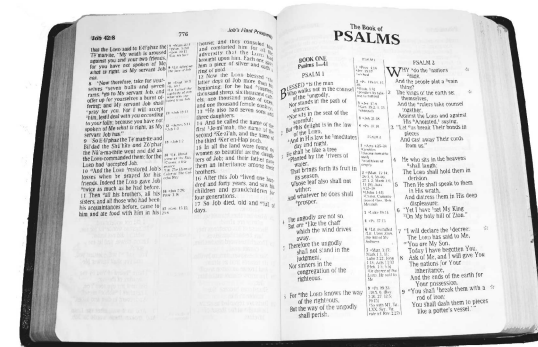


# PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



May 2017

1 Kings chapters 20 to 22  
Ephesians chapters 1 to 4

*Walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called*

We bring glory to God in the church by leading holy lives and Paul shows in Ephesians chapters 4 to 6 how we should live the Christians life in the fellowship of the local church, in the world, and at home. He urges us, ‘*Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called*’ (1). We are *called to be saints* and we have a *holy calling* (1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:9). One of the marks of walking worthy of our calling is to *keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace* (3). Paul was in prison for the sake of the gospel and he sees himself as *the prisoner of the Lord* (1; – NB. not of the Romans). He was bound by a chain (6:20) and he pleads that we too be chained to one another *in the bond of peace*.

A local church where there is unity, love and practical concern among the members is highly desirable; it is a foretaste of heaven on earth. Sadly, this is often not the case. There is discord in many churches and divisions that leave a trail of bitterness and heartache.

**Satan will do everything to destroy the unity of every true gospel church. He wants to divide us and thus to weaken us so that we pose no threat to his kingdom of darkness.** He knows that a divided church does not bring glory to God and we must be determined to give the devil no place in our fellowship. Division is necessary when a church or its pastor embraces false teaching, but many church splits are caused through misunderstanding or personality clashes.

We must never take unity for granted and we must make every effort to maintain it by having the Christlike attitudes described in verse 2. Stuart Olyott writes, ‘Unity is not automatic. Steps must be taken to preserve it. Work is needed. Who will make the necessary effort?’ (ALIVE IN CHRIST – EPHESIANS SIMPLY EXPLAINED, page 97, published by Evangelical Press).

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*Able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think*

Paul had been bold in his prayer for the Ephesians and had petitioned God to grant them great things. Perhaps you feel so weak that you could not imagine yourself becoming a strong Christian in the Lord, *strengthened with might through the Holy Spirit in the inner man and being rooted and grounded in love*. Why not? Nothing is impossible with God and this is one reason why we can be confident in our prayers. Paul ends his prayer with a great expression of praise to almighty God. *Now to him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us (20)*.

Paul's doxology is a wonderful affirmation of God's infinite power. He can not only do above all that we ask or think possible, but *exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think*. God has worked in us and is working in us by his almighty power. He has taken our darkened, blighted lives and has transformed them to love and to obey the Lord Jesus. That same power can work within us those things that Paul requested for the Ephesian church. God by his sovereign power is able to answer any prayer because nothing is too hard for him (Jeremiah 32:17). *The things which are impossible with men are possible with God* (Luke 18:27). What a privilege to come to such a God in prayer! Christian, take hold of these precious promises and persevere in your prayers for your unsaved relatives and friends. You may find yourself in very difficult and heartbreaking situations. Remember, your prayers are not in vain because God does hear his people.

Where is God's glory displayed? It is displayed in the church! *Now to him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages (21)*. **This glorifying of God must also be seen in the local church. Are you praying that God will be glorified in the life of your church?**

*You shall know that I am the LORD*

This chapter reveals the amazing patience and goodness of the Lord to wicked Ahab who was given yet more evidence of God's almighty power. Ben-Hadad the king of Syria, assembled a great army, being joined by thirty-two kings. He surrounded Samaria with his army and sent a message to Ahab, demanding his silver, his gold, his best wives and children. The king was a pathetic, cringing coward who yielded to Ben-Hadad's demands. The Syrian king was not satisfied, however, making further demands (1–6). Ahab summoned Israel's elders to come to him and told them of his plight. They showed more courage than their king and urged him not to give in to Ben-Hadad's demands (7–8).

Ahab sent the messengers of Ben-Hadad back to their king with his response. He was prepared to submit to the original demands but not those that were added. Ben-Hadad's messengers returned with dire threats but Ahab responded, *'Tell him, "Let not the one who puts on his armour boast like the one who takes it off"'* (9–11).

A prophet suddenly appeared to Ahab with a message of hope. God would give him a great victory over the Syrians: *'And you shall know that I am the LORD'* (13; cp. 28). Ahab wondered who would be Israel's leaders in this great victory and was told that they would be *the young leaders of the provinces'* (inexperienced soldiers) and Ahab would initiate the battle (14).

Ben-Hadad and his allies had a massive army and were arrogant in their expectation of victory. They were drinking to excess and becoming drunk. Ahab's army of seven thousand, led by two hundred and thirty-two young leaders gained a great victory. After the defeat of the Syrians and their allies, a prophet came and told Ahab to strengthen his forces because Ben-Hadad would attack again the following spring (19–22). God was very kind to wicked Ahab and proved to him that he was indeed *the LORD* but Ahab failed to respond to God's gracious dealings with him. **We must beware of despising the grace of God. We may go beyond the point of no return as did Ahab!**

*God of the hills ... God of the valleys*

The Syrians were convinced that they had been defeated because the Lord was God of the hills, but not God of the valleys. In other words, he was like their tribal deities, his power limited to certain areas or terrain. They decided that they would next fight the Israelites in the plain rather than in the hills. Ben-Hadad also took his servants' advice to remove the kings from their command, replacing them with more experienced military commanders. The army was built up to its former strength before they went to battle in the spring (23–26).

When the opposing armies mustered for battle, the Syrians filled the countryside, while the Israelite camp was like two little flocks of goats (27). A man of God came to Ahab and prophesied that God would give him a great victory because the Syrians had said, *'The LORD is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys'* (28). The message to Ahab was the same as that given before his previous victory: *'And you shall know that I am the LORD'* (28; cp 13). The armies faced each other for seven days before hostilities commenced. The Syrian army was destroyed and Ben-Hadad fled to his palace (29–30).

There are times when quite unwittingly, we make the same mistake as the heathen Syrians. We may belong to a small church with an aging membership and not expect God to work among us. That is Syrian theology and it is bad theology. God often works when humanly speaking there is no reason for optimism. We sometimes forget that God is in sovereign control of all our circumstances. Yes, he is the God who gives us great victories and blessings in our 'mountain-top' experiences, but he is also the God who is with us in the dark 'valleys' (cp. Psalm 23:4) of sorrow, loss, disappointment, discouragement and perplexity. **He is the God of all of our hills and valleys. How precious those valley experiences will become if we will only trust him in them!**

*That you may be filled with all the fullness of God*

Paul's prayed that the Ephesians *may be filled with all the fullness of God* (19). The *fullness of God* is to do with Christian maturity. We read of *the fullness of Christ* in this context in the next chapter (4:13–14). All the fullness of God is found in the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:9; 2:9) who communicates the life of God to his people (eg. the fruit of the Holy Spirit, *Love, joy, peace ...* etc. Galatians 5:22–23). This fruit will be perfected when we reach heaven but we will never be divine. Geoffrey Wilson helpfully comments, 'This therefore means that even when he is eventually filled with all the fullness of God, man does not himself become divine but remains a creature whose glory consists in eternally reflecting the glory of his Creator.' (EPHESIANS page 76. – Banner of Truth paperback).

Mormons believe that they will become gods and some extreme charismatics teach that Christians are gods now. They are all in great error and Paul's prayer that the Ephesians *may be filled with all the fullness of God* (19) does not support such heresy. Dr Lloyd-Jones suggests that the phrase would be better translated 'filled with respect to all the fullness of God' (THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST, page 281, Banner of Truth). We will never be like God in his unchanging nature, in his vast knowledge and inscrutable wisdom, in his almighty power or in his presence which is everywhere (theologians call these characteristics of God his 'incommunicable attributes'). The person who really knows God is humbled before him and stands in awe of his greatness and majesty (see Job 42:1–6).

**It is important that we see that being filled with all the fullness of God is associated with love rather than power (19). If I do not have love, I am nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2).**

*O fill me with thy fullness, Lord,  
Until my very heart o'erflow  
In kindling thought and glowing word,  
Thy love to tell, thy praise to show.*

(Frances Ridley Havergal)

*Rooted and grounded in love*

Paul prayed that the Ephesians would know spiritual strengthening (16). One of the marks of a strong Christian is the love of Christ in his life. Love to Christ and to each other are all important in the Christian life. Paul prays that his readers *being rooted and grounded in love may be able* (or ‘have strength’) *to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height — to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge* (17–19). Being *rooted and grounded* conveys two ideas:

- *Rooted* – Like a tree with roots spread deep and wide, giving a picture of stability, vigour and growth.
- *Grounded* – Like a building with deep and solid foundations, a picture of strength and stability.

The love of Christ is so wonderful that we will never fathom its depth nor scale its height. John Chrysostom, one of the church fathers, once wrote, ‘Oh, I am like a man digging in a deep spring; I stand here, and the water riseth upon me; I stand there, and still the water riseth upon me. But though we cannot ever know it all, yet we may and must grow in the knowledge of this love of Christ, in the searching of this sea that hath neither bank nor bottom.’

If we are not rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, we are very weak indeed. Are you enjoying the love of Christ in your daily experience? This wonderful love must not isolate us from other believers. It is *with all the saints* (18) that we appropriate the love of Christ as we talk about our discoveries and share our experiences with each other. It is a sad fact that we do very little of this. *Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what he has done for my soul* (Psalm 66:16). **It is as we love ‘all the saints’ even those who are not easy to love, that we will grow in Christ’s love and learn more of it each day.**

*So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided it*

God gave the Israelites a great victory over the Syrians just as the man of God had prophesied (28–30). He humbled the arrogant Ben-Hadad whose servile manner was comparable to that of Ahab earlier (4–9, 31–32). Ben-Hadad’s messengers rightly discerned that Ahab was favourably inclined to spare their king; this he did and also made a treaty with the Syrians (33–34).

One of the sons of the prophets *speaking by the word of the LORD* asked his neighbour to strike him but the man refused. He told the man that he would be killed by a lion as soon as he departed because he had disobeyed God. This prophecy was immediately fulfilled and another man did as the prophet requested (35–37). The prophet, who was known to Ahab (41), put a bandage over his eyes to disguise himself.

When the king passed by, the disguised prophet called out to Ahab and told a story of his failure to guard a prisoner and he wanted the king to cancel the punishment he would have to suffer. Ahab refused to comply and said to him, ‘*So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided it*’ (38–40). The prophet removed the bandage from his eyes and was recognised by Ahab. His story was a parable of Ahab’s disobedience to God. The Lord had appointed Ben-Hadad to utter destruction but Ahab had allowed him to slip through his hands. In his response to the prophet’s story, Ahab had passed judgment upon himself and his people (41–42).

Ahab had been given repeated opportunities to obey God and had refused to do so. He was displeased and sullen when condemned but he had no excuse. **If you are not a Christian, ponder the opportunities that God has given you to repent of your sin. Will you continue to be foolish like Ahab and waste those opportunities?** If you do, you have no ground for complaint when God the righteous Judge, punishes you.

*Sullen and displeased*

The Lord Jesus warns us, ‘*Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses*’ (Luke 12:15; cp. Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5). Covetousness is the mother of many other sins, including murder. David coveted another man’s wife and Ahab coveted another man’s vineyard; in both cases the outcome was murder. Naboth was quite right in refusing to sell his vineyard to the king. God had forbidden the Israelites to part with their inheritance (Leviticus 25:23–28).

Ahab was a weak, pathetic and petulant character who acted like a spoiled child when he did not get his way. He *went into his house sullen and displeased*. He went to his room and sulked, and he would not eat his food (4; cp. 20:43). When Jezebel wanted to know the reason for her husband’s sullen mood, Ahab told her of Naboth’s refusal, but failed to mention the reason for it. Jezebel, who had a very strong personality, told him that he must exercise his authority and that she would give him Naboth’s vineyard (7). It is quite apparent that she was the power behind the throne!

Jezebel’s scheme to have an innocent man convicted of blasphemy against God and the king was dreadful. Who more than Jezebel had blasphemed against God? The elders and nobles of Jezreel were just as guilty as Jezebel because they meekly obeyed her orders, being fully aware of the wickedness of her plot (8–16). Naboth was killed and Ahab had his vineyard but that was not the end of the story, as we shall see in tomorrow’s reading.

Many professing Christians behave just like Ahab. When they do not get their own way, they too become sullen and displeased. They become spiritual drop-outs and their Christian life is blighted. **How are you when you do not get what you want? Do you sulk, or do you graciously submit to your fellow- Christians (Ephesians 5:21) leaving the Lord to work all things together for good?**

*Strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man*

Paul’s prayer can be divided into four sections each beginning with the word, ‘*that*’ (16; 17a; 17b to 19a; 19b). He involves the entire Trinity in this prayer — Father (14), Son (17) and Holy Spirit (16). The apostle prayed that God would grant the Ephesians *according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man* (16). The *inner man* is the new nature that the Christian has in Christ, *the inward man* that delights in the law of God (Romans 7:22). It cannot be seen or touched like the body (cp. 2 Corinthians 4:16) but needs to be strengthened daily through the Holy Spirit.

Many Christians are weak, but we are commanded to *be strong in the Lord* (6:10). We must always be aware of our own dependence on the Lord for strength and never have confidence in ourselves. Satan will do all in his power to weaken us and we should pray each day for strength in the inner man. We will then be able to obey God and to show the beauty of the Lord Jesus in our lives (cp. 1 Peter 3:3–4).

You may wonder why Paul prays that Christ *may dwell in your hearts through faith* (17) if he comes into our lives at conversion. The Greek could be translated ‘that Christ may be at home in your hearts through faith’ (see John 14:23). The ‘heart’ in Scripture is the very centre of our personality, the seat of our affections (cp. Proverbs 4:23; Psalm 51:10; Ezekiel 36:26). **How is your heart? Has it been cleansed from sin through the blood of Christ? Are you living a holy life so that the Lord Jesus feels at home in your heart?**

*O for a heart to praise my God,  
A heart from sin set free,  
A heart that’s sprinkled with the blood  
So freely shed for me.*

*A heart resigned, submissive, meek;  
My great Redeemer’s throne;  
Where only Christ is heard to speak,  
Where Jesus reigns alone.*

(Charles Wesley)

*The whole family in heaven and earth*

The apostle now returns to the point where he left off in verse 1 and he again writes, ‘*For this reason ...*’ (14). He bowed his knees to God the Father who had poured out rich blessings on both Jew and Gentile, reconciling them to God *in Christ* and to each other (2:16). He was also concerned to pray for the Ephesians. Imprisonment in Rome did not affect Paul’s prayer life. It is an encouragement to know that nothing can deny us access to the throne of grace. Though Paul was a great man of prayer, he was never irreverent or flippant before God; he bowed his knees before the Almighty (14). William Hendriksen comments on this verse, ‘Posture in prayer is never a matter of indifference. The slouching of the body while one is supposed to be praying is an abomination to the Lord.’ Though we can come to God with boldness and confidence (12), we must always be reverent.

Paul bowed his *knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named* (14–15). *The whole family* is the church of God. The Ephesians had once been far away from God but now they belonged to his family and they enjoyed wonderful privileges. One of those privileges is to bring family (church) needs as well as personal needs to our heavenly Father in prayer (cp. Matthew 6:8–13).

God’s family includes every believer who has ever lived, from Old Testament as well as New Testament times. Death cannot remove us from God’s family which extends to heaven. When we die, we are not separated from the love of God nor removed from his family. We will then join the saints who have been made perfect and who enjoy eternal bliss. When the Lord Jesus comes again, there will be a glorious reunion, a marvellous family gathering. We shall see our precious Saviour, we shall be reunited with our Christian loved-ones, we shall then be made perfect and we will worship God as never before. **How wonderful to be in God’s family!**

*You have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD*

Jezebel had said to Ahab, ‘*Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth*’ (15). It appeared that the terrible crime could be put behind them, but they had reckoned without God who sees everything. The Lord told Elijah, ‘*Arise, go down to meet Ahab ...*’ (18). Ahab went to Jezreel where he was confronted by Elijah who had a solemn message of judgment from the Lord. God would bring calamity upon him and his descendants would be destroyed. The dogs would lick up his blood in the very place where they had licked Naboth’s blood and dogs would eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel (19–23). These prophecies were all fulfilled (22:38; 2 Kings 9:24 to 10:17).

The prophet unfolded God’s case against wicked Ahab:

- ‘*You have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD*’ (20; cp. verse 25 where we are told that it was Jezebel who had encouraged him in his wickedness). Many people have sold their souls to Satan to do evil but they will not escape the judgment of Almighty God! We cannot hide our sin from God (Numbers 32:23) and whatever we sow, we will also reap (Galatians 6:7).
- He had provoked God to anger, and had made Israel sin (22).

Ahab did not obtain any satisfaction from Naboth’s vineyard. He tore his clothes and put on sackcloth as an expression of mourning. Subsequent events proved that this was not true repentance (27–29; cp. 22:8, 26–28). The Lord told Elijah that he would postpone his judgment upon Ahab’s household. He is not deceived by false repentance, but he is patient, giving sinners opportunities to repent (cp. 2 Peter 3:9).

We still encounter those who hate the Word of God, who imprison and murder Christians. God hates injustice and he will avenge his elect (Luke 18:7–8). **Let us remember that God is sovereign (Psalm 11) and seek to lead godly lives, shining as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Philippians 2:15).**

*Whatever the LORD says to me, that I will speak*

Ben-Hadad had promised to restore to Ahab the cities taken from Israel during his father's reign (20:31–34). Those promises were broken and after three years, Ahab decided that he must recover Ramoth Gilead from the Syrians (1–3). Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, had become related to Ahab through the marriage of his son, Jehoram, to Ahab's daughter Athaliah (2 Kings 8:16–18). When Ahab sought his help, Jehoshaphat readily agreed, but wanted him first to seek God's direction in the matter. Ahab summoned his false prophets who were quite ready to speak in the name of the Lord and to tell the king just what he wanted to hear (5–6, 11–12). Jehoshaphat had his misgivings and asked for a genuine prophet of the Lord to be consulted. Ahab hated faithful Micaiah and was reluctant to send for him but did so at the insistence of Jehoshaphat. Ahab's messenger begged the prophet to encourage the king by saying the same thing as the other prophets but Micaiah replied, *'Whatever the LORD says to me, that I will speak'* (14).

When Micaiah promised Ahab success it was obvious that the prophet was taunting him. The king then asked for *'nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD'* (16). Micaiah told him that Israel would be left without their king in the coming battle (17 – *as sheep that have no shepherd*). Ahab knew that any faithful messenger of God would prophesy evil against him, but he refused to listen to the word of God. He preferred to listen to his own prophets who spoke by a lying spirit (18–23). Zedekiah, one of Ahab's leading prophets struck Micaiah who was then imprisoned for his faithfulness. Micaiah warned all present that they would know that God had spoken by him when Ahab failed to return from the battle (24–28).

We live at a time when many professing Christian leaders reject the Word of God. They refuse to speak of judgment and hell, or of the death and resurrection of Christ to save sinners. **We must never allow ourselves to be deceived by them!** Our attitude must be like that of Micaiah, *'Whatever the LORD says to me (through the Bible), that I will speak.'*

*The manifold wisdom of God*

Paul's purpose in preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles was *that now the manifold wisdom of God might be known by the church to the principalities and powers (angels) in the heavenly places* (10). The word *manifold* basically means 'much varied' but F.F. Bruce suggests that it could be translated 'many-splendoured'. By whom is this many-splendoured wisdom of God made known? It is not made known by individuals but by the church. Paul again points us to the importance of the church in God's eternal purpose. We must never despise *the church* for which Christ gave his life (5:25). The local church is the expression of the universal church and it is important that we are fully-committed members of a gospel church.

Notice also that *the manifold wisdom of God is made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places* (10). The angels who sinned were not spared God's judgment (2 Peter 2:4) but hell-deserving sinners are chosen by God and spared. Why? Because God set his love upon us and *did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all* (Romans 8:32). This is the glorious, many-splendoured wisdom *which angels desire to look into* (1 Peter 1:12). The Son of God dying to save sinners and bringing them out of the most appalling darkness (4:18–19; 5:8) and deadness (2:1–6) to transform them by his grace and to put them into his own family (15). One day the church will be made perfect and will reign with Christ for ever. *The manifold wisdom of God*. How marvellous is God's *eternal purpose* (11)! In Christ we now *have boldness and access with confidence* (12) because God has forgiven us and reconciled us to himself. **Let us rejoice in the manifold wisdom of God!**

*'Tis mystery all! The immortal dies!  
Who can explore his strange design?  
In vain the first-born seraph tries  
To sound the depths of love divine!  
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,  
Let angel minds inquire no more.*

(Charles Wesley)



*The unsearchable riches of Christ*

Paul rightly saw that his ministry to the Gentiles was *the gift of the grace of God* (7) and he was very humble despite his great success in planting churches. He goes on to write, *‘To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ’* (8). Paul had been a blasphemer and persecutor of the church (1 Timothy 1:13) but now he rejoiced in the grace of God who had not only saved him, but had chosen him to preach the gospel. When we remember all the blessings of salvation that we have and what we owe to the grace of God, there is no place for pride in our lives!

The apostle did not preach about himself (2 Corinthians 4:5). He preached *the unsearchable riches of Christ*. These riches cannot be fathomed and like the ways of God, they are past finding out (Romans 11:33 – same Greek word as translated *unsearchable*). We considered our great wealth in Christ in our notes on chapter 1 where Paul also used the word *riches* (1:7,18; cp. 2:7; 3:16).

The unsearchable riches of Christ are wonderful in every way! The eternal Son of God who with the Father made the universe, came to this earth taking human flesh. He became poor, he suffered, died and rose again from the dead. Why? He offered his sinless life to save us from our sins. He died to deliver us from Satan’s dark kingdom, to make us his own and to bring us into *the household of God* (2:19). He offered up his own life to give us eternal life, to bring us to glory, to give us an everlasting inheritance – and more (cp. 1 Corinthians 2:9)!

How foolish to seek worldly pleasures and treasures which do not last when we have *the unsearchable riches of Christ*! **Doesn’t all this humble you as it humbled Paul? Doesn’t it encourage you to love Jesus more, to praise him and to obey him?**

*A certain man drew a bow at random*

Micaiah had warned that going to war with the Syrians would be disastrous. He said, *‘Take heed, all you people!’* (28). Jehoshaphat must have recognised that Micaiah was speaking the truth, but he ignored God’s servant. Ahab must have had some misgivings, hence his plan to disguise himself to hide his royal status. He knew that he would be a marked man on the battlefield and he shed his royal robes. It is surprising that Jehoshaphat agreed to wear his royal robes which would place him at greater risk (29–30).

Ben-Hadad ordered his commanders to go for the king of Israel and seeing Jehoshaphat in his royal robes deceived them into believing that this was Ahab. Jehoshaphat cried out in this dangerous situation and the Syrian pursuers realised that he was not the man they really wanted; they called off their pursuit (31–33).

Throughout his life Ahab had stubbornly refused to heed God’s word and he was foolish to imagine that he could overturn Micaiah’s prophecy by disguising himself. *A certain man drew a bow at random*, not realising that he was pointing his arrow in the direction of the disguised king (34). The arrow found its way through a chink in Ahab’s armour. There are no random happenings with God! The random arrow that hit Ahab was planned by the Lord to fulfil his Word.

Ahab was mortally wounded and bled to death in his chariot. When his chariot was washed at a pool, the dogs licked up his blood, fulfilling the prophecy of Elijah (34–38). **God not only keeps his promises, he also fulfils his warning of judgment. If we are wise, we will take notice of God’s holy Word.**

*Also Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel*

The remainder of the chapter gives a summary of the reigns of Jehoshaphat of Judah and Ahaziah of Israel. Look at verse 44: *Also Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel*. His friendship with Ahab was to have disastrous consequences for himself and his descendants. His son Jehoram was influenced by his wicked wife, Athaliah (daughter of Ahab and Jezebel). He murdered all his brothers after Jehoshaphat's death (2 Chronicles 21:4–6). Athaliah mothered a very wicked son, Ahaziah of Judah. Following the death of Jehoram and the short reign of Ahaziah, she murdered all the royal princes (her own grandsons) with the exception of Joash who was hidden from her (2 Chronicles 22).

Jehoshaphat failed to shield his son from the wicked influence of Ahab and Jezebel and allowed him to marry into that dreadful family. **Those of us who are parents have a solemn responsibility to instruct and to guide our children according to the Word of the Lord. Where possible we must guard them from malign influences by being careful in the choice of our friends.** *Evil company corrupts good habits* (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Ahaziah (not to be confused with Ahaziah of Judah) succeeded his father Ahab to the throne of Israel. He was an evil man and a Baal-worshipper who *provoked the LORD God of Israel to anger* (51–53). Jehoshaphat allied himself with this wicked man and built ships with a view to creating wealth through foreign trading (47). A servant of God prophesied against Jehoshaphat telling him that because of his alliance with Ahaziah, God would destroy his works and the ships were wrecked (2 Chronicles 20:35–37). When Ahaziah proposed replacing the fleet, Jehoshaphat declined (49). The king of Judah had learned at last that it is wise to obey God.

*The mystery of Christ*

Paul writes, *For this reason ...* (1) and then digresses from what he was going to say before returning to the subject in verse 14 where he uses the same expression. Notice how Paul views his imprisonment in Rome. He had been unjustly convicted, having attracted opposition from the Jews because of his contact with Gentiles. They wrongly thought that he had taken Trophimus, a Gentile from Ephesus into the forbidden inner-courts of the temple when he had last visited Jerusalem. He recognised that the Lord was sovereign over all his circumstances. He was *the prisoner of Jesus Christ* (cp. 4:1) and not the prisoner of Caesar. When we walk with the Lord, we should remember that he places us where we are, whatever the difficulties; then we will *not lose heart* (13). Everything that happens to us is *according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his own will* (1:11).

When Paul mentioned that he was a prisoner *for you Gentiles*, he thought about *the mystery of Christ* (3–4, 9). We saw in the notes for 13 May (on chapter 1:9), that the *mystery* is not some vague thing which is beyond our knowledge. It is a secret which God has revealed and which is understood only by those who have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit (5; cp. Mark 4:11; 1 Corinthians 2:7–16). What is this *mystery*? It is that salvation is not restricted to the Jews but that Gentiles are also included. The promises of the Old Testament point to the salvation of Gentiles (cp. Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 11:10; 49:6; 54:1–3; 60:1–3). Most Jews never grasped this except for a few such as Simeon (Luke 2:32). *In Christ* Gentiles and Jews are *fellow heirs*, (and members) *of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ through the gospel* (6).

Paul fully accepted the suffering and the tribulation that came because of his preaching to the Gentiles (1,13). **Are we prepared to make Christ known whatever the cost to ourselves?**

*Fellow citizens with the saints and members  
of the household of God*

Paul again uses the word ‘but’ to show our present position in Christ. The new covenant provides us with better promises than those given to Israel under the old covenant (Hebrews 8:6–12; 1 Peter 2:9). *We are no longer strangers and foreigners (from the commonwealth of Israel and the covenants of promise, cp. verse 12) but:*

- *Fellow citizens with the saints* (God’s people). We are citizens of heaven (19; Philippians 3:20) and our names are written there (Luke 10:20; Hebrews 12:23).
- *Members of the household of God* (19). We are now in his family which is in heaven and on earth (3:15). What a great blessing! This should give us much joy.
- Joined together in a building which has been *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone* (20–21; cp. Isaiah 28:16; 1 Peter 2:4–7). The apostle now turns our attention from the household to the structure of the house. All other stones in a building are adjusted to the cornerstone. **In our spiritual house we are dependent upon Christ and must regulate our lives according to his will.**
- A building which *grows into a holy temple in the Lord* (21). The Ephesians were very conscious of the great temple in their city used for the worship of the goddess Diana (Acts 19:27), but God does not dwell in such places (Acts 17:24). He is present among his people. We are *a holy temple in the Lord*. God requires all of us to lead holy lives (1 Peter 1:15–16).
- *A habitation of God in the Spirit* (22). Once we were far from God but now he dwells within us by the Holy Spirit. How marvellous!

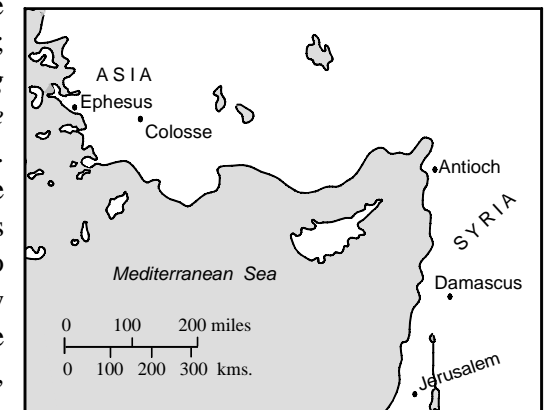
*Dear Lord, and shall thy Spirit rest  
In such a wretched heart as mine?  
Unworthy dwelling! glorious Guest!  
Favour astonishing, divine!*

(Anne Steele)

## EPHESIANS

Ephesus was the most important city in the Roman province of Asia (now the western coast of Turkey). It had a thriving port which has long since been silted up – the sea is now some six miles from the site of Ephesus. The city boasted the largest building in the Greek world, the massive temple of the goddess Diana (Artemis) which attracted thousands of pilgrims. Occult practices flourished and there was a great trade in making and selling Diana images, talismans, etc. which was threatened by the coming of the gospel (Acts 19:19, 24–27). Paul paid a short visit to Ephesus on his second missionary journey, leaving Aquila and Priscilla to remain there (Acts 18:19–21). He returned on his third missionary journey, staying for three years, two of which were spent in *reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus* (Acts 19:1–41; 20:18–35). From Ephesus, the gospel spread throughout the province of Asia and *the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed* (Acts 19:10–20).

Paul was in prison at Rome when he wrote his letter to the Ephesians between AD 61 to 63. He wrote to the Colossian church (also in Asia) at the same time. Tychicus, *a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord* carried the letters to the churches (Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7). There is a great emphasis on the church in this letter of Paul. The church is described as the *Body* (1:22–23; 4:4,16; 5:23,30); the *Building* (2:19–22) and the *Bride* (5:25–27,32) of Christ. The nature of the believer’s life in Christ is described in chapters 1 to 3; chapters 4 to 6 show how that life is to be worked out in the church, the family, and the world.



### Outline of Ephesians

1. The Believer's Blessings in Christ (His Wealth in Christ) – chapters 1 to 3
 

Opening greetings	–	1:1–2
Every spiritual blessing	–	1:3–14
Paul's first prayer	–	1:15–23
Saved by grace	–	2:1–10
Jew and Gentile	–	2:11–22
The mystery of the gospel	–	3:1–13
Paul's second prayer	–	3:14–21
  
2. The Believer's Life in Christ (His Walk in Christ) – chapters 4 to 6
 

Walk worthy	–	4:1–16
Walk differently	–	4:17–32
Walk in love	–	5:1–7
Walk in light	–	5:8–14
Walk wisely	–	5:15 to 6:9
Walk in God's armour	–	6:10–20
Closing greetings	–	6:21–24

N.B. The letter of Paul to the Ephesians is so rich and wonderful in teaching that we shall repeat some readings for additional days to give more space for explanation. **Be sure to read the repeat passage of Scripture each day so that it will be impressed on your mind.**

### *Through him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father*

Reconciliation to God brings great privileges to every Christian and there is no difference in status between Jewish or Gentile Christians. Let us think about verse 18: *For through him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father* (cp. 3:12). Notice the involvement of all of the Persons of the Trinity in this. Our access to the Father is through the Son (on the basis of his death and resurrection) and by the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is also reassuring to know that the Holy Spirit is active in our lives to help us in our prayers (cp. 6:18; Romans 8:14–16, 26–27; Jude 20). The Lord Jesus is the only mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5). There is no other way of coming to God the Father except through him (John 14:6). How wonderful to know that we can come to God in prayer at any time; we have access to him!

When we come to God in prayer we come to him as our heavenly Father. He loves us and delights to supply our every need (cp. Matthew 6:32–34). We also come to God who reigns supreme over the universe and nothing is impossible with him (Genesis 18:14; Psalm 93:1–2). His throne for us is *the throne of grace* (Hebrews 4:16) where he receives us not on the basis of anything we deserve, but because he is full of grace and has set his love upon us.

**Christian, think of this! You are able to come into the presence of the King of all the universe, the sovereign, almighty, eternal, holy, and all-wise God, and he delights to receive you.** What a privilege it is to carry everything to God in prayer! Are you making good use of this precious privilege, rejoicing in the free access that you have to the throne of God?

*Thou art coming to a King  
Large petitions with thee bring;  
For his grace and power are such,  
None can ever ask too much.*

(John Newton)

*Made near by the blood of Christ*

There is bitter racial and religious tension in the world between Jew and Arab, Hindu and Muslim, etc. This is not a new phenomenon. Many of the Jews in New Testament times despised Gentiles whom they contemptuously called ‘*Uncircumcision*’ (11).

The apostle now introduces us to the great theme of reconciliation. We must never forget that there is a state of enmity and hostility, between God and sinful men (15). We have offended God by our sin and we need to be reconciled to him if we are to be saved. This alienation is far more serious than any alienation that is found between one person and another or between nations. God in his great mercy has provided the way of reconciliation: *For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life ... through whom we have now received the reconciliation* (Romans 5:10–11).

We should often take time to remember what God has done for us. Paul encourages the Ephesians to do the same – they were to remember their former state as Gentiles when they were without Christ, alienated from the life of Israel, strangers to the promises of God, hopeless and godless (11–12). Before our conversion to Christ we are described as *having no hope and without God in the world*. Paul again uses the word, ‘*but*’ to show the difference that Christ had made in their lives: *But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ* (13).

In Christ the barriers are broken down! Paul shows that *the middle wall of division* between Jew and Gentile is removed when both are saved (14–15). They are reconciled to God and to one another (16). The blood of Christ shed for sinners brings us near to God and closer to each other. **Have you been reconciled to God?** If you are far away from him and know that you are without him, do come to him repenting of your sin and trusting in the Lord Jesus. He will gladly receive you, forgive you, and bring you near to himself!

*The saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus*

We usually sign our name at the end of a letter but in Bible times a writer introduced himself at the beginning of his letter. The apostle Paul describes himself as *an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God*. He was not self-appointed but was sent by God (the word ‘*apostle*’ means ‘one who is sent’).

Paul’s letter was addressed to *the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus* (1). Here is a good description of Christians. Christians are:

- *Saints* – All the early Christians were known as saints and if you are a Christian, you are a saint. A saint is a person who is set apart to God (sanctified), to live for him and to shine for him in this dark and sinful world.
- *Faithful* – To be faithful is to exercise faith in Christ, trusting him to save us from sin, relying on him in every difficult and perplexing circumstance. In other Bible verses it refers to those who are reliable and steadfast (cp. Matthew 25:21).
- *In Christ Jesus* – We are all born *in Adam* but when we are saved, we are *in Christ* (1 Corinthians 15:22). To be *in Christ* is to be taken from spiritual death into new life, to be a new creation in him (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Christians also know the *grace* (undeserved favour) and *peace* of God in their lives (2). Paul’s first readers were in Ephesus, a city in great spiritual darkness where the temple of the goddess Diana attracted thousands of pilgrims, and where occult practices were widespread (Acts 19:18–41). They were in Ephesus, but they were also *in Christ* and in him there is joy and victory. Remember, dear saint of God, you may live or work in a place where there is much spiritual darkness, but in that place, you are *in Christ*. **Live as a saint should live and God will bless and use your witness to his glory!**

*Blessed be ... God ... who has blessed us*

After his opening greetings Paul blesses God for all the spiritual blessings that he has given to us. Our English word ‘eulogy’ comes from the Greek word used for *blessed* (3); it means ‘to speak well of’ or ‘to praise’. We have received so many blessings that our hearts should be filled with praise to the triune God. We have been chosen by God the Father (3–6); redeemed by the Son (7–12) and sealed by the Holy Spirit (13–14). What are the spiritual blessings bestowed upon us?

- Predestination (4,5,11).
- Adoption into God’s family (5).
- Acceptance and forgiveness (6–7).
- Redemption (7).
- The knowledge of God’s will (8–10).
- A glorious inheritance (11,18).

**What a wealth we have in Christ!** No wonder Paul rejoices in *the riches of his grace*’ (7; 2:7) and in *the riches of the glory of his inheritance* (18). He describes this wealth as *the unsearchable riches of Christ* (3:8). Commentators are not agreed on the meaning of *heavenly places* (3). Matthew Henry suggests that it may refer to the church as distinguished from the world, or to the heavenly origin of these spiritual blessings. Christ sits at the right hand of God in the heavenly places (20) and though we are on earth, we *sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus* (2:6) because we are *in Christ*. We are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20) and we live in a spiritual realm as well as on earth. In this realm we not only enjoy God’s blessings, but are also engaged in spiritual warfare (6:12).

Christian, think about your great privileges *in Christ* and praise God with all your heart. All the blessings of salvation are *in Christ* (3,4,7,10,11,13). Are you *in Christ*? If you are not, I urge you to seek the Lord with all your heart and to repent of your sin.

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

*By grace you have been saved*

The Christian message is *the gospel of the grace of God* (Acts 20:24). The apostle Paul rejoices in that grace and he almost runs out of superlatives to describe it. He writes of *the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus* (7). James Denney describes grace in this way: ‘Grace is the love of God, spontaneous, beautiful, unearned, at work in Christ for the salvation of sinners.’ Paul twice states, ‘*By grace you have been saved*’ (5,8).

Any religion which teaches that we can earn our salvation by good works or through suffering in this life or the life to come, or by observing religious ritual, is false. Salvation is the gift of God and we are saved by grace (8). The apostle states, ‘*By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God*’ (8). Good works cannot save us (Titus 3:5). We cannot contribute anything to our salvation. We must come to Christ humbly trusting in him to save us. The doctrine of doing penance for sin or of suffering for sins in a place called purgatory before we can enter heaven is not found in the Bible. The Lord Jesus died to save sinners and bore the punishment we deserve (Isaiah 53:4–6; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18).

There is no place for pride or boasting in the Christian life. We owe everything to God: *We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works* (9–10). God saves us to glorify him by our good works (Matthew 5:16; 2 Corinthians 9:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:17; Titus 3:1; Hebrews 13:20–21; James 2:18). **Though good works cannot save us, they are important! What good works can be seen in your life?**

*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)

*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love ...*

We saw yesterday that sinners are *by nature children of wrath* (3). Christian, you were once alienated from God and had his holy wrath hanging over you. You were helpless and hopeless in your sin, *but God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us ... made us alive together with Christ* (4–5). Those words, *But God* make all the difference for us! We are told two things about God in verse 4:

1. God is rich in mercy. – *But God, who is rich in mercy ...* We fully deserved God's wrath, but in his mercy, he gave his beloved Son to die for us. He freely forgave us and he has heaped marvellous blessings upon us. Notice that the apostle does not just describe God as being merciful, but states that he *is rich in mercy*. The Bible says that God *delights in mercy* (Micah 7:18; some versions translate *mercy* in the Old Testament as 'steadfast love' or 'lovingkindness'). Are you struggling with failure? Is the devil suggesting to you that God has cast you off? Oh, remember that God is *rich in mercy*. Come to him and call upon him for mercy. He will hear you and accept you because *he delights in mercy!*

2. God is great in love. – *Because of his great love with which he loved us*. He loved poor sinners like us so much that he did not spare his beloved Son the appalling horror of suffering on the cross to save us (Romans 8:32). Is it any wonder that we humbly and joyfully sing, Amazing love! How can it be that thou my God should'st die for me?

The Lord Jesus Christ sits at God's *right hand in the heavenly places* (1:20). When we are saved, we are united to Christ. This union is described as being '*in Christ Jesus*' (6–7). We are raised from being dead in our sins and we sit *in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*. We know his presence with us, though we are not yet literally in heaven. One day we will be with him in glory because of *the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus* (7). **Oh, let us pour out our hearts in praise to our great God and Saviour!**

*He chose us in him before the foundation of the world*

The doctrine of election has been a topic for heated debate in the history of the church, but for Paul and Peter it inspired adoration and praise (3–5; 1 Peter 1:2–4). Scripture is quite plain in teaching that before he made the world, God chose a vast number of people for himself (the elect), and gave them to Christ. *He chose us in him before the foundation of the world* (4; cp. John 6:37; Romans 8:28–30; 2 Thessalonians 2:13).

Many Christians are not at all clear about the doctrine of election. They believe that God chose us because he knew in eternity past that we would choose him. This is not true! The Bible teaches that election is entirely the sovereign and gracious purpose of God, and not according to any faith or good works foreseen by God in us (eg. Romans 9:11–16; 2 Timothy 1:9). God chose us and set his love upon us *according to the good pleasure of his will* (5,9,11).

**Let us think about some of the implications of election:**

- God has chosen us *that we should be holy and without blame before him* (4). If we have no desire to please and to obey God, we must question whether we are truly saved.
- We have been chosen that God should be praised and glorified – *to the praise of the glory of his grace* (6; cp. 12).
- God has *predestined us* to be adopted into his family having *made us accepted in the Beloved* (that is 'in Christ', 6). What a glorious privilege to belong to God's family and to know the almighty God as our loving heavenly Father!
- We have been predestined to obtain a wonderful inheritance in heaven (11,18). The best is yet to be!

*Chosen, not for good in me,  
Wakened up from wrath to flee,  
Hidden in the Saviour's side,  
By the Spirit sanctified,  
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show  
By my love how much I owe.*

(Robert M. M'Cheyne)

*In him we have redemption through his blood*

*Redemption* and *grace*, like *election* are key words in the teaching of the Bible. *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace* (7). The word, ‘*Redemption*’ means ‘release by payment of a ransom’. The Lord Jesus came into the world *to give his life a ransom for many* (Mark 10:45). Men and women are slaves to sin which brings ruin, misery and damnation, but the Lord Jesus redeemed us with his precious blood (1 Peter 1:18–19). He paid the ransom price to save us!

*There was no other good enough  
To pay the price of sin;  
He only could unlock the gate  
Of heaven and let us in.* (Cecil F. Alexander)

The only way to forgiveness of sins is by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ (7). Redemption brings us freedom from:

- The curse of the law (Galatians 3:13).
- From the guilt, punishment and power of sin (John 8:34; Romans 6:14; 1 Corinthians 7:23).
- The power of darkness (Satan) to bring us into the glorious kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13–14).

Redeemed! – Set free, forgiven and cleansed from sin. Redeemed *from every lawless deed* and purified to be Christ’s own special people (Titus 2:14). What a wonderful salvation! What a wonderful Saviour! Forgiveness means that our sins are removed for ever and are forgotten by God (Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 44:22; Jeremiah 31:34; Micah 7:19).

*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace* (7). There would be no redemption but for the grace of God. God’s grace is favour that we do not deserve, nor can we earn it (see notes on Ephesians 2:7–8). **If we love the Lord, we should never cease praising him for the riches of his grace.**

*Dead in trespasses and sins*

Paul moves on from his statement about the church which is the body of Christ (1:22–23) and goes on to describe the former state of his readers in the Ephesian church (and indeed of every Christian). We were in a terrible mess before Christ saved us. *We were dead in trespasses and sins* (1,5). That means that we were totally incapable of responding to the message of the gospel – we were spiritually dead. It is for this reason that *the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God* (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Though we were spiritually dead before we were saved, we were very much alive to do Satan’s bidding. We led our lives *according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air* (Satan). We were disobedient to God because we were enslaved by the devil and by our own sinful nature (2–3). *We were by nature children of wrath*. That was our terrifying condition; we were under God’s holy wrath! M.R. Vincent in his ‘WORD STUDIES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT’ with reference to this statement, writes, ‘Wrath is God’s holy hatred of sin, his essential, necessary antagonism to everything evil.’ The wrath of man is often uncontrolled rage and is sinful, but God’s wrath is a revelation of his righteous indignation *against all ungodliness and unrighteousness* of sinners (Romans 1:18).

When we understand the terrible plight of sinners, we realise that nothing short of a miracle can save them. They do not need entertaining, but for the Holy Spirit to awaken them as they hear the faithful preaching of the gospel. It takes *the exceeding greatness of his power* to bring life to the dead sinner and to raise him to new life in Christ (5–6; cp. 1:19). **As you think of what you were before your conversion to Christ, thank him for saving your soul, for bringing you to new birth, and for giving you a living hope (1 Peter 1:3).**

*Lord! I was dead, I could not stir  
My lifeless soul to come to thee;  
But now since thou hast quickened me  
I rise from sin’s dark sepulchre!* (William T. Matson)



*The church, which is his body*

When Paul considered the staggering power of God, he thought of his almighty work in raising Christ from the dead to sit at his own right hand (19–20). The Lord Jesus reigns supreme over all *principality and power* (21). Stuart Olyott comments, ‘There is nowhere that Jesus Christ does not rule. He is over all. But for whose benefit does he rule the universe? Verse 22 gives us the answer. He does it for the church. He reigns in order to further the interests of believers. We are down here on earth, but our Lord does not stand aloof from us. We are his body, and he is our head. Christ and his people are bound together by an inextricable link. We belong to each other, and his life is our life.’ (pages. 54–55, ALIVE IN CHRIST – EPHESIANS SIMPLY EXPLAINED; published by Evangelical Press).

God has not called us to be Christians in isolation, but has called us into his church. Paul emphasises two things concerning Christ’s relationship to his church:

1. The Lord Jesus is *head over all things to the church* (22; cp. 5:23; Colossians 1:18). The church has its leaders but it does not have an earthly head. The Roman Catholic church is in great error in claiming that the pope is the head of the church. There is no Scriptural warrant whatever for such a notion. Christ alone is the head of the church!
2. The church is *his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all* (23). The Lord Jesus with the Father created our vast universe and he upholds it (Hebrews 1:2–3). He is entirely self-sufficient and yet in a sense he is incomplete without the church which is his fullness. He *loved the church and gave himself for it* (5:25). The church is his body and is united to him. **We are united to the One who is absolutely sovereign over his universe. Why should we fear or be discouraged? Let us encourage ourselves in him.**

*Having made known to us the mystery of his will*

There is yet more to the riches of God’s grace. God gives us *wisdom and prudence* (better translated *wisdom and insight* as in the English Standard Version). He has enlightened our darkened minds to understand the glories of the gospel of Christ. God has also *made known to us the mystery of his will* that all things shall be gathered together under Christ’s rule (8–10; cp. Acts 3:21).

The word *mystery* is often used by the apostle Paul in his letters. When the New Testament uses the word ‘mystery’ it does not mean something mysterious, beyond the reach of human understanding, but something which can only be known through the revelation of God by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10–13; cp. Mark 4:11; Colossians 1:26–27). *The natural man* (the unconverted person) *does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him* (1 Corinthians 2:14). Spiritual wisdom is hidden from the lost because they are blinded by Satan (2 Corinthians 4:3–4). God’s plan of salvation is to be proclaimed to all, but only those whom God enlightens can understand this revelation. *Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh ...* (1 Timothy 3:16).

God, in his sovereign and gracious purpose, has also given to us *an inheritance* in Christ (11,14,18). We have received part of that inheritance here and now in the blessings of redemption described yesterday. There is more to come, however! God has prepared wonderful things for those who love him, his heirs (Matthew 25:34; 1 Corinthians 2:9). The Lord Jesus is preparing a place for us in heaven (John 14:2–3) where we have an inheritance which will never decay, tarnish or fade away (1 Peter 1:4). This inheritance is reserved for us in heaven, the most secure place of all – far safer than the vaults of the Bank of England or Fort Knox! **Life for the Christian is full of purpose and meaning. Let us be encouraged and praise God for his wonderful grace.**

*Sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise*

Paul reminded the Ephesians that they came to faith in Christ after they *heard the word of truth, the gospel of their salvation* (13; cp. Acts 19:10,18–20). God’s method of saving souls is through his precious Word: *Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (Romans 10:17). We live in confused times when many professing evangelicals have gone crazy about other methods to promote faith in Christ – drama, pop-gospel singers, dance and even cabaret acts. Apart from being unscriptural, such methods often distort gospel truth and fail to convey that we have a serious message. To resort to these expedients is plain unbelief, a lack of confidence in God to use *the word of truth* to awaken and to save souls.

When we come to faith in Christ, we are *sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise*. **This is not some ‘second blessing’ which a certain Christian elite receive. Paul makes no exceptions – all the Ephesian believers were sealed with the Holy Spirit (13; cp. 4:30).**

A seal was used as:

- A mark of authenticity and genuineness, eg. a royal seal on decrees (1 Kings 21:8; Esther 3:12). The Holy Spirit makes all the difference in our lives and he marks us out as God’s people.
- A mark of ownership (cattle and sheep are often branded to identify their owner). We belong to Christ (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).
- A mark of protection. Our Lord’s tomb was sealed to protect it from intruders (Matthew 27:66). We are *sealed for the day of redemption* (4:30) when Christ will return. We are eternally secure!

The Holy Spirit is *the guarantee of our inheritance* (14; cp. 2 Corinthians 1:22 where the word *deposit* is the same Greek word translated *guarantee*). He is the pledge of the glorious inheritance that we have in Christ. **Our future and our inheritance are secure!** — No wonder that Paul is stirred to praise God and to repeat for the third time, *to the praise of his glory* (14; cp. 6,12).

*The exceeding greatness of his power towards us who believe*

Paul constantly prayed for the Ephesians and gave thanks for them because of their faith in Christ and their love for **all** their fellow-believers (*all the saints*, 15–16). Love for other Christians is an evidence of true faith in Christ (John 13:35; James 2:14–18). We do have our own close friends but we must not pick and choose which Christians we love. We are to love all those whom God has chosen – *all the saints* with all their faults!

Paul prayed that God would give them *the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him*, and that they would know continued enlightenment (17–18). We do not have instant maturity at conversion. We have *to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (2 Peter 3:18). Paul prayed for this ongoing wisdom and enlightenment for the Ephesians that they might know:

- *What is the hope of his calling* (18). ‘It is a desirable thing to know what this hope of our calling is, to have such an acquaintance with the immense privileges of God’s people, and the expectations they have from God, and with respect to the heavenly inheritance, as to be quickened thereby to the utmost diligence and patience in the Christian course’ (Matthew Henry).
- *What are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints* (18). ‘Beside the heavenly inheritance prepared for the saints, there is a present inheritance in the saints: for grace is glory begun, and holiness is happiness in the bud’ (M. Henry).
- *What is the exceeding greatness of his power towards us who believe* (19). Think about the fact that God’s almighty power which raised Christ from the dead is working in us and for us (19–21). In Christ we are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37). Let us pray with greater expectation and persevere in our witness for him.

**If we thought more about these wonderful possessions in Christ we would be more encouraged in our Christian lives and have greater boldness in our evangelism.**