but it is up to us to make ourselves available. The readiness is in the feet. Although the mouth is involved in the speaking, Paul puts the emphasis on the willingness to go. There is no victory for those who are determined that they will not be moved. So Paul's image actually speaks of our full surrender to the Lord, to the point that He may do with us, what He wants, and send us where He wants.

4. The shield of faith. The Roman armor had a shield, usually made of wood or wicker, that covered the whole length of the body. It makes me think of the war vest the Ekagis or Monis used to wear to war in Irian Jaya, at least as far as the material is concerned. The shield is faith. The image is profound in its suggestiveness. *Vincent* says that the faith meant here is "saving faith." I do not think this is correct in

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<sup>351</sup> Ps. 51:6

<sup>352</sup> Isa. 59:17

<sup>353</sup> II Cor. 5:21

<sup>354</sup> I Thess. 5:8

<sup>355</sup> Isa. 52:7, Rom.10:15

<sup>356</sup> I Pet. 3:15

<sup>357</sup> Rev. 12:11

the sense of a trust in Jesus Christ for salvation from sin and condemnation. The picture Paul paints is that of a soldier who holds a position from being overrun. Jesus has won the victory, and we have to hold the terrain. That faith plays such an important role in this task implies that the enemy tries to exploit the fact that the spiritual things are not visible to the naked eye. He bombards us with that what is visible and tries to make us believe that we are looking at reality. How can we glory in the fact that Jesus conquered death for us, when people around us are dying with cancer? The enemy will rub this in. It takes faith to see beyond these tactics. We have to understand what the writer to the Hebrew says: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."<sup>358</sup> The KJV says: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." C. S. Lewis illustrates the use of the fiery darts forcefully in his Narnia book *The Silver Chair*, where the green witch almost succeeds in making the children and Puddleglum lose their grip on reality. There is a fine line between "Where is God?" and "There is no God!" And the devil will try to make us cross that line.

If heaven were a visible reality to us, and if we had been born on the other side instead of in enemy territory, the darts wouldn't burn as much. What causes our pain is that there is so much combustible material within us. We are in this world, but we are not to be of this world, even when we are in Christ, there still is a lot of world within us. We often serve as a sounding board for the devil's propaganda. That is what makes those darts burn so much. We are being accused by them and we have to admit that there is a lot of truth in what the father of lies has to say.

It is not without reason that Satan is called "the accuser of our brothers"<sup>359</sup> The picture is borrowed from Zechariah, where the prophet says: "Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him."<sup>360</sup> The devil has been very clever in exploiting the facts of our sin and God's righteousness, with the idea of driving us to despair. It is the faith that made Martin Luther answer the enemy, when he was confronting Luther with his sins: "Write, washed in the blood of the Lamb," that will help us to put out the fiery darts that are aimed at us also.

This doesn't mean, of course that, it doesn't matter how we live. We should be careful to avoid sin, to confess whenever we stumble, and to have ourselves cleansed regularly of all pollution. We have to cling to the promise that: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."<sup>361</sup>

5. The helmet of salvation. As the shield protects the heart, so the helmet covers the head. Our mind, our thinking process, must be protected by salvation in Jesus Christ. This does not mean an impairment of our thinking power, or that one must have a low IQ to be born again. The fact is that a person can be born again regardless of his IQ; however, just as smog impairs vision, so sin impairs thinking. The devil is very clever, but he is no match for God's omniscience. As a matter of fact Satan's intelligence was given him when God created him. It is the only part of the divine left in him and it is corrupted. So if a human being believes that he commits intellectual suicide when he puts his mind under the protection of the lordship of Jesus Christ, he doesn't know what he is talking about, and he is definitely less intelligent than he thinks. Some parts of the Word of God make no sense to us, not because they are absurd, but because we do not understand them. It is amazing how much fog is lifted from our thinking once we put our mind under the control of the Holy Spirit and put the helmet of salvation on our head.

6. The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. The Bible teaches us that the Word of God is the most essential need for us as human beings. It is more important than food or the satisfaction of any other physical need we may have. Moses said: "He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."<sup>362</sup> Jesus quotes Moses' words in Matthew by which He overcomes the temptation that the devil puts before Him to change stone into bread. This shows us how we are supposed to wield this sword. It is of the utmost importance that we know the written Word of God and that we learn how to apply it to the circumstances of our daily life.

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<sup>358</sup> Heb. 11:1

<sup>359</sup> Rev. 12:10

<sup>360</sup> Zech. 3:1

<sup>361</sup> I John 1:9

<sup>362</sup> Deut. 8:3



The Word of God is both similar to and different from the word of man. It is hard to imagine what the power of human speech must have been before sin came. On the first pages of the Word of God, we read ten times "and God said." Eight times the result of God's speaking is the creation of something new on earth. That is why the psalmist says: "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth."<sup>363</sup> Human speech never comes close to the Word of God in this respect. It is obvious, though, that our words are derived from the Word of God. The fact that we make noises that express our emotions and thoughts in a way that can be understood by others, would not be possible if God had not spoken. We do not just produce sounds; even music is not just sound. It would take volumes upon volumes of books to dig into the mystery of human speech. We haven't even started to scratch the surface.

But we are talking about the Word of God, not the Word of man. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God as a sword. The writer of the Hebrew epistle explains what this means: "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."<sup>364</sup> Paul uses the expression "the sword of the Spirit" in this way. We have to see it in the context of sin and demonic oppression, in which Paul paints the picture of the armed soldier. It is the Holy Spirit, who uses the written Word in such a way that it penetrates into the soul and spirit of man. Jesus puts this truth beautifully in the parable of the sower.<sup>365</sup> It is the Word of God, sown in the heart of man that brings about the Kingdom of Heaven.

But Paul speaks specifically about what the Word of God does in our struggle against demonic powers. The Word of God works in the heart of sinful man as a scalpel in the hand of a surgeon, with the purpose of bringing life. In our resistance against the devil, the Word of God becomes our most effective means of victory. If the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God through our mouth, the defeat of the enemy is certain. That is the most important lesson Jesus teaches us in His victory over the temptations that the devil put before Him in the desert.

It is important to understand that it is the Spirit using the Word that causes it to be effective. There is no magic in the written Word itself. We cannot detach the Word of God from God Himself and think that anything will happen. In the same way that the Holy Spirit makes the Bible a living book for us, the Word of God becomes a weapon in our hands in our struggle against the "rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." This finishes the picture of the armed soldier. Or does it?

Maybe we can say that in Vs. 18 Paul actually comes to what he has to say. The real defense in spiritual warfare is prayer. "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints." We need the whole armor of God in order to be able to pray effectively. This links our position on earth with our position in heaven. Paul started by showing that we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies. He has shown us how this affects our walk on earth. Now he shows us how the two are connected; in Matthew Jesus shows us how it works: "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."<sup>366</sup>

The strategy of our prayer should be to pray for "all the saints." The strategy of the enemy is to destroy the testimony of the church, which is the bride of Christ, and make the church appear to be a bunch of flunkies who botch up everything they are supposed to be and do on earth. We should catch some of the vision Paul had about the Corinthian church, as he says in the Second epistle to the Corinthians: "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him."<sup>367</sup>

The prayer should be "in the Spirit." This does not necessarily mean speaking in tongues, as some Pentecostals believe, but it means that we should let ourselves be guided by the Spirit in the way we pray and

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<sup>363</sup> Ps. 33:6

<sup>364</sup> Heb. 4:12

<sup>365</sup> Matt.13:3-8;18-23

<sup>366</sup> Matt.18:18-20

<sup>367</sup> II Cor.11:2

in the things we pray for. The Holy Spirit is willing and eager to assist us in our prayer life. Paul brings this out very forcefully in Romans: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."<sup>368</sup> Prayer goes deeper than words. Odilon Vansteenberghe said once: "If we can say everything we feel, we do not feel much!" The same goes for our prayer life. We need the Holy Spirit to say for us what we cannot express ourselves. Prayer goes very deep.

We also get a glimpse here of God's emotions about us and the situation in which we find ourselves. If the Spirit "intercedes for us with groans," that means that He feels more deeply than we do. We have a tendency to adapt ourselves to hardship which is sometimes extreme. God never gets used to our suffering. When God calls Moses, He has to convince him how hard the people of Israel are suffering. Moses is not really interested! We read in Exodus: "The LORD said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.'"<sup>369</sup>

What Paul says here runs parallel with what he states in Philippians: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."<sup>370</sup> The phrase: "All kinds of prayers and requests" equals "prayer and petition." And 'on all occasions' is the same as "in everything." The idea is that all our circumstances should be under the control of the Lord Jesus Christ. We should not try to do anything or figure out anything without Him.

Paul adds "be alert" to this and the KJV translates it this way: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." That is where the enemy comes into the picture again. We should never forget that we are in a war situation where attacks are always imminent. The devil has a way of sneaking up on us. Vigilant prayer can save a lot of lives and a lot of needless sorrow.

#### 6:19-24

*Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

*Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing.*

*I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you.*

*Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.*

As in Philippians, Paul does not take it for granted that he will perform well in his witness for the Lord.<sup>371</sup> He knows himself sufficiently to realize that without the prayers of others, he could cut a miserable figure. It is not his own courage, but the Spirit of the Lord that makes a person bold. That is why Paul asks here for prayer: "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel." (Vs. 19).

Paul calls himself "an ambassador in chains." The title is rather ironic. An ambassador in chains is no compliment to the kingdom he represents. It can also mean a condemnation for the kingdom he is sent to. In the same way does the crucifixion of the Lord of glory condemn the world that crucified Him. What the king of Ammon did to David's ambassadors did not harm David but Ammon.<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Rom. 8:26

<sup>369</sup> Ex. 3:7,9

<sup>370</sup> Phil. 4:6,7

<sup>371</sup> See Phil. 1:19,20

<sup>372</sup> II Sam. 10:1-5

On the other hand, can Paul's statement be taken in the same vein as in ch. 3:1 and 4:1, where he calls himself "a prisoner of Christ Jesus" and "a prisoner of the Lord." The chains he wears are not only the chains of the Roman empire, but the chains of the Lord. There is a sense in which we are all "prisoners of the Lord" and "ambassadors in chains." His imprisonment is in no way a senseless experience, for Paul knows why he is in prison. Because of the mystery of the Gospel, it is the price to be paid for the salvation of those who have not heard. That knowledge makes the hardship easier to bear. Even an atheist like Nietzsche knew that we can bear the "how" if we know the "why" of our experiences. He was very close to the truth when he said this.

This brings us to the last four verses of this book. Verses 21,22 are similar to Col. 4:7,8. This links this epistle closely to the one to Colosse, as we have seen already. In both cases Tychicus is mentioned as the bearer of the epistle. If we are correct in assuming that the Ephesian letter is actually the one written to the church in Laodicea, then Tychicus is Paul's link with those places he has never visited himself. In Acts we find him mentioned as originating in Asia. "Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia."<sup>373</sup> So we may suppose that he was treading familiar ground and that this would be the reason that he was chosen to be Paul's mail man. The last two verses give the benediction which is more elaborate here than in any of the other epistles. Romans ends with a doxology; I Corinthians come closest to the one in Ephesians. There Paul puts in a negative way what he says here positively: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha."<sup>374</sup> In II Corinthians Paul writes: "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all,"<sup>375</sup> which is the benediction that is most often used at the end of church services. Galatians is brief.<sup>376</sup> And so are I and II Thessalonians.<sup>377</sup>

Paul prays for peace, *shalom*, which probably is a request for unity among the brethren in this context. Faith is evidently considered here to be a gift from God, together with love. For fellowship together we are dependent upon the divine presence which will generate love among people, who love the Lord. None of these things come automatically. We have to ask for them, and of course our Lord will be happy to give them. On the other hand is love between brothers in Christ which is a prerequisite for God's blessing, as we read in the Psalms: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!... For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore."<sup>378</sup> So there is a circle of experience, which originates in heaven and flows to earth and goes back up to the Father. Verse 24 which says: "Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love." concludes the epistle. We find again both *shalom* and *charis*. There is a special grace for those who love Jesus with all their heart. KJV puts "in sincerity" in stead of "undying love." I like the latter better. We have to grow in our love for the Lord Jesus Christ, as Peter declares: "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy."<sup>379</sup> The more we understand who He is and what He has done for us, the fuller our heart will be with love for Him.

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<sup>373</sup> Acts 20:4

<sup>374</sup> I Cor. 16:22 (KJV)

<sup>375</sup> II Cor. 13:14

<sup>376</sup> Gal. 6:18

<sup>377</sup> I Thess. 5:18; I Thess. 3:18

<sup>378</sup> Ps. 133.

<sup>379</sup> I Peter 1:8