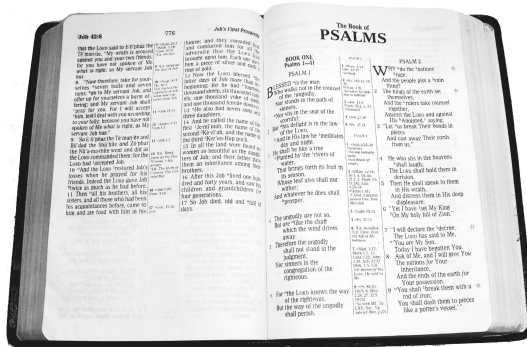


# PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



June 2017

Ephesians chapters 4 to 6

Psalms 107

*The unity of the Spirit .. there is one body and one Spirit*

We are repeating yesterday's reading because the apostle gives further compelling reasons for keeping *the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*. We have seen that we must not tolerate doctrinal error or sinful living in our churches, but this is not always the cause of discord. We will not be perfect until we go to heaven and we still need to repent of sin. We are at different stages of maturity in the Christian life and we have different personalities and we must not allow these things to divide us.

Our lives must be marked by *lowliness, gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing* (putting up) *with one another in love* (2). Stuart Olyott writes. 'Lowliness is taking the lowest place with a view to being the servant of all. The Lord Jesus was lowly, and so was Paul (3:8). Disunity cannot survive where lowliness reigns.' (ALIVE IN CHRIST – EPHESIANS SIMPLY EXPLAINED, page 96). Spiritual strength must be accompanied by *gentleness*. If we are harsh, rude or self-assertive, we are being sinful and will drive people away from us. To be 'long-suffering' is to bear graciously the hurts that we receive at the hands of others; *bearing with one another in love* means that we will show love rather than complain when we are hurt.

Look at the seven *ones* in verses 4 to 6. There is *one body* (the church), *one Spirit* and we share *one hope* of our calling. We have *one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God*. How can we have no concern for unity in our local church when we belong to one body and have the same Holy Spirit within us? We are united by strong bonds.

If we are not at *one* with others in our church, we are not walking worthy of our calling. Are you humble and gracious in your attitude to others, especially when they disagree with you? You are more likely to win them to your point of view if you are gentle and patient in your response to them. **Ask God to give you the grace to walk worthy of your calling and to maintain the unity of the Spirit in your church.**

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*To each one of us grace was given*

The old saying that ‘the devil finds work for idle hands’ is very true in relation to the life of the church. The apostle has stressed the great need for unity in the church (1–6) and it is important that we recognise that God has a work for us all – *to each one of us grace was given* (7). Paul applies Psalm 68:18 to show that the Lord Jesus came down to this earth, suffered and died at Calvary, was buried and rose in triumph over Satan and death, ascended to heaven leading captivity captive and that he shares the spoils of his victory with his people (8–10). He has given us gifts and abilities according to his grace and these gifts are to be used (Romans 12:3–8). We may not be gifted for public ministry, but there is a work for Jesus that we can do. There is the ministry of prayer which is so vital for the health of the church. We can be encouragers, we can use our homes for hospitality and our cars to carry the elderly or disabled? There are many opportunities for ministry in the church if we keep our eyes and ears open.

The risen Christ has also given gifted men to the church to equip *the saints for work of ministry* in order to edify (build up) the body of Christ (10–12). An *apostle* is ‘one who is sent’ or ‘a messenger’. The word is used in a restricted sense in verse 12. The twelve apostles and Paul had seen the risen Christ (Acts 1:21–26; 1 Corinthians 15:5,7–9). They had authority over the churches in their life and doctrine and their ministry was attested by miracles (2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3–4). The church has been *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets* (2:20). Prophets spoke by direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, eg. Agabus (Acts 11:28; 21:10–11). There are no apostles or prophets (in this restricted sense) today and we must be very suspicious of the teaching and claims of so-called apostles or prophets in the twenty-first century.

We live in confusing days and we need to pray that God will raise up many gifted men – evangelists, pastors and teachers. **We all need to be equipped for the work of ministry (service) and to use the gifts that God has graciously given to us. How are you doing?**

*No longer be children*

God has graciously given gifts to his people for the building up of the church (12,15–16). Every believer should grow into Christian maturity *that we should no longer be children* (13–14). The Greek word translated ‘*children*’ literally means ‘unable to speak’ (infants). New Christians must not remain babes in Christ. Just as children are particularly vulnerable, so immature Christians will be *tossed to and fro by the waves and whirled about by every gust of doctrine* (14, William Hendriksen’s translation).

Those who are immature in the Christian faith (*children*) are easily deceived and false teachers are waiting to pounce. They use *trickery ... cunning craftiness* and deception to further their evil trade. It is a sad fact that there are some believers in our churches who are a hindrance rather than a help. *We should no longer be children*. How long have you been a Christian? Have you grown up or are you still an infant who is not equipped to serve the Lord?

When we grow up in Christ, we will not be carried about with gusts of false teaching, but will be found *speaking the truth in love* (15). When we speak about spiritual things, we must speak the truth in love. Matthew Henry wrote, ‘Truth is an excellent thing; yet it is required that we speak it in love, and not in contention.’ There is all the difference in the world between contending earnestly for the faith (Jude 3) with a loving spirit, and contending in a rude or rough manner.

**Spiritual maturity is not measured just by a head knowledge of spiritual things, but by the Word of God being seen to work in our lives producing faith and love.** A healthy church is like a healthy body which has all its members working harmoniously together; *every part does its share ... for the edifying of itself in love* (16).

*That you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk*

We have already seen that if we are to walk worthy of our calling, we must maintain the unity of the Spirit among ourselves (1–6). We must also walk (behave) in a different manner to unbelievers (17–32). God has given us gifts and gifted men that we should build up each other and be built up in the faith (7–16). We are therefore to be different from unbelievers; our lifestyle must change when we profess Christ. Paul told the Ephesian believers that they *should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk* (17). Matthew Henry comments, ‘Converted Gentiles must not live as unconverted Gentiles do. Though they live among them, they must not live like them.’

We are presented with a stark picture of the lives of those who are not Christians. They *walk in the futility of their mind* (17) because:

- Their understanding is *darkened* (18). A child who is a Christian has more understanding than the unbelieving adult.
- They are *alienated from the life of God* being separated from God so that he appears to be very remote to them (18). The life of God in the believer brings love for God and obedience to his holy Word. It brings peace and joy.
- They are ignorant (18). Men and women may possess brilliant intellects, but without Christ, they are ignorant of spiritual truth and foolish (Romans 1:21–22; 2 Corinthians 4:3–4).
- Their hearts are hardened (18).

What are the consequences of a godless life? The non-Christian lives for his sin and is past feeling as far as any sensitivity to God is concerned (19). We know that some who are not believers appear to live upright lives, but their ‘goodness’ falls far short of God’s holy standards. We must *no longer walk* as we did before we were saved! Do you love the Lord for all that he has done for you and for what he has come to mean to you in the greatness and beauty of his person? **Be determined, with God’s help to live for his glory. Christians must be different from those around them!**

*But you have not so learned Christ*

The apostle Paul has described what William Hendriksen calls ‘the tragic hopelessness’ of the Gentiles, of those without Christ: *Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart* (18). There is then another of Paul’s ‘buts’: *But you have not so learned Christ* (20). We learn Christ through hearing of him and by being taught by him through his Word. Spiritual progress is linked with God’s Word (*as the truth is in Jesus* – 21) being taken into our hearts and worked out in our lives.

We are sinners until we die. We may long to be perfect, but we must wait until we go to heaven before we will be completely free from sin. This does not mean that we do nothing about the remains of sin in our lives and thus behave as we did before we were saved. Learning Christ means putting off *the old man* (the old sinful nature) and putting on *the new man* (our new nature in Christ; 22–24; cp. Colossians 3:9). The old man clings to us like a sticky, rotten old garment. We must daily put it off and clothe ourselves with the new man. How? The old nature must not be fed or indulged by reading, watching or listening to things that harm our souls. It must be crucified and this is a painful process (Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20).

We must be *renewed* in the spirit of our mind (23; cp. Romans 12:2) so that the new man is nurtured and encouraged. How? Through reading and hearing God’s Word; through daily fellowship with the Lord (personal devotions are essential to a healthy Christian life); through fellowship with God’s people; through being at the Lord’s Table; through reading good Christian books.

**Learning Christ is much more than learning about him; it is knowing him in a personal way; it is being holy and Christlike in our lives. Let us pray that God will help us to *learn Christ*.**

*Nor give place to the devil*

Today's reading illustrates what it means in practice to learn Christ. We are warned about sins of thought (26,31), word (25,29,31) and deed (28). In the world, deceit and lying are a way of life, but we must be different. We must put away lying and always *speak truth* (25). Christians may tell lies without realising that they are sinning. They may indulge in gossip, not being concerned about all the facts of the matter, and so distort the truth. We tell lies when we make promises that we know we will not be able to keep. Church members belong to each other (*members of one another*, 25) and any form of deceit breaks down trust and hinders our fellowship together. We must shun all forms of lies. The Bible warns of the condemnation of liars, placing their sin alongside the sin of murder (Revelation 21:8; 22:15).

The apostle quotes Psalm 4:4: *Be angry and do not sin*. There is a righteous anger which is not sinful. The Lord Jesus was angry and grieved at the Pharisees because of the hardness of their hearts (Mark 3:5). Righteous anger is controlled and is never motivated by pride or selfishness. Most human anger is sinful, especially when we lose our temper and say or do things which we may later regret.

*Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil* (26–27). **Satan is always looking out for opportunities to cause trouble and we must be on our guard.** We sin if we harbour angry, bitter feelings. We must not finish the day by going to bed in a state of anger. We must be right with God and with our fellow believers or we will give the devil room to cause trouble both for ourselves and others. *He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city* (Proverbs 16:32). I will close with some wise words from Puritan John Trapp – ‘He that will be angry and not sin, let him be angry at nothing but sin.’

*Do no sinful action,  
Speak no angry word;  
You belong to Jesus,  
Children of the Lord.*

(Mrs C.F. Alexander)

*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth*

Putting off the old man and putting on the new man (22–24) reflects both negative and positive aspects of the Christian life and these are seen in the reading today. Stealing was a way of life in the Greek and Roman world especially among slaves (often translated *servants* in the New Testament; eg. 6:5; Titus 2:9–10). The world has not changed since those times; in places of work and in schools theft is common. Shops and businesses lose many millions of pounds every year through shop-lifting.

Christians who were thieves before their conversion must forsake their sin. *Let him that stole steal no longer* (28). The alternative to stealing is working, not only to keep ourselves and our own family, but also to enable us to have enough to give to those who are in need. We must resist every temptation to dishonesty and honour God in our lives.

We must also be different to the ungodly in all aspects of our speech. We not only refrain from telling lies (25) but also shun all kinds of bad language and crude talk. *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers* (29). We are assailed every day by filthy talk in the world. If we choose the company of a foul-mouthed sinner, if we choose to listen to blasphemous language on radio or television, we should be thoroughly ashamed of ourselves. We must repent before God if we use foul language. Coarse joking and filthy talk should be unthinkable for any Christian (Ephesians 5:4). The Lord knows every word that we utter and all will be recalled on the day of judgment (Psalm 139:4; Matthew 12:36–37).

Our speech leaves its mark upon those who hear us and we must always aim to impart grace to them. **What an amazing thing! God is the giver of grace, but we can communicate his grace to those around us by being gracious in our conversation.**



*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God*

We must not give place to the devil through sinful behaviour (27) but the apostle now appeals to a higher motive for shunning sin – *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption* (30). He has done so much for us and we must not grieve him. The Holy Spirit is a Person who can be grieved and who prays for us (Romans 8:26). He is our Helper who guides us into all truth and we have fellowship with him (John 16:7–13; Acts 9:31; 2 Corinthians 13:14). Sects such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and Christadelphians do not believe that the Holy Spirit is a Person but that he is an impersonal power or force. These people are blind to the truth of God and they are in great error.

When we are saved, our bodies become the temple (dwelling-place) of the Holy Spirit. When we sin we dishonour and grieve the Holy Spirit and we cannot enjoy fellowship with God. We were bought by God at tremendous cost and we are not our own to do as we please by sinning (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). If we truly love the Lord we will grieve over our sin and avoid grieving the Holy Spirit.

**If you are restless and unhappy in your Christian life, could it be that you are grieving the Holy Spirit?** If that is the case, turn from your sin, put away the old way of life and seek God’s forgiveness and cleansing through the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7–9). There is no other way to joy and blessing in the Lord!

*Holy Spirit, dwell with me!  
I myself would holy be,  
Separate from sin, I would  
Choose and cherish all things good;  
And whatever I can be  
Give to him who gave me thee.*

(Thomas T. Lynch)

*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another*

Verses 31 and 32 present a vivid contrast between the ugliness of an ungodly life and the beauty of a Christlike life. Putting off ‘*the old man*’ (22) means putting away wicked, sinful attitudes and conversation. We must put away *all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour* (‘the violent outburst of the person who has lost his temper’ – Hendriksen), *evil speaking ... with all malice* (31). These ugly, wicked things grieve the Holy Spirit and they must have no place in our lives.

A bitter spirit makes a person harsh, sour and repulsive in his behaviour; it ‘brings a scowl over his face and infuses venom into the words of his tongue’ (Eadie). It is a very sad fact that some who profess the name of Christ are just like that! If a Christian is bitter and twisted, or if he carries a chip on his shoulder, he is out of touch with his Lord and Saviour. Let us examine our own hearts and if any of these sins are lurking within, let us repent of them. Let us make no excuses as we ask the Lord to forgive us.

We must put on *the new man* (24) and be Christlike in our behaviour. We must *be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven us* (32). These attitudes are so different to being bitter and malicious. **We owe so much to God for his great love to us and for his forgiveness. We must learn to forgive those who have hurt us.** If we have experienced the love of God in our lives it must be seen by those around us!

*Give me a faithful heart,  
Likeness to thee,  
That each departing day  
Henceforth may see  
Some work of love begun,  
Some deed of kindness done,  
Some wanderer sought and won,  
Something for thee.*

(Sylvanus O. Phelps)

*Be followers of God*

Following on from the appeal that we should be kind to one another, forgiving one another (4:32), We are exhorted, ‘*Therefore, be followers of God as dear children*’ (1). The Greek word translated *followers* means ‘imitators’ and the English Standard Version and some editions of the New King James translation have this word. To follow God is to imitate him. Paul commended the Thessalonian Christians who had become followers of the apostles and of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 1:6). Those new believers had chosen the best human role models to imitate but they also aimed for the highest possible standard in following God. Christians are God’s children and just as children imitate their parents, so we too must imitate God and show by our lifestyle that we belong to his family. We are to:

- *Walk in love* (1–2),
- *Walk as children of light* (3–14).
- *Walk circumspectly* (i.e. carefully, wisely, 15–21).

Walking in love means that we obey God and show love to our fellow-believers and to the lost. We must walk in love and the Lord Jesus Christ is our pattern (2). He loved us so much that he gave himself to die for us at Calvary. This sacrifice delighted God the Father as *a sweet-smelling aroma*. God is also well pleased with us as we show his love in our lives by being kind (Hebrews 13:16). Such love is costly because it requires great self-denial and it makes us vulnerable. If we are not kind, if we fail to forgive those who offend us or hurt us (4:32), we are not walking in love, we are not imitating our God and Saviour.

**Love delights to give and to forgive, and the believer who walks in love is truly happy and blessed. Let us meditate on the love of Christ for us and examine our own hearts to see if we are walking in love.**

*Blest be the tie that binds  
Our hearts in Christian love;  
The fellowship of kindred minds  
Is like to that above.*

(John Fawcett)

*As is fitting for saints*

The Lord Jesus Christ *has loved us and given himself for us* and we owe it to him to live *as is fitting for saints* (2–3). Christians are saints (cp. 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:2) and we are called to live as saints in this evil world. *But fornication* (sexual immorality), *and all uncleanness or covetousness* (in this verse, lusting after a person to whom we have no right of possession), *let it not be named among you, as is fitting for saints*. This does not mean that we must not mention them, for the apostle is doing that very thing in these verses as he warns us against them. These sins must not even be mentioned among us in the sense that they must be removed far from us (3).

Many unbelievers utter blasphemies and filthy language but for Christians such language *is not fitting, but rather giving of thanks* (4). We live in an unthankful world and we glorify God in our speech when we give thanks to him for his blessings (cp. Psalm 136; 1 Thessalonians 5:18).

The sins mentioned in these verses are a way of life to many people (see notes for 7 June). Sadly, many Christians have been influenced by the godless ways of the world. The media has played a dreadful role in making sexual sin, filthy talk and coarse jesting appear to be quite harmless and acceptable. These things have terrible consequences. They shut people out of heaven and bring the wrath of God upon the ungodly (5–6).

We must not allow ourselves to be deceived by the empty words of unbelievers. Scoffers may call us ‘old-fashioned’ when we refuse to share their filth and smut in word or in deed. Thousands of Christian lives and homes are being blighted because the warnings of God’s holy Word are not being taken seriously. *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them* (6–7). **Let us be determined to live as is fitting or proper for saints by giving thanks to God for all of his blessings.**

*Walk as children of light*

We must follow God by walking in love and we must also *walk as children of light* (8; cp. 1 John 1:7). We are again reminded of what we were before we came to faith in Christ. *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord* (8; cp. 2:1–3). William Hendriksen comments, ‘Not only had they been in darkness as in an evil environment, but they themselves had been part of that realm.’ (COMMENTARY ON EPHESIANS, published by The Banner of Truth Trust). Let us always remember with much gratitude that God has delivered us from the power of darkness and has brought us into the kingdom of his Son (Colossians 1:13). God has called us *out of darkness into his marvellous light* (1 Peter 2:9) and we owe it to him to live *as is fitting for saints* (3).

When we *walk as children of light* we will bear the fruit of the Spirit *in all goodness, righteousness, and truth, proving what is acceptable to the Lord* (Greek = ‘well-pleasing’ (9–10)). This is to be our lifestyle because it is the only way of living that is acceptable to the Lord. We must *have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness*, but expose them by leading godly lives (11–13). Those unfruitful works of darkness include sins such as sexual immorality, impurity, greed, filthiness, foolish talk and coarse jesting (3–4).

Some Bible commentators believe that the words of verse 14 are based on Isaiah 60:1, but others believe that the words were from an early Christian baptismal hymn. There is no mistake, however, about the message of the verse. Let us beware of lethargy in the Christian life. We need always to be vigilant (cp. 1 Thessalonians 5:6–8). **Are you sleeping when you should be shining in the darkness that is around you?** If this is true of you, I ask you, ‘Where is your light? Wake up from your slumber! Rise up from the sleep of death and call upon Christ!’ He will give you light and you will then prove *what is acceptable to the Lord* (10,14).

*See then that you walk circumspectly*

The word *circumspectly* means ‘accurately’ or ‘diligently’. The admonition, ‘*See then that you walk circumspectly*’ (15) could be rendered ‘walk carefully, not as fools but as wise’ (cp. Colossians 4:5). We must always be careful and wise in our conduct. *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom* (Psalm 111:10). A godly fear will promote wisdom and care in our behaviour.

We need to *walk circumspectly* in our use of time. We must redeem the time (or buy up opportunity) because we live in evil days (16). There are many opportunities to shine for God in this dark world and we must not wait for them to drop into our lap. We must look out for them, seize them and use them. Many of us fritter away our time in unprofitable pursuits and God’s work languishes for lack of commitment from Christians.

How much time do you spend each week in serving the Lord in the work and witness of your church? Do you spend more hours in front of a television set than in personal devotions or service for the Lord? Have you become addicted to playing computer games or to spending most of your spare time surfing the ‘web’? Oh, beware! Your spiritual life may so easily be sapped of its strength and usefulness. We do need leisure time, but we must not go too far in this matter. *We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ* (2 Corinthians 5:10). **Will you be embarrassed to give an account of the way you have used your time?**

We also need care and wisdom in understanding God’s will for our lives (17). We must not act on impulse or out of self-interest, but rather be prayerful and apply Biblical principles to our decision-making. We are sometimes faced with very important and difficult choices. Let us seek at all such times to understand the will of the Lord and to prove what is acceptable to him (10; cp. Romans 12:2).

*Be filled with the Spirit*

Believers are not commanded to be baptized (or sealed) with the Holy Spirit because that blessing is received at conversion (1:13; 4:30; cp. Acts 2:38; 1 Corinthians 12:13). We are exhorted, however, '*Be filled with the Spirit*' (18) and we must go on being filled with the Holy Spirit each day of our lives. Let us remember that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit which are to be filled by him so that we may glorify God (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). We express our personality through our bodies; it is through them that we sin or live in a manner which pleases God. We cannot go on being *filled with the Spirit* if we are clinging to sin. *Therefore ... present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service* (Romans 12:1).

Drunkenness and dissipation (debauchery or riotous living) were very common in the ancient world just as they are today. Christians must never indulge in such unseemly activities. We must not be *drunk with wine* but rather *be filled with the Spirit*. The person who is drunk loses all self-control, but the filling of the Holy Spirit brings self-control and produces good fruit in our lives (Galatians 5:22–23). We do not need the wine-bottle to make us happy. We have a wonderful salvation and a glorious Saviour and Friend and we should be rejoicing in him.

The peace and tranquillity of the Spirit-filled believer is far better than the unruly behaviour of the drunkard. How are we to go on being filled with the Holy Spirit? We must not grieve him (4:30) but seek always to please him by being holy and obedient to the will of God, letting the word of Christ dwell in us *richly in all wisdom* (Colossians 3:16).

There should be no place in our lives for the giddy songs of the drinking parlour or the pop culture. We have the wonderful songs of Zion (19–20; Colossians 3:16–17). Do you sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord with *psalms and hymns and spiritual songs* at home as well as with the church? **Does your MP3 or CD player resound with more of the world's music than with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs?**

*Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father*

We saw yesterday that being *filled with the Spirit* can be seen in singing and making melody in our heart to the Lord. Paul has already encouraged us to give thanks (4), but now he urges us to be *giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* (20). William Hendriksen describes thanksgiving as the ‘grateful acknowledgment of benefits received. It presupposes that the person who engages in this activity recognizes three things:

- a. that the blessings which he enjoys were bestowed upon himself, so that in all honesty he cannot give himself the credit for them;
- b. that he is totally unworthy of them; and
- c. that they are great and manifold.’

(COMMENTARY ON EPHESIANS, page 241; published by the Banner of Truth Trust).

Paul is a great example of *giving thanks always for all things*. He wrote these words after he had been imprisoned for the preaching of the gospel but he rejoiced because God had used his imprisonment for the furtherance of the gospel. He had learned the secret of contentment in every situation (Philippians 1:12–14; 4:11–12).

It is God’s will that we should abound with thanksgiving (Colossians 2:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:18). How can we give *thanks always for all things*? How about the set-backs and the adverse circumstances of life? We should thank God that he is working all these things for his glory and for our good and that none of these things can separate us from his love in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:28,35–39). **We need to lift up our eyes to our great God and to enjoy the salvation that he has given to us.**

*‘The expression of gratitude is therefore a most blessed response to favours undeserved. While it lasts, worries tend to disappear, complaints vanish, courage to face the future is increased, virtuous resolutions are formed, peace is experienced, and God is glorified.’* (William Hendriksen)



*Submitting to one another in the fear of God***(Additional Reading:– John 13:1–17)**

We may enjoy singing spiritual songs, but it is often difficult to give *thanks always for all things* (19–20). Verse 21 describes something even more difficult and demanding. *Submitting to one another in the fear of God*. This verse introduces a very important section of the letter to the Ephesians which deals with relationships:– with each other (21); between husbands and wives (22–33); children and parents (6:1–4); servants and masters (6:5–9).

Many churches are weakened and divided because some members refuse to submit to each other and show little fear of God in their lives. *Submitting* means ‘obeying’ (the same Greek verb found in verses 21 and 24 is translated *be obedient* in Titus 2:5,9). We readily accept that we must submit to God, but most of us are reluctant to submit to other Christians. We must not resent the Christian who has shown enough love, concern and courage to rebuke us when we are wrong.

Submission to other believers requires great humility (1 Peter 5:5–6) and self-denial; it is an essential ingredient in taking up our cross and following Christ (Luke 9:23). The Lord Jesus himself set us the great example. He was subject to Joseph and Mary (Luke 2:51) and was obedient to the Father’s will even to the point of death (Philippians 2:5–8). Sadly, there are some who are like Diotrophes (3 John, verses 7–8) and we cannot submit to such people. The Christian who has learned submission is not a spineless, pathetic type of person. When confronted with hypocrisy or error, he stands as firm as a rock (cp. Galatians 2:11–12).

It takes true Christian manliness or womanliness to display a submissive spirit. When we submit to one another, we say, ‘no’ to self-centredness, to self-assertion and to self-seeking. If we *walk in love* (2), we will be prepared to submit *to one another in the fear of God*. **How is it with you? Are you learning the grace of submission?**

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church*

Christians are not immune from unhappiness in marriage nor from divorce. Today's reading gives us essential directions for marriage which every married Christian must follow. The relationship between Christ and his church is the pattern for Christian marriage.

Wives must submit to their husbands just as the church submits to Christ. This submission must be seen as part of their submission to the Lord who has appointed the husband as the head of the family (22–24). We must resist the godless pressures of the feminist movement which tends to see men and women in conflict and would reject the Biblical teaching on marriage. The headship of man does not imply that women are inferior to men; both are equal in dignity before God but the husband is the leader in the marriage partnership. William Hendriksen points out that 'a home without a head is an invitation to chaos. It spells derangement and disaster worse even than that which results when a nation is without a ruler or an army without a commander. For excellent reasons (see 1 Timothy 2:13,14) it has pleased God to assign to the husband the task of being the head of the wife, hence also of the family' (COMMENTARY, page 248).

The godly husband is self-denying and sacrificial in his love for his wife. *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it* (25). As head of his wife, the husband must be like Christ who is the Saviour of the body (his church). He must protect and care for his wife and love her as he loves himself (23, 29, 33). The wonderful love of Christ for the church excites our devotion and obedience to him. **The love and care of a good Christian husband makes it easier for his wife to submit to his authority in the home as he gives himself to her and for her.** Some of us who are husbands are often selfish and thoughtless; is it any wonder that our wives find it difficult to respect us (33)? Let us seek to glorify God in our marriages for this is the way to happiness and peace.

*Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it*

We cannot leave this passage on Christian marriage without looking at its teaching on the love-relationship between Christ and the church. Paul writes that *this is a great mystery* (i.e. a secret, previously hidden, which God has now revealed, 32). He compares this relationship to that of a bridegroom and his bride (25–32; cp. Matthew 9:15; John 3:29; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 19:7; 21:2,9). Three aspects of this relationship are presented here:

- Past. – The Purchase of the Church. *Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it* (25). The Lord Jesus endured terrible suffering at Calvary for the church. Dr Lloyd Jones writes, ‘His purpose in dying was to redeem the church. He gave himself for the church, for all who belong to her when she will be complete and perfect and entire. All was known to God from eternity, and the Son came, and gave himself for the church’ (EXPOSITION OF EPHESIANS 5:18 to 6:9, published by The Banner of Truth Trust). The atonement is limited to the church which Christ purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

*From heaven he came and sought her  
To be his holy bride,  
With his own blood he bought her,  
And for her life he died.*

(Samuel J. Stone)

- Present. – The Privileges of the Church. He nourishes and cherishes the church and nothing can separate us from his love (29; Romans 8:35–39). Are you feeling discouraged? Remember, your Saviour knows all about you and he lovingly cares for you.
- Future. – The Presentation of the Church. He has bought the church to be his holy bride and he sanctifies (sets apart) and cleanses the church through his Word (26; cp. John 17:17). We are painfully aware of our remaining sin and imperfection, but when Jesus comes again, he will make his bride to be pure, perfect and without blemish (27). **The best is yet to be!** Let us meditate on our wonderful blessings in Christ and bring to him our grateful praise.

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right*

Paul takes it for granted that children would be in the meeting of the church with their parents when his letter was read out. Our attention is now directed to the relationship between parents and children. *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right* (1). Obedience to parents should not only flow out of love and esteem for them, but also out of love and reverence for the Lord and because *this is right*.

The apostle did not take the view that the Ten Commandments are no longer binding on Christians. He quotes the fifth commandment and its promise to thrust home his appeal. Obedience to parents brings the smile of God upon our lives (*that it may be well with you*) and the promise of a prolonged life (cp. Proverbs 3:1–2; 10:27). A life of godly discipline saves us from some of the sinful excesses that may well shorten our lives, eg. drunken behaviour, general neglect of our health, etc.

One of the marks of an ungodly society is the disobedience of children to their parents (2 Timothy 3:2). This sin encourages other sins such as lawlessness, ingratitude, a lack of love and of self-control, and a despising of God. The sin of rebellion against parental authority has led to misery and instability among many thousands of young people.

Young people, you must resist the arrogance of those of your friends who despise older people and have no respect for authority. Gladly obey your parents when they quite reasonably ask you to do your fair share of household chores. Honour them by being thoughtful and appreciative of all that they do for you. If you have godly parents, never cease to thank the Lord for them. If your parents are not believers, never cease to pray for their salvation and be sure to honour them. **Many a parent has been won to Christ through the witness of the transformed life of a Christian son or daughter!**

*Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath*

Children must obey their parents but parents also have obligations and duties to their children. They must be reasonable and not provoke their children to anger or resentment by behaving like tyrants. Fathers are particularly addressed perhaps because they are the head of their household and they are often more prone than mothers to provoke their children. *Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord* (4). The Greek verb translated *bring them up* is elsewhere rendered *nourish* (5:29). Many children grow up to be bitter about their fathers. Some have been neglected when they needed a father's guidance and protection; others have never known a word of encouragement. Many fathers have alienated their children by their unreasonable behaviour toward them. If we lose our temper with our children, scream at them or inflict severe physical punishment upon them, we provoke them to wrath.

Children are to be nourished with godly training (or discipline) and admonition (instruction) but many Christian parents fail in this respect. Parents, do you have family worship in your homes each day? Do you read the Bible with your children and explain its meaning to them? Do you give them instruction in the things of God? Do you pray with them? Do you explain to them the difference between right and wrong? Do you lovingly discipline (chasten) them when they disobey you?

We need always to set a godly example to our children. William Hendriksen comments, 'The very heart of Christian nurture is this: to bring the heart of the child to the heart of his Saviour' (COMMENTARY ON EPHESIANS, page 263, Banner of Truth). **Christian parents, you have your children as a stewardship from the Lord and you will have to give account of that stewardship. May it be with joy and not with sorrow!**

*How can you lead to Christ your boy  
Unless Christ's methods you employ?  
There's just one thing that you can do –  
It's let that boy see Christ in you.*

(Author unknown)

*As to the Lord, and not to men*

We now come to the relationship between *servants* (Greek = ‘slaves’) and their *masters*. Though the Bible does not condemn slavery, neither does it condone it. When the gospel comes to a community, it creates conditions where slavery can hardly survive. Slavery was abolished in the British colonies mainly through the work of godly men like John Newton, William Wilberforce and Zachary MacAulay. Some slave owners were wicked tyrants, but Paul did not encourage Christian slaves to rebel against them but to be obedient. Slaves were to show respect for their masters serving them *with fear and trembling* (5).

Though slavery is outlawed in western society today, there are vital principles here for the relationship between workers and their bosses. Let us consider how slaves were to serve and apply the lessons to ourselves. Their work (and ours) must be motivated by *sincerity* (or ‘singleness’, AV) *of heart, as to Christ* because we are *servants of Christ* (5–6). However boring, irksome or tiring our work, we must do it *as to the Lord, and not to men* (7). When we see this as the will of God, we will be diligent at all times and not only work when we are being watched (6). Such an attitude banishes complaining and makes work enjoyable. Like slaves, we may feel that our work is not appreciated and that we are taken for granted. Let us remember that the Lord knows and cares. We may receive little or no earthly reward, but the Lord will give us an eternal reward (8; cp. Colossians 3:23–24).

Christian slave-owners (*masters*) also had solemn responsibilities. They were to have the same attitude as slaves; they too had a Master in heaven (9); they too were *servants of Christ*. This was a motivation to be Christlike in dealing with their servants by showing care, compassion, understanding and appreciation. A Christian boss today must also be fair and reasonable in his attitude to those who work for him and respect their dignity. The Christian employer must not be an exploiter and the Christian worker must not be an agitating layabout. We are all *servants of Christ*. **How is your testimony in your place of work? Does your conduct glorify God?**

*Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might*

Paul urges us at the start of this final section of his letter, ‘*Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might*’ (10). We must not have a defeatist attitude when we face the battles of the Christian life nor rely on our own abilities (cp. 1 Corinthians 10:12). God’s holy Word commands every one of us to *be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might*. If we want to *be strong in the Lord*, we must exercise ourselves to godliness (1 Timothy 4:6–7), we must be disciplined and build ourselves up through God’s Word. Why do we need spiritual strength? Because we are engaged in a spiritual warfare and we need to *be able to stand against the wiles of the devil* (11–12).

The crafty, scheming enemy of our souls is always looking to take advantage of us and he may take us off our guard by appearing as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 2:11; 11:14). He hinders and opposes God’s work (1 Thessalonians 2:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:4,9). In our spiritual warfare we wrestle against evil personalities (12; cp. 2 Corinthians 10:3–4). Some well-meaning Christians become obsessed with demons, ‘seeing’ them everywhere, but we must beware of the other extreme which forgets that Satan and his servants are behind the setbacks and opposition to God’s work.

Our encouragement is that the Lord Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil and that he wrought a great victory over evil principalities and powers through his death at Calvary (1 John 3:8; Colossians 2:14–15). We wrestle and fight against our wicked enemies from a position of strength and victory. **The Lord Jesus has not called us to be at ease. He has called us to be soldiers in a spiritual warfare and this is tough (2 Timothy 2:3–4).** There are spiritual battles *in the heavenly places* (12) as well as spiritual blessings (1:3). We all need to *be filled with the Spirit* (5:18) and to *be strong in the Lord*.

*Put on the whole armour of God*

The Lord does not leave us without protection or weapons in the Christian warfare but we must *put on the whole armour of God* (11,13). Our English word ‘panoply’ is derived from the Greek ‘panoplia’ which is here translated *armour*. The Greeks used the word ‘panoplia’ to describe the complete equipment used by heavily armed infantry. Spiritual warfare requires spiritual armour and we must put on *the whole armour of God* for our Christian battles. We must be well-protected if we are to stand firm (notice the stress on standing, 11,13–14) and also be able to attack our spiritual enemies.

In ancient times the belt was put on to gather up long garments so that a man was prepared for work, a soldier for battle. We must gird our waist *with truth* (14). Many evangelicals no longer seem to have enough concern for the truth of God’s Word. We should always be concerned for truth however and never compromise what the Bible teaches. We must also *put on the breastplate of righteousness* (14). Without Christ’s righteousness we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20). We must be holy if we are to be strong in the Lord (Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15–16).

Good footwear is essential in battle to give stability on uneven ground, to give speed of movement and to protect the feet from sharp objects. Our feet must be shod *with the preparation of the gospel of peace* if we are to have a firm footing for the fight. To know that we have peace and acceptance with God will help us withstand the attacks of Satan whenever he slanders or condemns us (cp. Revelation 12:9–10; Romans 8:33–34). *Truth – righteousness – the gospel of peace*. What precious items in our armour! **Have you put on the whole armour of God? Are you standing firm?**

*Soldiers of Christ, arise,  
And put your armour on;  
Strong in the strength which God supplies,  
Through his eternal Son.* (Charles Wesley)



*The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*

We must take *the shield of faith* to protect us from the fiery darts which Satan shoots at us (16). Paul had in mind the shield which was used to protect the whole body from enemy missiles; it was oblong in shape, about four feet long and two and a half feet wide (122 × 76 centimetres). The wicked one shoots flaming arrows of doubt (eg. about the love and care of God for us and about his Word) in the trials that we endure and we need to quench these attacks with the shield of faith.

The helmet protects the head, and elsewhere, Paul writes of *the helmet of salvation* (17) as *the hope of salvation* (1 Thessalonians 5:8). Hope and faith are closely linked in Scripture (eg. 1 Corinthians 13:13; Hebrews 11:1). Let us put on this helmet by meditating much on our great salvation in Christ and by trusting in him at all times. We also need this helmet as those who bring the message of salvation to needy sinners (cp. Isaiah 59:16–17).

We are to take *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God* (17; cp. Hebrews 4:12). The sword is a weapon for attack and we must use the Bible in our fight against the dark powers of the evil one. The Lord Jesus used the Word of God against Satan when the enemy tempted him (Matthew 4:4,7,10). The Greek word used for *word* in this verse is not ‘logos’ but ‘rhēma’ – the spoken Word of God. The word uttered by God endures for ever (1 Peter 1:25) and this Word is the Bible. It is called *the sword of the Spirit* because it is given by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21) and he applies it to our hearts. Paul goes on to ask for prayer that he may have *utterance* to boldly proclaim *the mystery of the gospel* (19–20). **We must memorise Scripture and know the Bible if the Holy Spirit is to use us to witness for Christ and to attack the strongholds of Satan.**

*The Spirit breathes upon the Word  
And brings the truth to sight;  
Precepts and promises afford  
A sanctifying light*

(William Cowper)

*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit*

A church notice-board proclaimed these words, ‘Seven prayerless days make one weak!’ Prayer is absolutely essential in the Christian life and warfare, for by it, we communicate with our Commander, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian armour alone is not enough! Prayer is essential in the believer’s life:

- When we are to pray: *Praying always* (18: cp. 1 Thessalonians 5:17). We must be prayerful at all times. This does not mean that we are to engage in non-stop prayer. If we concentrate our thoughts in prayer while driving on the motorway or when crossing a busy road, we may reach heaven sooner than we anticipated. It is impossible to pray every moment of the day but we must cultivate a prayerful awareness of God in our lives, giving thanks before meals and being ever ready to turn to God in prayer (cp. Nehemiah 2:1-4).
- How we are to pray: *Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit* (18). *All prayer* includes adoration and worship, confession of sin, praise and thanksgiving, and supplication. We must pray in the Spirit depending upon him to help us and to guide us in our prayers (cp. Romans 8:26; Jude 20). We must also persevere in prayer (*with all perseverance*) and not lose heart because of discouragement when it seems that God is not hearing us (cp. Luke 18:1).
- Who we are to pray for: We must pray not only for ourselves, but make *supplication* (that is bringing earnest, humble petitions) *for all the saints*. Our fellow-soldiers need our prayers and we need to make ourselves aware of their needs so that our prayers are more direct and specific than ‘Lord, please bless so-and-so.’ **How is your prayer life?**

*Restraining prayer, we cease to fight;  
Prayer makes the Christian’s armour bright;  
And Satan trembles when he sees  
The weakest saint upon his knees.*

(William Cowper)

*Praying always ... for all the saints — and for me*

We have already seen that Paul considered himself to be a prisoner of the Lord rather than a prisoner of Rome (3:1; 4:1). He was Christ's *ambassador in chains* (20). William Hendriksen comments, 'What a paradox! Is not an ambassador supposed to be free? But here is an official representative of him who is King of kings and Lord of lords, and this ambassador is chained! May he never forget whom he represents. Therefore, whenever he proclaims the glorious mystery of the gospel may he do so in a manner befitting his high office' (COMMENTARY ON EPHESIANS, published by The Banner of Truth Trust).

Paul was very much aware that he needed the prayers of God's people: *Praying always ... for all the saints — and for me* (18–19). He did not ask for prayer for his release, but that *utterance* be given to him so that he would be able to boldly proclaim *the mystery of the gospel* (19–20). Tychicus, a faithful and beloved brother carried Paul's letters to the Ephesians and Colossians. He would let them know of Paul's affairs and would comfort their hearts (21–22; cp. Colossians 4:7–8). Many Christians are lonely because they will not share their concerns and burdens with fellow-believers. The apostle Paul was not afraid to write about his problems and cares. Christian fellowship involves sharing and caring.

There isn't a trace of self-pity in Paul as he asks for prayer. Why is this? He knew that prison walls cannot separate us from God nor from his love. **We have such blessings in Christ that we are able to walk in the darkest valleys and along the most perplexing and difficult paths because he walks with us.** The benediction says it all! – *Peace ... love ... faith ... grace*. These blessings are the portion of *all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity* (23–24). Do you sincerely love the Lord?

# PSALMS

The title ‘The Book of Psalms’ is used in the New Testament (Luke 20:42; Acts 1:20). The Greek word (‘Psalmos’) is a translation of the Hebrew title (‘Mizmor’) used in 57 of the Psalms. ‘Mizmor’ is a song which is accompanied by a stringed instrument. David wrote almost half of the Psalms; other writers include Moses (Psalm 90), Solomon (Psalms 72; 127) and Asaph (Psalms 50; 73 to 80).

The Psalms have always been a hymn book for the church as they were for Israel (cp. Ephesians 5:19). They are a rich devotional handbook which we should know well and continually use. They encourage us to worship God. They give us much insight into the blessings, struggles and moods of a saint of God in various circumstances — in joy and in sorrow; in trial and in rest; in danger and in peace; in defeat and in victory; in penitence and in praise; in doubt and in trust. The Psalms are a great antidote to the false teaching that gives the impression that the Christian should always be on the ‘mountain-top’ of rejoicing and blessing, living above struggles or sorrow.

**Hebrew Poetry** is not based on rhyme or metre as is usual with English verse, but uses a number of devices, the most common being parallelism. In parallelism, a similar or a contrasting thought is expressed:-

Psalm 30:5                      *Weeping may endure for a night,  
But joy comes in the morning.*

Proverbs 15:20                *A wise son makes a father glad,  
But a foolish man despises his mother.*

Another device is the use of acrostics, eg. Psalm 119 which has 22 sets of 8 verses, one set for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In each set, every verse starts with the same letter of the alphabet, eg. verses 1–8 all begin with the same letter ‘Aleph’.

I warmly commend C.H. Spurgeon’s commentary on the Psalms, ‘THE TREASURY OF DAVID’

*He satisfies the longing soul*

C.H. Spurgeon describes Psalm 107 as ‘a choice song for the redeemed’. We are called on to *give thanks to the LORD, for he is good!* (1). God had delivered Israel of old from the hand of the enemy and he has delivered us from the power of Satan, our great enemy (2).

There are four pictures in this psalm of God’s people in distress who *cried out to the LORD in their trouble* (6,13,19,28):

1. Lost wanderers being brought safely home (4–9).
2. Prisoners being released from their chains (10–16).
3. The sick being healed (17–22).
4. Storm-tossed seafarers being rescued (23–32).

The refrain, *Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!* is found in each of these sections (8,15,21,31).

The wandering Israelites were distressed in the wilderness because of their sin (4–5). When we wander away from God, we too become restless, dissatisfied and weak. God is most gracious and when we cry to him in our trouble, he will hear us and deliver us (6). Spurgeon comments on verse 7: ‘There are many wrong ways, but only one right one ... When the Lord is leader the way is sure to be right.’

**Are you in a backslidden state? Is there an aching void within you that you know through bitter experience can never be filled by this world? Are you longing to be restored to the Lord, to enjoy fellowship with him once more?** There is a promise for you in verse 9: *He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with good things.* Call upon God now and soon you will be giving thanks to the Lord for his goodness to you.

*He sent his word and healed them*

Verse 10 paints a grim picture of the effects of sin in the ungodly. They sit in spiritual darkness and are captive to do the will of the devil (cp. 2 Timothy 2:26). Satan has from the beginning tempted men and women to despise and to rebel against the Word of God (cp. Genesis 3:1–4). He promises freedom but if we listen to him and disobey God we will fall into darkness and bondage. We will then find that there is none to help; the devil never helps those in distress.

The Lord brings down those who rebel against him, but he lifts up those who cry to him and who sincerely call upon him in their trouble. He saves them and brings freedom to their souls (10–14, 19). He sent the Lord Jesus into the world to liberate those who sit in darkness and whom Satan has imprisoned (Isaiah 42:7). *Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!* (15).

Those who choose to sin are foolish indeed and they bring upon themselves all manner of spiritual sickness (17). Those who are sick often lose their appetite and so it is when the soul is not well – it abhors all manner of food (18). We lose our appetite for spiritual things such as worship, prayer and the Word of God when our hearts are not right. What is the cure for such a condition? We must cry out to the Lord and we will discover what every other repentant sinner has found. *He sent his word and healed them* (19–20). **This healing word is the same word which sinners despise and against which they rebel** (11)! God's precious Word heals, strengthens and builds us up. Let us treasure it! Let us always receive it with joy! Let us be determined to obey it! How should we respond to the Lord for his great goodness? Let us *sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing* (22; cp. Hebrews 13:15).

*At their wits' end*

This passage gives us a vivid description of a storm at sea. For all our modern technology no one is able to control the awesome power of a storm-tossed sea. Experienced mariners *reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end* in the raging storm (27; cp. Jonah 1:4–5; Acts 27:13–20). God is in sovereign control of the sea: *He commands and raises the stormy wind ... he calms the storm, so that its waves are still* (25,29; cp. Matthew 8:26–27). Spurgeon points out that ‘though at their wits’ end, they had enough wit to pray.’ You may not have been in a storm at sea, but you perhaps know the experience of being tossed about by testing and trial in your Christian faith. As you read these words, you too may be at your wits’ end, knowing that there is none who can help you but God. What must you do in such a situation? You must cry out to the Lord who will give you peace and calm in the storms that beat around you .

Let us ponder these encouraging words from Spurgeon: ‘When God makes peace, it is peace indeed, the peace of God which passeth all understanding. He can in an instant change the condition of a man’s mind, so that it shall seem an absolute miracle to him that he has passed so suddenly from hurricane to calm. O that the Lord would thus work in the reader, should his heart be storm-beaten with outward troubles or inward fears ... The rougher the voyage the more the mariners long for port, and heaven becomes more and more “a desired haven”, as our trials multiply ... Our heavenly haven shall ring with shouts of grateful joy when once we reach its blessed shore’ (THE TREASURY OF DAVID).

*Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people* (31–32). **Do you ever testify to others in your church of God’s gracious dealings with you and come to worship and to exalt the Lord with your songs of praise?**

*Whoever is wise will observe these things, and they will understand the lovingkindness of the LORD*

God's power and absolute sovereignty shine through this lovely psalm. There would be little point in crying out to him in prayer if he were not sovereign and almighty. He turns the fertile land into a salty desert in visiting judgment upon the wicked (33–34) and he is able to turn the wilderness into a bountiful land for the righteous (35–39). If you are discouraged in the work of the gospel, remember that God is able to make your spiritual wilderness *yield a fruitful harvest* (37).

God turns all the wheels of providence and this should cause us to rejoice in him (40–41). The ungodly person never gives a thought to the wonderful ways of God but we should think much about his providence and encourage ourselves in him. *Whoever is wise will observe these things, and they will understand the lovingkindness of the LORD* (43). Let us turn again to Spurgeon for instruction: 'Those who notice providences shall never be long without a providence to notice. It is wise to observe what the Lord doth, for he is wonderful in counsel; has given us eyes to see with, and it is foolish to close them when there is most to observe; but we must observe wisely, otherwise we may soon confuse ourselves and others with hasty reflections upon the dealings of the Lord. In a thousand ways the lovingkindness of the Lord is shown, and if we will but prudently watch, we shall come to a better understanding of it. To understand the delightful attribute of lovingkindness is an attainment as pleasant as it is profitable: those who are proficient scholars in this will be among the sweetest singers to the glory of Jehovah ' (THE TREASURY OF DAVID).

**Are you a keen observer of God's good and wise providence? Do you understand his lovingkindness?**