

# Ephesians

Through the eyes of Song of  
Songs

## CHAPTER 1

**VERSES 1-4: P.2**

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**AUTHORITATIVE TRUTHS SPOKEN OVER OUR LIVES: P.80**

How beautiful you are, my darling, how beautiful! Your eyes are like doves. Like a lily among thistles is my darling among young women. My dove is hiding behind the rocks, behind an outcrop on the cliff. Let me see your face; let me hear your voice. For your voice is pleasant, and your face is lovely. You are altogether beautiful, my darling, beautiful in every way.

You have captured my heart, my treasure, my bride. You hold it hostage with one glance of your eyes, with a single jewel of your necklace. Your love delights me, my treasure, my bride. Your love is better than wine, your perfume more fragrant than spices. Your lips are as sweet as nectar, my bride. Honey and milk are under your tongue. Your clothes are scented like the cedars of Lebanon.

You are my private garden, my treasure, my bride, a secluded spring, a hidden fountain. "Who is this, arising like the dawn, as fair as the moon, as bright as the sun, as majestic as an army with billowing banners?" Oh, how beautiful you are! How pleasing, my love, how full of delights! O my darling, lingering in the gardens, your companions are fortunate to hear your voice. Let me hear it, too!

**In describing her lover's desire for her, she says:**

The king is lying on his couch, enchanted by the fragrance of my perfume. He escorts me to the banquet hall; it's obvious how much he loves me. His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me. My lover said to me, "Rise up, my darling! Come away with me, my fair one! When my lover looks at me, he is delighted with what he sees.

***Song of Songs: 1:12, 15, 2:2, 4, 6, 10, 14, 4:7, 9-12, 6:10, 7:6, 8:10, 13***

These are the words of a man who is crazy in love and the reflections of a woman who is wrapped securely in his love. These are the words of a man who absolutely cherishes his bride. These are the words of a man who would do anything to be with his lover. These are words of passion, desire, longing, and even unfettered obsession. These are words of beauty; the language of unbridled romance. And these are just a few of the things this man says about his woman; in fact, a lot of what I left out is over the top erotic.

What images has this aroused in your mind? How have these words stimulated your imagination? Do you picture the man, the woman? It sounds absolutely glorious; after all, who doesn't dream of experiencing such desire, intimacy, and affection with their true love. But what is shocking is that although these are the words of Solomon and his bride, these are first and foremost the words which God speaks to you and to me, and to His bride the church.

I cannot even fathom it, but He is entirely consumed with what He considers to be our beauty and He chooses to use the picture of erotic love between a man and His bride to describe the intensity of His desire for us. I love this part: "You have captured my heart, my treasure, my bride. You hold it hostage with one glance of your eyes, with a single jewel of your necklace. Your love delights me, my treasure, my bride. Let me see your face; let me hear your voice."

No matter how many times I have read this I still can't get over the fact that this is how God feels about you and about me. He longs for us to turn our eye toward Him just like He longs to hear our voice. This is our God, our Lover.

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We are going to start a new study tonight in the letter to the Ephesians but our companion text is going to be found in the Song of Songs, so I would encourage you to spend time reading both. They are very short; Ephesians has only 6 chapters and the Song of Songs has just 8. I think it would be awesome if you would read each of these books in their entirety at least once a week as we go through this study. If you do I believe that when we are done all sorts of amazing truths will be permanently etched into your hearts.

The reason we are going to look at Ephesians through the eyes of the Song of Songs is that I believe they convey the exact same message. In the book of Ephesians we get a perspective of who we are from God's vantage point; it's a top down view of His love for us from eternity past. Then the Song of Songs captures this love and expresses, in our language, the passion and absolute adoration God has, and has always had, for you and me. Yes, God absolutely adores you—you might even say He is obsessed with you. He thinks you are so lovely and so amazing that He just wants to see you and gaze on your beauty. In fact, He is even jealous of others who get to share in your delight and He desires that you turn to Him and let Him hear your voice.

To Him, you and I (and collectively all those who belong to Him—which we call the “church”) are this woman whom He adores and is passionately in love with. And in the book of Ephesians we will learn 1) the extent of that amazing love (which is likened to the *oneness* that can be experienced between a husband and wife) and 2) the power of knowing this love—literally living here and now as if we are the precious desire of the God of who created all things!

In response, this should inspire us to live as this woman who is enthralled with the beautiful man who loves her unconditionally and whose refuge, security, and promise are found in the never ending adoration by her man. We should be mesmerized by His love for us and beholden only to Him. We should never seek our satisfaction or completeness from any other lover; in fact, our relationships with others should be the fruit or the overflow of our having been satisfied by God's love. We should be so attentive to His love for us that we yearn to know everything about Him so we can freely say:

You are so handsome, my love, pleasing beyond words! My lover is dark and dazzling, better than ten thousand others! His head is finest gold, his wavy hair is black as a raven. His eyes sparkle like doves beside springs of water; they are set like jewels washed in milk. His cheeks are like gardens of spices giving off fragrance. His lips are like lilies, perfumed with myrrh. His arms are like rounded bars of gold, set with beryl. His body is like bright ivory, glowing with lapis lazuli. His legs are like marble pillars set in sockets of finest gold. His posture is stately, like the noble cedars of Lebanon. His mouth is sweetness itself; he is desirable in every way. Such, O women of Jerusalem, is my lover, my friend.

Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, its jealousy as enduring as the grave. Love flashes like fire, the brightest kind of flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can rivers drown it. If a man tried to buy love with all his wealth, his offer would be utterly scorned.

***Song of Songs: 1:16, 5:10-16, 8:6-7***

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I know you guys, in particular, might be thinking this is weird and you might have a hard time connecting to the emotional and even conceptual aspects of God dealing with us in the way that a man deals with a woman. But it is critical for us to understand this picture; it is a very important Biblical type and a powerful image rich in meaning. Understanding this idiom helps us develop a proper understanding of 1) our relationship to God, 2) our relationship to one another in the body of Christ, and 3) the relationship of a man and woman in marriage and the reasons why this relationship, this union, is given such honor throughout the Bible (which we will be addressing in chapter 5 of Ephesians).

To help us get our minds around this, I want us to understand **1 Corinthians 11:7-8** which I believe illuminates quite beautifully this whole word-picture. In talking about the order of creation and issues of “spiritual authority” amongst men, women and angels, Paul says that man was created in the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. Normally this is understood to mean that woman was created for man thus her beauty is what gives glory to man. You’ve seen it; a guy walks down the street with a hot woman and he feels like he is the cat’s meow.

But I actually think it means something quite a bit different and far more powerful. Woman is the glory of man in that in all of creation she is the one being which captures or embodies the glory of man from the perspective of God. You see the way that man is infatuated and even obsessed by the beauty of a woman, captivated by every curve and move of her body, mesmerized by the intricate and glorious way she has been designed and functions, is all just a perfect picture, or type, of how God views those He has chosen to belong to Him. Those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ are creations of beauty in the eyes of God. And that is why He likens His church to a bride. Truly the woman is the embodiment of the glory of all mankind.

This truth should shape your perspective of who you are **in Christ** and how much worth He has bestowed upon you. In fact, every time you see a woman who captivates your attention in any way, shape, or form, you should instantly worship Jesus knowing that is how He is looking at you right at that exact moment. Remember, you hold His heart hostage with one glance of your eyes.

But with that as a high level overview, let’s start off with a little background on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. First of all, there is a little bit of controversy about to whom this letter was actually written. Some people find it very strange that if Paul was writing the church at Ephesus, a church which he founded and spent at least 2-3 years ministering at, that he included no personal references. Yet, in most every other letter it has many references to friends, acquaintances, and the good times spent together. But this letter is strangely void of all of that.

Secondly, some of the oldest manuscripts do not include the reference in verse 1, “to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus” but merely say: “to the saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus.” This has led many to believe that this letter was not directed specifically to the Ephesians although they would most certainly have been recipients of the letter. You see it was not unusual for Paul to send a letter like this and have it (or even multiple

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copies) passed around all the various churches in Asia Minor, of which there were 14 key churches.

Quite a few scholars people believe that this might be the letter Paul references in **Colossians 4:16** when he said: “When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.” Now no one really knows for sure how or why some of the later manuscripts included the reference to Ephesus (maybe because it was the spiritual hub of Asia Minor and perhaps it was the first stop for this letter), but regardless, for our purposes, we will just choose to refer to this letter by its customary nomenclature, the letter to the Ephesians.

Although Paul founded the church at Ephesus we know that Timothy, whom Paul disciplined, was the overseer of that church. In addition, the Apostle John also served in that role in that later part of his life. We know that John ministered at Ephesus both before and after his internment on the island of Patmos.

Ephesus was located on Turkey’s southwestern coast, a little east of Smyrna (which is now known as Izmir), and was the crown jewel of Asia Minor; in fact, it was the most important city in the entire Roman province. Coins excavated from the site are struck with the titles “First and Greatest Metropolis in Asia” and “First of All the Great Ones.” At its height Ephesus is believed to have had a population of around 250,000 permanent residents. So its mere size and location made Ephesus a very strategic location in terms of the spreading of the gospel, which is likely why Paul centered so much of his work in and around Ephesus.

The city’s chief industry was the supply of idols to pilgrim worshippers who travelled to Ephesus from all parts of the world to pay homage at the city’s great temples dedicated to gods such as Artemis also known as Diana, Cybele, and Bacchus or Dionysos. There have been hundreds of fertility god artifacts located in the ruins of Ephesus. These miniature replicas of the gods were said to charm away evil spirits and provide protection to its owners. You have to understand, this was big industry and it brought great profit to the local artisans.

It’s funny how when it comes to man and little “g” gods it is always ultimately about money. In **Acts 19** we have a story where the local artisans ignited a crazy riot against Paul and those belonging to the “Way” (which is what Christianity was called back in those days) because so many people were becoming Christians and abandoning their idolatry. You have to understand this was no little affair; God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out. This was real power and when compared to the impotent idols of wood and stone there was no comparison so people were converting in droves.

As you can expect these conversions to the Way resulted in a serious decline in revenue for the local artisans and they were not going to have it. It started with the artisans who were responsible for the images of Artemis (Diana) but they soon gathered together the other craftsmen who were involved in the idol industry and before you knew they had gathered together a mob. The entire city was in an uproar and they all rushed to the amphitheater (which was the largest theater in the Roman Empire and could hold 50,000 people) and before

you know it there was a single outcry from the masses and they shouted for 2-hours straight: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." It was crazy; but, after all, this was big business!

Among the other artifacts that have been excavated from the ruins of Ephesus are scrolls about magic, mysticism, and incantations. These writings are known as the "Ephesian Letters" and contain magical remedies for illness, infertility, and prosperity. Check out **Acts 19:11-20** and you will find the converts voluntarily burning all their books of magic. I tell you all this because Paul makes various critical allusions to Ephesian social and spiritual culture throughout this letter.

Overtime, however, Ephesus declined in glory and even though at one time it was the hub of Pauline ministry, today, in fulfillment of the Prophecy in **Revelation 2:7**, neither the city nor the church exists and in its place is just a small Turkish village amongst scattered ruins.

As far as the timing of this letter, it was written toward the end of Paul's ministry. According to **Acts 28:16** and **Ephesians 6:20** Paul wrote this letter while he was in Rome under house arrest chained to a Roman guard. I guess the only other point of historical background that I want to make before we jump into the text is that this letter is almost identical to the letter sent to the Colossians in both theme and tone; in fact, 75 of the 155 verses (just under 50%) are almost identical. Obviously Paul desired for the larger body of Christ to understand, believe, and bet their lives on the truth he communicated in those 2 letters. So with that said, let's jump into a verse by verse study of these amazing truths.

### ***Ephesians 1:1-2***

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The will of God and His sovereign selection is one of the major themes of this letter. Paul makes the point with this little phrase, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God," that God is intimately involved in the affairs of men. God is not just some disconnected deity that is watching the world spin; in fact, quite the opposite. He has His hands (so to speak) all over our lives and He is personal, purposeful and always intentional.

For example, if you know anything about Paul's story you would know that he did not set out to be an Apostle, and he was most definitely not chosen by the church leadership for that position. Paul was actually busy arresting, beating, and killing Christians when God decided to pay Paul a personal visit and set him on the path of fulfilling God's will—which is exactly what he did with the rest of his life.

Think about it. This notion that God has a will for your life is a very powerful concept which is intended to give you great security, comfort and authoritative confidence in how you live. Look at Paul; he just unabashedly threw it out there. I am an Apostle because God chose me to be an Apostle. Just think about it: Taylor, an engineer according to the will of God; Ian, a worship

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leader and waiter according to the will of God; Julie, a book keeper, IT coordinator, and base player according to the will of God; Ryan, a student and drummer according to the will of God; Lesley, a mother and Psychologist according to the will of God.

This means that in God's economy there is no calling that is higher than another—the only issue is whether or not you are living in the will of God. Sure there may be different roles with different levels of authority, power, and responsibility and so on, but those differences create no qualitative distinction. Each assignment is vital and necessary for God's good purposes and intentions as He is executing His will in heaven here on earth.

I know that often it is hard for us to accept this truth and rest in it. We think our lives should have more of this or more of that and it seems our lust for more tempts us, at times, to move from what we know God has asked of us. We need to learn to stand confident in the place or the role where He has us assigned until He chooses to give us a new assignment, a new role, or a new level of responsibility.

I want you to write this down: "whatever it is that God has personally appointed for you, it is perfect." And believe me you do not want to be in any other place at all (even if, like Paul, you spend your last days chained to a Roman guard). Besides, if you choose to live outside of the will of God for your life you will have some serious problems on your hand; it is not the path you want to take. So I encourage you to take comfort and strength in knowing that your Father knows you and has personally appointed your affairs to fulfill His good works. We will talk more about the will of God as we get further on in this letter.

Now Paul wrote to the saints, faithful *in Christ*, and this is notable to me for two reasons. First, he calls the believers saints. This does not mean that he was writing to a bunch of dead people who had been enshrined in statutes; rather, it is merely a Biblical word which is used 68 times and encompasses all those who belong to God—all those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. But what is interesting is that the word "saints" comes from the Greek word "hagos" which literally means: holy, pure, consecrated. In other words, Paul is addressing these believers according to their *New Creation* which has been made in the likeness of Christ, righteous, holy, and true. And that is what we are—"saints"—those who have been made holy (through our *New Creation*) and have been set apart or consecrated exclusively for God.

Second, he calls them "faithful *in Christ*;" yet, based on the way Paul exhorted them in Chapter 4 to not live as the ungodly whose lives are filled with all kinds of impurity and greed, it is clear they were probably not so faithful in their behavior. But again, we have to understand that Paul is making an appeal to their *New Creation* which is always faithful to Christ since it is the home of the Holy Spirit who is righteous, holy and true, and forever faithful.

Like the first statement about the will of God, knowing that we are faithful *in Christ* is also intended to bring us comfort. Sure we struggle in the flesh, but we are saints of God who not only belong to God but are forever faithful because we are "*in Christ*." Thank goodness that our faithfulness totally depends on what He has done for us and who He has made us and not on our ability to do it right; because, simply said, on our own we can't—it's all Him.

Paul then says: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." This statement foreshadows one of the key truths, one of the mysteries, which Paul is going to

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reveal to us in this letter and that is that the bride of Christ is made up of both Jews and Gentiles. You see, the Greeks would always greet each other with the word “charis” which means grace and the Hebrews would always greet each other with the word “Shalom” (in the Greek “eireenee”) which means peace—and this was Paul’s way of giving us a preview of the mystery he was going to disclose in this letter. And since grace and peace are from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, we are to know that He made us into one body—one church. This is not something we could accomplish on our own; the emotional, psychological, and cultural barriers and prejudices were too great, but God makes us one so that we can live as one.

In addition, this little greeting also speaks to the fact that you must receive grace before you can ever know peace. Grace deals with the sin problem which plagues all of humanity; and since grace moves sin out of the way and tosses it as far as the East is from the West, we are able to have peace, know peace, and experience peace. This is even more real when we remember that in our study of **John 20** we found out that Jesus is our peace. If we know Him, we will know peace; and to the extent we trust ourselves to Him, we will experience peace. Peace is inseparably tied to our relationship with Jesus and it is a fruit of giving ourselves to Him as a bride gives herself to her husband.

I also don’t want you to miss the way Paul juxtaposed both God and Father and Jesus Christ and Lord. First of all, grace and peace is a gift from the one who is above all—you simply cannot hold a higher title or position than God. That is as big as it gets. Yet, our grace and peace also comes from the one who loves us more than we could ever fathom; and there is no more intimate or personal reference than Father. This is beautiful. The one who is above all is your Father, and He is the one who grants to you grace and His Peace. Yes, He grants you His own Son.

Second, Paul draws us into the relationship between the name Jesus and the title Christ whose position is Lord. Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the promised Savior of the world; but you have to ask yourself if you have honored Him in your life with the position as Lord. And just so you know, this is a position that you will come to know and experience one way or another because He is Lord whether you like it or not. But you have a choice. You can choose to let Jesus be your Lord by trusting yourself to Him and move with Him as He works out His will here on earth or you can choose to experience His Lordship as a matter of fact, as His will prevails over your will. Remember, He purchased you with His blood (which is why He is the Christ) and one way or another He is going to exercise His rule over your lives. It is just so much more wonderful to choose to be in relationship with Him as your Lord than it is to have to get to know Him as Lord. Let’s move on.

### ***Ephesians 1:3-4***

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, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.



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This is so precious and demonstrates to us that Paul was so totally ok with identifying Himself with the woman from the Song of Songs. The word we have translated as “Blessed” comes from the root word “eulogeo” which literally means “adorable.” Now we know that the lesser can never bless the greater, so Paul is not literally blessing God. Paul is saying that our Father is adorable; these are the words of one who is secure in his Father’s love. Adorable is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us (or demonstrated His adoration of us) by giving us every spiritual blessing (or adoration) in the heavenly places in Christ. The verb tense is in the *aorist* and *active* tense meaning that it’s been done in eternity past and its all ours now with nothing held back. Can you imagine? It’s all ours!

I am not even sure what this really means. I know Peter said that God has given us everything we need for life and godliness, as well as all of His rich and wonderful promises (**2 Peter 1:3-4**). But still I think what Paul communicates is so big, huge, vast, and ginormous that we barely scratch the surface in terms of understanding what it means to live as a child of God and as the bride of Christ. But what I do understand is that it is all given to us *in Christ* (there’s that little phrase again—“*in Christ*”—a phrase that is used 13 times in this letter). Everything that we could ever want, need, or desire is found *in Christ*—He is our completion. There is no life or power apart from Him. He holds all things in His hands, “for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things” (**Romans 11:36**).

And everything we have been given by the Father is because of what the Son has done; it’s because of His finished work. There is nothing for us to do other than believe (that is our only work—**John 6:29**). In fact, it is entirely sacrilegious to try and add anything to what He has done. He has blessed us, we have not blessed Him. I know the temptations are overwhelming and express themselves in all sorts of subtle and not so subtle forms of legalism and religious acts of “doing” or “not-doing” for God. But do not be mistaken. We are *saints* because of His finished work. We are holy because of His finished work. We are adored because of His finished work. None of it has anything to do with our being good or our doing it right. Like a bride, we only had to open ourselves up to be loved and even that occurred because He is the One who choose us, pursued us, and set us apart to be His own.

Consider that it says He has given us all spiritual adorations. Maybe this is what those verses in the Song of Songs were trying to communicate to us all along. Perhaps “all spiritual adorations” means that He is obsessed with us, so enthralled with our beauty, and He so adores us that like a loving Father He has given us our beautiful adorable husband who adores us. He has given us all of Himself by giving us His Son. This is so radical!

For a moment I wished I had this really long list of spiritual blessings that I could rattle off for you, but then I realized such an attempt would have marginalized the power of this statement. Sure there are a lot of promises He has made to us and those are wonderful and precious, but I believe this passage is all about our relationship with Jesus and the truth that He is our beginning and our end, our source of all things. It’s never been about what He can do for us or what we can do for Him, but who He is to us. I cannot imagine that there is any greater spiritual blessing than being *one* with Christ and *one* with the Father. Again this is something we cannot even fathom in our puny little minds, but it is nothing short of glorious and for me it breathes new life into my understanding of Jesus’ prayer in John 17.

**John 17:20-23**

"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

And just to refresh your memory, this *oneness* is not some mystic concept where we melt away into the god essence that makes up the universe. No, our *oneness* with God is identical to Jesus' *oneness* with the Father. As we studied in **John**, the entire Godhead is made up of 3 separate persons with separate functions but who are united in all ways: nature, essence, purpose, and intent. In the same way, through our *New Creation*, He has made us *one* with Him and *one* with each other. But we must never forget that it is all found "**in Christ.**" He is the source of our *oneness* and He is the only way for anyone to receive these spiritual blessings. There is no other pathway—just Jesus!

What is mind numbing to me, however, is that He blessed us with these "spiritual blessings" from before He even created anything that is seen—just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be (in the *present* and *active* tense) holy and blameless before Him in love.

In other words, because God chose you in eternity past, right at this moment, God views you through your *New Creation* as thoroughly unblemished, entirely without sin, fault, or accusation. And, by the way, this is not just our "position" in Christ as some teach, inferring that it is somehow only our future reality or some form of progressive spiritual reality. No, this is our *present* reality in our *New Creation*, as everything that derives from our *New Creation* is from Him and is therefore de-facto, by definition, holy and pure. And what is so amazing is that He determined this for you and me from before He even created the world. He knew us even then; yes, we were in His amazing mind way back then. He has always loved us and always planned to make us holy, **in Christ**, for the sole purpose of our enjoying deep, intimate, and passionate fellowship with our Maker.

In the same way, right now right at this moment, and from all eternity past, He views you as perfectly altogether beautiful in every way, worthy of His love, a lily in the midst of thistles, as fair as the moon, as bright as the sun, as majestic as an army with billowing banners, as His darling among young women. Yes He has *forever actively* blessed you with all His adorations.

Now as beautiful as this is, some of you might be getting a little uneasy because the implication of this truth is that God chose us (those of us who are believers) and did not choose others (**Romans 8:29-30**, **2 Thessalonians 2:13** and **1 Peter 1:2**). It is what we call the doctrine of election and the Bible is replete with this truth on all levels as we see examples of this truth being applied to individuals, families, people groups, cities, nations, empires and so on. It is not something we can really argue with since God choosing one over another is all over the Word; it

is just something that can make us very uneasy especially when someone asks us how can God be just if He chooses who will follow Him and who will not. But we are going to have to wait until next week to address this issue. But for now, please just rest in the fact that you are God's lovely lily, His chosen one who is loved beyond measure.

Let's Pray

***Ephesians 1:3-4***

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, ***just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world***, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

Where we left off last week we opened the door on this issue of *election* and God having chosen us before the foundations of the world that we would be in relationship with Him; which, by the way, is why He created a way for us to be holy and blameless. I know that sometimes words like “holy” and “blameless” come across as so religious that they lose their meaning, but they are very important and we need to grasp why Paul included them—it’s totally a relational thing and is so beautiful.

You see there a couple of presuppositions that run all the way through this letter and that is that 1) God is good—He is perfect, holy, righteous, and true—and we are not; and 2) regardless of the fact that we are not good, God still wants us to be in, and experience, a deep, passionate, and intimate relationship with Him. So He provided a remedy, a way for us to become good—holy and blameless in His sight—and that is through His Son. And while that is simply amazing, don’t take your eyes off the fact that the only reason we would need to be holy and blameless is so that we can freely come into His presence, at any time, and enjoy Him without any limitation whatsoever.

By the way, the phrase “that we would be holy and blameless” is in the present active tense, so it is our reality now. All true believers have already been made “holy and blameless.” This is our present state of existence in the *New Creation* which Jesus gave us. Therefore, it is not something we have to wait for and it is not something we progressively achieve; it is our reality when we choose to live from our *New Creation*. This is marvelous! From before the beginning of time He made it possible for you and me to know Him, experience Him, be like Him, and be lavishly loved on by Him.

I hope you are beginning to understand how special you are and how privileged you are to be “*chosen*.” Consider the fact that since God sits outside of time, He knew everything about you, and all that you would say and do, and still He chose you. All those less than pleasant parts of your character and nature, all those little dark secrets in the corners of your heart, and all your struggles with sin, did not deter God in the least; He still found you absolutely adorable and wanted to spend eternity with you. Go figure! It is not something we deserve; it is just an outpouring of His love and mercy on our lives. As for me, I love knowing that I was chosen from before time; it makes me special, unique, and privileged beyond measure.

Every one of us should dwell on this truth and let God’s love for us expel all the awful and misplaced insecurities and self image issues that we have. Please, don’t let this go in one ear and out the other; don’t just give it the religious nod and then move on. Receive this truth into your heart and let it transform your mind so you can begin to live as one whose worth is beyond measure.

The lies that you have held to that perhaps were spoken to you by family members, friends, loved ones, or others who were scrambling around to find their place in this world, which said you were not worth a whole lot, that you deserved to be treated in this way or that way, that you were not precious enough to be truly loved, safe, secure, cared for, and so on, have to be confronted with the truth of who you are to and who you are in Christ. Remember, you are amongst the select, the few, who can stand confidently on the fact that you are loved by a love that will not change and you have been loved this way from eternity past. You are amongst the "chosen."

But let's talk about this whole idea of election because 1) in some ways it seems to conflict with all that we have been taught about our having to choose Jesus to be our Lord and Savior, and 2) it seems to cut across the idea that God is "just." Is it really fair that those who were not "chosen" must spend eternity separated from God in a very bad place?

### Our Choice.

First, we are all very familiar with scriptures like **John 3:16** which says, "whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life," or **John 1:12**, "But to all who believed Him and accepted Him, He gave the right to become children of God, or **Matthew 11:28-29**, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." In each of these passages there seems to be an element of volition, our choosing Him, our coming to Christ. But how does our needing to choose sync with His choosing of us before the foundations of the earth?

I have to say that there is an aspect of these truths that are far above and beyond our ability to truly understand since God is so much bigger than you and I. I will attempt however to articulate the ways the Bible presents this issue, but I do believe that we have to first take heed of this passage in Isaiah:

### **Isaiah 55:8-9**

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.

So with that said; we need to first realize that time, as we know it, is finite and has a fixed beginning and end. Time was actually created by God; thus, He sits outside of time and is therefore able to see and know all things, from beginning to the end. It may be hard for us to comprehend, but to God all things are known and nothing is a surprise. If you think about it, even the fall in the Garden of Eden was known beforehand and was part of God's marvelous plan such that man would be the glory of God (which I will explain in Chapter 3). Therefore, He knows what is going to happen when He intervenes in time and space and comes to you and invites you to follow His Son. He knows who will follow and who will not because He chose some to follow.

Let's look at a key passage in Romans to help us unfold this mystery.

**Romans 8:28-30**

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

This might get a bit confusing, but please try and follow. Since God is outside of time and literally knows the beginning from the end, in His **foreknowledge**—in His ability to see everyone who would ever live—He chose or marked those upon whom He would have mercy. Then He intervened in time and space and ordered, or **predestined**, the events of this world to ensure that each person chosen to receive His mercy would get an introduction to Him. Then He actually **called**, them by name, to follow; and, since in His foreknowledge He had chosen them to receive mercy, they responded and made a volitional choice to follow.

Please, understand, God never forces anyone to follow, but He makes it possible for them to follow. By a pouring out of mercy on a person's life, which seems to have the effect of dampening, for a moment in time, the natural rebellion of their old sinful nature, they were free for the first time in their life to choose to follow and receive the love that had been freely offered to them.

And those who choose to follow He **justifies** by giving them His life and making them holy and blameless before Him when they by no means deserved it. And still there remains a promise of **glorification** for all those who follow Christ; a promise that we will one day receive new bodies that are entirely free from this flesh and the attachments to our old sinful nature.

So there is an element of volition, our free choice, but it is only because God chose us, predestined us, called us and has made a way for His mercy to be poured out on our lives. That's why Paul said: "Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God" (**2 Corinthians 3:4-5**). Please, make no mistake, God is the one who works in each one He has chosen giving them even the desire to obey Him and the power to do what pleases Him (**Philippians 2:13**).

It's just like choosing to walk in the Spirit of God—it's a choice. God never forces anyone to walk in the Spirit; rather, He compels us to choose life; yet, He is the one who gives us the desire, the ability, and the power to choose to love Him. But we must always remember, the only reason we love Him is because He first loved us (**1 John 4:19**).

To following passages all speak to the principle that God gives us the desire and the power to follow Him: **Deuteronomy 29:4; 1 Kings 8:58; 2 Chronicles 30:12; Jeremiah 31:33, 32:40; Ezra 1:5, Isaiah 26:12; Ezekiel 36:26-27; John 3:27; Philippians 1:11; Hebrews 13:21; James 1:16-18.**

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In summing up this first point, I think the best thing I can say about it is that in some strange way, which we cannot fully understand, both God's unqualified election and our choice are emphatically and undeniably put forth within the scriptures—even though our choice is only made possible by a direct outpouring of His mercy on our life—and to teach choice without election or election without choice is not being honest or faithful to the Word.

### **A Matter of Justice.**

Now let's look at the justice of God's choosing. To understand this issue we are going to have to move beyond what I would say is most people's wrong belief about themselves and God. Most people, when they consider this issue, start with the faulty presupposition that there is something innately good within them and it would be entirely unjust for them to be condemned to spend an eternity separated from God in abject suffering. But that is the root of the error. Despite all our protestations, we must know that there is nothing good within us; only God is good. Every one of us has sinned and rebelled, by nature and by choice, against the perfection of God; thus, none of us deserve the blessing or the pleasure of being with God forever. Consider what the Psalms say about our nature, as quoted by Paul in the book of Romans.

### ***Romans 3:9-18***

Well then, should we conclude that we Jews are better than others? No, not at all, for we have already shown that all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, ***are under the power of sin.***

As the Scriptures say, "No one is righteous—not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one. Their talk is foul, like the stench from an open grave. Their tongues are filled with lies. Snake venom drips from their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. They rush to commit murder. Destruction and misery always follow them. They don't know where to find peace. They have no fear of God at all."

Simply said, God is good and we are not! ***Jeremiah 17:9*** makes this so clear: "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick." So for a person to spend an eternity separated from God is not unjust because God did not create the separation—the separation already exists within the heart of all of humanity—and He will not condemn anyone to eternity without Him because everyone already stands condemned.

Therefore, God choosing some to receive life is not a matter of "justice" at all but it is a matter of His "mercy" which, in His sovereignty as God, He has bestowed on those of us who come to Him through Jesus Christ. This is why Jesus said that the Father did not send Him into the world to condemn it (for it already stands condemned) but to save those who trust Him. In fact, those who do not trust Him **have already** been judged for **not believing** in the only Son of God. Their judgment is based on this fact: the light from heaven came into the world, but they loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. They hate the light because

they want to sin in the darkness. They stay away from the light for fear their sins will be exposed and they will be punished (**John 3:17-21**).

Now since God is God, and you are not, He gets to decide upon whom He graciously and lavishly bestows His mercy. As He says: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (**Romans 9:15; Exodus 33:10**). So even though those whom He calls "sons" and "daughters" actually deserve to spend eternity separated from Him, He has made it possible for us to be holy and blameless before Him.

It is all a testament to His glorious mercy, for our having been chosen has nothing to do with our being good or somehow deserving it more than others. It's just His mercy, a decision He as God made; and I for one thank God that He has made me a vessel of His mercy and gave me what I do not deserve.

### ***Ephesians 1:5***

In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. (ESV)

God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. (NLT)

I wanted to read this in both the ESV and the NLT because they both capture the concepts here a little differently. First of all, I want you to understand that this notion of adoption is not what we think where someone from another family is adopted and brought into a new family. That is more of our western custom. But beginning with the Greeks and more pronounced in Roman culture, adoption was more of a coming of age concept where a legitimate son is inducted into manhood and is presented publically in a formal celebration. With this rite the son receives the legal right to inherit all and everything that is owned by the Father. Further, it is at that time that the Father and other public officials would gather in the Forum or some other common gathering place and drape the son with his white toga—the symbol of Roman citizenship and the so called beginning of his adult life.

I want you to note that although he did not receive the right to his inheritance until the coming of age, the son was always part of the family. And it was always the Father's plan to have this coming of age celebration where the son would receive everything that belongs to him. And since we were chosen before time, since we have always belonged to God, He made sure (He predestined) that we made it to our coming of age celebration where Jesus clothed us in white (made us pure and blameless) and we were publically presented by the Father to all of creation as a glorious spectacle for all to behold.

When we chose to accompany our Father to the "Forum" (chose to accept our white toga that was waiting for us), our sonship was manifested before all of creation and that was the beginning of our real life, our real citizenship among those belonging to heaven (**Philippians 3:20**). And what an inheritance we have received. We are joint heirs with Jesus Christ—this



means that all that belongs to Jesus belongs to us. It is not divided in any way shape or form, but we have 100% rights to the entire inheritance (**Romans 8:17; Titus 3:7**).

Now what amazes me is that our adoption was not only part of His will, it also gave Him great pleasure—it's what He wanted to do. The ESV says it was the "purpose of his will" and the NASB says, "kind intention of His will" but the Greek is emphatically clear, it means the "pleasure" or "delight" of His will. I love this aspect of God. He brought us into relationship with Him because we give Him delight. I believe this notion is captured not only in the image of a proud Father who gets to present his son to the public, but in the delight and utter pleasure that a wife can bring to her husband. I know this changes the metaphor we have been working with, but still let's consider the way Solomon was utterly delighted by his woman and remember this is how Jesus is delighted by us.

### ***Song of Songs 1:10-11***

"Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, Your neck with strings of beads." "We will make for you ornaments of gold with beads of silver."

To him she is so beautiful that he wanted to lavish her with beautiful things that accentuated her loveliness—no expense spared—gold, silver, she is worth it.

### ***Song of Songs 2:14; 4:7,10-15; 5:1; 7:2, 6***

Let me see you; let me hear your voice. For your voice is pleasant, and you are lovely. You are altogether beautiful, my darling, beautiful in every way. Your love **delights** me, my treasure, my bride. Your love is **better** than wine, your perfume **more fragrant** than spices. Your lips are **as sweet** as nectar, my bride. Honey and milk are under your tongue. Your clothes are **scented** like the cedars of Lebanon.

You are my private garden, my treasure, my bride, a secluded spring, a hidden fountain. Your thighs shelter a paradise of pomegranates with rare spices—henna with nard, nard and saffron, fragrant calamus and cinnamon, with all the trees of frankincense, myrrh, and aloes, and every other lovely spice. You are a garden fountain, a well of fresh water streaming down from Lebanon's mountains.

I have entered my garden, my treasure, my bride! I gather myrrh with my spices and eat honeycomb with my honey. I drink wine with my milk. Your navel is as delicious as a goblet filled with wine. ***Oh how delightful you are my beloved; how pleasant for utter delight!***

Every description this man uses to describe his woman is about pure utter delight and pleasure—pleasure to the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the tongue, and the touch. It is all so sensual and so intoxicating. This is God's attempt to describe for us in words and pictures the

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sheer pleasure that He received to work out His will so that you and I could be His garden of delight in which He dwells and in which He feasts and thoroughly enjoys.

I believe that this whole notion of God and pleasure is something that the enemy has stolen from our understanding of His nature. When we think of God too many of us still react in fear and tend to think of some gray haired old man that is more than just a little grumpy. But think about it. There are so many things, which we tend to take for granted, that God did just to give us delight. He paints the sky with clouds and light and creates amazing colors so we will just stare and take delight. He created dogs with such a unique nature that they just naturally make us smile and feel comforted. He made food and drink so pleasurable to us. He made man for woman and woman for man so that we might know and experience joy, love, intimacy and pleasure. I want you to understand, God is not some killjoy who is just about pain and suffering, but He is about pure delight—a delight that can only truly be experienced in Him and with Him. He loves delight and He loves to give delight. That is why He says that in His presence is fullness of joy and at His right hand are pleasures forevermore (*Psalm 16:11*).

I hope that as you begin to understand God's heart and affection for you it will help you throw away, like filthy idols, all the wrong belief you have about God and His intentions for your life. Too many of us still do not live as if God is over the edge passionate and desirous of us. And what is even crazier is when you consider that His desire is that we become like Him. How glorious is that?

Going back to the passage in *Romans 8*, He predestined us with a very specific purpose, to be conformed into the image of His Son. So when we are adopted into our sonship, He gives us the *New Creation* (our white toga), which has been created in His image and then, by His Spirit, He teaches us why and how to trust our lives to Him so that we can live from the *New Creation* and experience His pleasure. You see our Father wants us to no longer live as citizens of this world but as citizens of our true home in heaven, fulfilling the will of God for our lives—that which is good, acceptable, and perfect (*Romans 12:1-2*).

### ***Ephesians 1:5-8***

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.

This phrase “to the praise and glory of His grace” is really just Paul's way of saying that when we think about how God chose us and predestined us to be His own, just for His pleasure, we should break out in praise. His grace poured out on our lives is unbelievable. Instead of these truths inciting any opposition to God with wrongful complaints of justice and fairness, they are intended to cause us to bow our knees and say thank you for loving me. We deserved no love but still we have it because He freely gave it.

Imagine, without the outpouring of God's wonderful mercy, all of us would reject Him—we would! In fact, **Romans 2** says we are so dark and void of light that we would not even thank God for sending the rain that grows our crops (and we have seen that to be true with the way so many tend to ascribe all of God's basic goodness to us to mother nature, evolution, or some other ridiculous humanistic fallacy. So praise Jesus for His wonderful grace.

In the Greek, this phrase "which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" literally says, "He has accepted us in the Beloved." Accepted is in the Aorist active tense meaning it was done way back when and every moment of every day we are still accepted. "In the Beloved" is just another way for Paul to say that our acceptance is in Christ for He is the one who is perfectly loved by God.

I want us to focus for a moment on this word redemption. "In Him we have redemption, through His blood." Redemption literally means to pay a ransom in full. If we could sum up the Bible in one word, perhaps redemption is the word. Just about every story in the Bible, and even whole books like Genesis, Exodus, Ruth, Acts, and Revelation, paint a picture of God working to bring redemption to those who were sold as slaves to the enemy. It does not matter where in the Bible you turn you will soon run across God's wonderful plan of redemption.

Now the reason this is such an important topic is because of how much it cost God. Sure God could have easily wiped out all of creation and created a new world with new people and start all over again hoping this time they don't blow it. But instead He chose to pay the ultimate price in order to make clean those who were soiled, to set free those who were enslaved, to give life to those who were dead. The price, however, was not paid with perishable things like silver and gold, but with the precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ (**1 Peter 1:18-20**). The Father gave up His only Son to be killed so that you and I might be redeemed to Him. What a price to pay just so all of us who once hated God could actually enjoy His love. Look at this passage in Song of Songs which captures these truths.

### ***Song of Songs 1:5-6***

I am very dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has looked upon me. My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept!

She says do not look on me because I am dark, or literally black because of the sun. This implies that she was exposed, without protection, to the harsh judgment of the sun. And although she believed she had value, others would not think so. This is a picture of this woman's bondage to sin and the affect of living without any shelter or protection. She had been abandoned by her own family into slavery. She had to work to make others ok—to serve their will—but she was never allowed to take care of herself. She was alone, empty, and without love.

Why do you think she says the children of her mother but not her father? It's because they were sons of a different father. Eve is our common mother, or in this case maybe it's a reference to Israel, but Satan is the father of the ungodly whereas God is the father of the righteous. She was left with the sons of those who belong to Satan and they took advantage of her.

This is a perfect picture of our bondage to sin and to Satan before we were redeemed. Satan had his way with us and we were burned by the sun enslaved to his pleasures and his will. But God, in lavishing His grace upon us, woke us up to His love and placed within us a desire to want Him and to find His place of shelter and protection. Notice that she believed she was beautiful; it's as if God's mercy had already been poured on her and her love was aroused and she just needed to find the way. So she asks:

***Song of Songs 1:7***

Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon; for why should I be like one who veils herself beside the flocks of your companions?

She no longer wants to live out in the open exposed to the sun. She no longer wants to be a slave. She wants to go to the good pasture and lie down and rest. She no longer wants to be treated as an untouchable, literally a prostitute, who can only come beside those who belong to God but can never be in relationship with Him or His companions. She wants to fall under the good shepherd's care.

In the text, we are not really sure who gives the reply to this woman, but based on the way she is addressed (and the verse that follows which we will not be covering) it is probably her lover.

***Song of Songs 1:8***

If you don't know, O most beautiful woman, follow the trail of my flock, and graze your young goats by the shepherds' tents.

He reaffirms his adorations and despite the wear and tear on her skin He calls her not just beautiful, but most beautiful. He tells her to follow the path that others have walked. In other words, go to my tent, the path is clearly marked, and you can rest and feed and find your shelter and protection because you are loved.

The way to the Father has been marked by the blood of Jesus. Others have trod that path and if anyone chooses to take the same path they will find rest and protection in His tents and will be redeemed from the slavery of serving in the vineyards of Satan.

And what is amazing, going back to Ephesians, is that this redemption brings to us the forgiveness of sins, which by the way in this passage is not a verb but a noun. In other words,

forgiveness is not something that is ongoing or that we continually need, but something that was done; it's something we have. It is now a reality; we have forgiveness as a result of the lavish unrestrained outpouring of His grace. It is our state of existence; thus, even if we choose at times to live in our old sinful nature, we are still forgiven. It's what we are and that does not change!

Again, these truths should not cause you to return to the vineyards and once again live as a slave; that would be so foolish when you can be free. These truths should cause you to bust out in praise to Jesus for: you belong to Him, you are His son, you have been clothed in white robes that have been dipped in the blood of Christ, you have been presented before all of creation, and you have received your inheritance. All of this is yours merely because you are beautiful to Him and in His mercy He chose to pour out and lavish His grace upon you who were once dark and burned by the sun. You have been set free to live free—to live in your new life in Christ. Come to His tent and you will find rest. Abide in His tent and you will be able to find protection from the sun, food upon which to feast, and a place to rest your head. Come to Him.

Let's Pray

***Ephesians 1:7-10***

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Backing up a little bit to verse 7, I did not want you to miss a beautiful and extremely comforting truth. We have been redeemed (God purchased us with the blood of His Son), we have forgiveness (forgiveness defines our existence; in fact, we live in a perpetual state of forgiveness), but all of this is according to the riches of His grace. Now Grace is one of those words that get thrown around a lot but essentially it means that God gives us what we do not deserve and what we have not earned. It is literally a gift, a precious treasure given to us by God.

Therefore, our redemption and forgiveness are gifts and they comes according to the riches of His grace not from the riches of His grace. This distinction is critical. In other words, God pours out His grace on us and continues to pour out His grace and yet the magnitude of His grace is never diminished. He does not take grace from a limited pool and pass it around; rather, His grace is merely an expression of His nature; thus, it is not something that we will ever be without because His supply of grace is as eternal as His nature. This is why we can take comfort and assurance in both our redemption and forgiveness.

In addition, His grace is always sufficient for our needs; no matter how much we have messed up. He has not given us just enough grace to make it through; “for of His fullness we have received grace upon grace” (***John 1:16***). In the Greek the quantity of grace given to us is excessive and super-abounding—we have been lavished and doused with His grace; thus, we can be assured that we will never find ourselves outside of its covering.

Paul said that God has made known the mystery of His will according to His purpose, which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

As I stated before, the “will of God” is a big topic in this letter to the Ephesians and in this reference Paul calls it a mystery; a mystery in which Christ is the absolute center. I am going to deviate here for a second and give you an assignment that might be fun. I want you to search out all the different Biblical mysteries. A Biblical mystery is not something that cannot be discovered, but it means something that was previously hidden or not understood and which has now been unveiled or made known. I have created a list of the ones I found and I would like you to go and search out the scriptures.

The reason this is important is that according to ***1 Corinthians 4:1*** every one of us is a steward or overseer of the mysteries of God. And if that is the case we should know them, understand them, and be ready to communicate these mysteries to others. So here is the list of mysteries: His will; the administration of the ages; Christ and the church (illustrated in a the marriage between a husband and wife); the Gospel; Christ; the kingdom; among the Gentiles;

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the Jews being re-grafted into the vine; God's wisdom; the rapture (we shall not all sleep); of lawlessness; of godliness; 7-stars and 7-lampstands; of God fulfilled by the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet; Babylon; and the woman who rides the beast. It's your job to go find the scripture that is behind each of these and study the issues so you are well versed as a good steward of the mysteries of God.

Now back to our text, the specific mystery Paul is talking about is that according to God's good pleasure (in the Greek there is a specific reference, once again, to His pleasure) which He purposed in Himself (since there is none greater and He cannot purpose in any one else), that in the dispensation of the fullness of times (which just means at the proper time which He has appointed—when all things come to a close), He will sum up all things in Christ. And when He says all things He means it—everything in heaven and on earth in Christ.

It is interesting to note that the same root word which is used in **1 Corinthians 4:1**, when we are called "stewards," is also used in **Ephesians 1:10**, which is translated "dispensation" or "plan." It is where we get our word, "economy." So in effect we are God's designated economists of the mysteries of His spiritual economy, which are tucked away in the Word of God and will be played out in this world and beyond.

This is one of the reasons that we should be students of the entire Bible and not just skip over things that are difficult. I am making a specific reference to prophecy regarding the end times—the time when all things are summed up in Christ. We should know and be a good economist of what is going to take place in the future of God's economy. We should be able to interpret for others all those mysteries which are spoken in various images, colors, numbers, and names and which are flavored with all manner of historical and very specific cultural context.

I know that many of us have avoided these fascinating parts of scripture because they are confusing and there are so many opinions, by well learned people, on what they mean. But let me tell you this one thing; the clues for understanding Biblical prophecy are not found in a specific school of thought or system of theology; but if you are a careful student, you will find that the Bible actually interprets itself. You just have to study hard in order to learn the code of colors, symbols, numbers, and names, as well as become very familiar with the historical and cultural context in which things were spoken. As pretty much all of prophecy speaks in the language of the people of that day in which it was spoken.

But it is all in there. For example, if you really want to start to understand the book of Revelation (which, as good economists, of the economy of God you should want to understand), you need to master your Old Testament, for pretty much all of the clues lie therein.

Now, being an overseer does not mean that you will become the absolute end all be all of Biblical prophecy, for there is so much that we cannot fully understand. God sometimes just gives us small pictures or details that really do not fit anything within our worldview and often our historical and cultural understanding is so limited. I have found that it takes a real stripping of much of what we have been taught from a western centric mindset before we have eyes to see—eyes which are not filtered by someone else's glasses.

In addition, God uses metaphors to describe metaphors, which can be problematic, but these pictures capture for us concepts and ideas and do not necessarily describe physical realities. For example, when we are told that there are streets of gold in heaven this is communicating to us a concept that the most valuable thing imaginable in our economy is worth nothing more than mere tar in heaven. In other words, our future is going to be so grand that nothing on this earth even compares. But since we are so finite and cannot fully understand spiritual realities, God speaks to us in pictures which give us just a taste of what things will be. Moreover, there are things that God chooses to keep secret and those belong to Him, but the revealed things do belong to us and our children forever (**Deuteronomy 29:29**), so we need to know them.

So let's think about this notion that all things are summed up, or gathered together, in Christ. This is a perfect example of what I was just talking about. We don't really know what that means in terms of tangible reality and we cannot describe it in detail; but it communicates to us that, as believers, we chose the right **One** with whom to align ourselves—we are on the winning side. You see there will be a time when the power and authority which God has granted to various angelic beings (including Satan), to man, and to various aspects of creation, will all be stripped away. All power, authority, and majesty will be given to the **One** and only Jesus Christ. The Old Testament clearly describes this truth.

#### ***Isaiah 45:21-25***

And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance. They will say of Me, 'Only in the Lord are righteousness and strength.' Men will come to Him, and all who were angry at Him will be put to shame. In the Lord all the offspring of Israel will be justified and will glory.

And the New Testament describes it as follows:

#### ***Romans 14:10-12***

But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

#### ***Philippians 2:8-11***

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus **EVERY**



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**KNEE WILL BOW**, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So in a word, **submission!** The summing up of all things in Christ will involve the complete submission of everything to Jesus. No one will escape His rule, no one will thwart His purposes, no one will do anything that He has not directed; nevertheless, all will bow their knee and all will confess that He is Lord. This is so beautiful and as joint heirs of Jesus Christ we will actually share in this glory. This is part of our great inheritance. Yes, it is unfathomable.

### ***Ephesians 1:11-14***

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Wow that is a mouthful. We talked before about our having been predestined so we won't spend a lot of time on it except I want you to take comfort in how intentional and detailed God is in your life. As Jeremiah said: can anything happen without the Lord's permission (**Lamentations 3:37**)? His work is so precise (check out **Hebrews 4:12-13** to explore this a bit further) and it all follows His predetermined plan. So nothing in your life is random and nothing is arbitrary. He is in control and what He allows in your life is according to His wisdom for your life. He knows exactly what is needed in order for you to learn to live as His son and enjoy your inheritance.

Now, we have **obtained** an inheritance. This is in the past tense and sticking with the cultural metaphor we discussed last week it refers to the time we were publically presented and received our white toga along with the legal rights to all that our Father possesses. It is the time when we received Jesus as our Lord and Savior and He created within us a new nature that in His image is holy and righteous. It is the time when He placed the Holy Spirit of promise within this *New Creation* as a seal of all that will come when God's economy is summed up in Jesus Christ.

Now since we have obtained it; it is ours and cannot be taken away—God has given it to us as a gift and “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (**Romans 11:29**), which is why Jesus could say:

### ***John 10:27-29***

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father,

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who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Think about this concept. We are a beautiful gift or reward that is given by the Father to Jesus. And this is why our eternity is perfectly secure; no one is bigger than God. We are His gift and He secures us for His son with the Holy Spirit of promise. That is what it means when Paul says we are sealed in Him. The Spirit is a pledge of an unalterable destiny with Jesus.

This concept of a “seal” can be understood from a couple of *Old Testament* and *New Testament* passages, beginning in ***Esther 8***. In this story, the Kings’ key advisor tricked him into passing a law that would single out the Jews for persecution. But when this treachery was discovered, the king passed another law granting the Jews the right to defend themselves and to lawfully kill anyone who tried to harm them. This law was then sealed with the king’s signet ring which indicated that this decree cannot be revoked. It had the full backing, power, and authority of the throne.

Similarly, in ***Daniel 6*** the kings’ advisors tricked him to pass a law which was intended for one purpose only, to persecute and kill Daniel, the prophet of God. When this law was passed, the king signed it and it could not be revoked. As a result Daniel was arrested, and according to the law was thrown in the lion’s den. The king then put a stone over the entrance to the den and sealed it with His own signet ring so that no one could alter the sentence without losing their life.

When Jesus was entombed, the Jews asked Pilate to seal his tomb with a Roman seal to ensure that no one could mess with the tomb under threat of death. Complying with their request Pilate sealed the tomb and posted a guard to protect it (***Matthew 28:65***).

Still another use of a seal was to certify a transaction. If you purchased something you would mark it with your seal in order to claim it as your own in the event it got mixed in with goods belonging to another. We see a picture of this in the book of ***Exodus***. On the night of Passover, the Jews were sealed with the blood of the lamb, which was placed on the mantel of each house, such that when the angel of death made his way through Egypt and saw this seal he passed by and left the inhabitants untouched; whereas the households without the seal were stricken by the plague of death which killed each first born.

In the book of Revelation we see a very similar event. Right before judgment is poured out on the earth, God sends an angel with His seal to mark certain Jews. The seal was then placed on the foreheads of 144,000 who were sealed from all the tribes of Israel. They were marked as His personal possession, redeemed from the earth, and set apart as holy unto the Lord. And that mark contained both the name of the Lamb of God and His Father’s name (***Revelation 7:1-8; 14:1***). How cool is that; I want that written on my forehead for the angels to see.

This also reminds me of the parable of the wheat and the tares (which, by the way, each of the 7 parables, in ***Matthew 13***, speaks to the various mysteries of God—so there is a hint for your studies). In the parable of the wheat and tares we find that an enemy of the farmer sowed a type of weed amongst the wheat which as it grows looks very much like the wheat. This made

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it very difficult to tell one from the other. The farmer's servants asked if they should go and pull out the tares and the farmer said no; not wanting to risk damaging any of the wheat. He told them that in the day of gathering it will be easy to separate the wheat from the tares; for the wheat will have fruit clearly visible to all and the tares will be obviously worthless. So in essence the wheat, which symbolizes true believers, will bear the mark or seal of authenticity and it will be undeniably revealed when all things are summed up in Christ.

Do you know that the Father even sealed the son as belonging exclusively to Him so that Jesus would only do what the Father wanted Him to do, nothing more and nothing less (**John 6:27, 35-40**).

So a seal denotes ownership, authority, legitimacy, and power over that which has been sealed. Thus, the Holy Spirit's presence in our life, as He dwells in our *New Creation*, speaks to God's legitimate ownership of our lives (as the cost of redemption was fully paid), His authority, and the power that He has to operate in and through our lives.

Now you might be wondering why I am spending so much time on this notion of being sealed, marked, set apart as exclusively belonging to the Lord. I'm going to tell you. There have been many studies which have revealed that men and women have, for the most part, very different psychological profiles and that the primary needs of women are fundamentally different from the needs of men (I know that is a little obvious and probably did not need a study to prove it).

However, the most important aspect of love that a man needs in a relationship is to feel respected and honored by his woman. Respect is at the very core of a man being able to feel like a man; and if he does not feel respect in a relationship he often begins to shut down and close himself off to his woman, emotionally and physically, in order to protect himself.

Whereas for a woman, the aspect of love which she needs most is to be secure. She needs to know she is loved, she needs to feel secure in that love, and be absolutely convinced that her man cares for her and desires her above all others. And when she is convinced she is safe, she naturally gives herself to her man. Now unfortunately a woman is also very complex and her need to be secure spans across many areas: emotional, relational, physical, as well as the practical aspects of life; so it's a big job for a man to meet her needs in this manner. The Song of Songs gives us a good look at a woman's need to be secure in love.

Prior to their marriage, but during the time of engagement, Solomon calls out to his betrothed to assure her of his love and intentions for her.

### ***Song of Songs 2:10-13***

My beloved responded and said to me, 'Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, And come along. 'For behold, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. 'The flowers have already appeared in the land; the time has arrived for pruning the vines, and the voice of the turtledove has been heard in our land. 'The fig tree has ripened its figs, and the vines in blossom have given forth their fragrance. Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come along!'

He lets her know that their love is ready to be indulged. The time of engagement where love is grown and nurtured is at its end; now it is the time for the two of them to eat of the harvest of love. He invites her to arise and come with him. He is assuring her that he desires her and he is going to marry her; it will surely happen. His assurances warm her heart; but just temporarily.

### ***Song of Songs 2:16-17***

My beloved is mine, and I am his; he pastures his flock among the lilies. "Until the cool of the day when the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of Bether.

The comfort lasts only so long. She is not yet married and she has not been permanently established in the relationship. Therefore, in her heart grows a paranoia; she insists that when he is done with his work that he comes to her right away with the speed of a gazelle or young stag. She wants him to leap over the mountains of division which separated them during the day. So although she makes a bold statement of belonging (my beloved is mine and I am his), she is still paranoid and her insecurity plays itself out in her dreams later that night.

### ***Song of Songs 3:1-4***

"On my bed night after night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him but did not find him. 'I must arise now and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I must seek him whom my soul loves.' I sought him but did not find him. "The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me, And I said, 'Have you seen him whom my soul loves?' "Scarcely had I left them when I found him whom my soul loves; I held on to him and would not let him go until I had brought him to my mother's house, and into the room of her who conceived me."

"On my bed at night" is reference to a dream she had. Notice that she is totally paranoid and begins to freak out believing that she cannot find her lover. She is looking all over for him just so she can be reassured. When she finds him she grasps on to him, clings, to him, and does not want to let him go until she can find within herself that place of greatest comfort and security (which is the reference to her mother's house). For those of you who have listened to the Way of a Woman, this is a precursor of what will go wrong if her love is not secured. But sure enough, just like he promised, the wedding day arrives. He says to her:

### ***Song of Songs 5:1***

"I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh along with my balsam. I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey; I have drunk my wine and my milk.

He has given her his love and has received her love. As a result, she is absolutely enthralled with her lover:

***Song of Songs 5:10-16***

"My beloved is dazzling and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand. "His head is like gold, pure gold; His locks are like clusters of dates and black as a raven. "His eyes are like doves beside streams of water, bathed in milk, and reposed in their setting. "His cheeks are like a bed of balsam, banks of sweet-scented herbs; His lips are lilies dripping with liquid myrrh. "His hands are rods of gold set with beryl; His abdomen is carved ivory inlaid with sapphires. "His legs are pillars of alabaster set on pedestals of pure gold; His appearance is like Lebanon choice as the cedars. "His mouth is full of sweetness. And he is wholly desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem."

Notice that her man is not only her beloved but also her friend. She feels secure. It is obvious to me that for this woman to be this vulnerable and this lovesick that this man has not just secured her place in his arms but he has also been emotionally available to her and has been there to meet much more than just her sexual needs. This man is her friend; he has cared for, cherished, and adored his love. As a result, her heart has been made secure. She knows him as a friend, a lover, and a husband. That is why she just stares at him, admires him, and why he is wholly desirable to her. Understand, her attraction goes far beyond his physical attributes. I am sure he was a stud (I don't want to take anything away from the man); but because her heart is secure, to her he is the most gorgeous man she has ever seen.

Then she actually asks him to place her like a seal over his heart or like a seal on his arm. She now wants everyone to know that he belongs to her.

Obviously, as the bride of Christ, our biggest need is to know and be fully convinced that we are loved, safe, secure, and adored above all others. However, believing that we are loved is the one thing with which we all seem to battle. We are constantly seeking for God to once again validate and prove to us that He loves us. It's really kind of silly.

In addition, our need to be secure spans across many areas: emotional, relational, physical, as well as the practical aspects of life. And if we feel that any of these areas are at risk we freak out. Like this woman we scramble around wondering where God is and why He is not doing what we think He needs to do. We also tell him to drop everything and come to us; to leap over mountains of separation and get here right now. It is amazing how insecure we can be in His love.

But He has made us a commitment, a promise, and He will not break it. We belong to Him; He has redeemed us. We are set apart as His special possession. We have been sealed in order that we might know that we do not have to worry, we do not have to freak; therefore, we do

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not have to start running around the city (so to speak) like a crazy woman looking for assurance. We are His and He takes His ownership of our lives ever so serious.

That is why He has given us His Holy Spirit. The Spirit is in effect our engagement ring. He is our pledge that during this time of waiting for the summation of all things in Christ, we can know His love and be fully assured in His love and take comfort in knowing that He is always with us and will never leave us. In addition, He will always provide for us and care for us. That is why He said:

***Matthew 10:29-31***

"Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father."But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. "So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

***Matthew 6:25-33***

"For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? "And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? "And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Jesus knows that we easily freak about so many things; therefore, He tells us over and over again that we are loved and we do not have to worry, for all our needs are met in His love (yes, even our emotional and relational needs). Besides, He will do everything that He has promised; the scriptures speak so clearly of His faithfulness to His loved ones. I don't care if it is about the pain you still feel in your heart due to wounds from the past or the worries about your future, He has everything in His loving hands. Our job is to rest in that love, to abide in His love, or as we talked about last week, to be willing to take the path to His tent and lie down, get a cool cup of water, and enjoy a good meal. It's all waiting for us.

The Holy Spirit of promise, who dwells in the midst of our *New Creation*, is our assurance and our guarantee that we are never more safe and secure than when we trust ourselves to the Father's love. Thus, being secured, we should be free to gaze at Jesus and adore Him, worship

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Him, love Him and most importantly give ourselves completely to Him without reservation. He is safe thus we are safe; and there is not a single part of our lives that cannot be completed in Him.

Paul referred to the Holy Spirit as the Holy Spirit of promise. I believe this was one of those mysteries in the *Old Testament*, disclosed by Jesus, yet not fully understood until the day of Pentecost. I thought about giving you a homework assignment to find the passages that promise the giving of the holy Spirit, but I decided to just give them to you to look up: **Joel 2:28; Proverbs 1:23; Isaiah 32:15; 44:3; Ezekiel 39:29;** and **John 14:15-21, 26; 16:5-15**. Now the mystery is that although God promised that He would “pour out His Spirit,” no one had any idea that He meant He would “pour Him out” to live inside of us in the *New Creation* that He would create inside of our bodies. This was a concept that we can see pictures of in the *Old Testament* (for example, in the Tabernacle), but again it was not something understood.

There is a lot more that we still need to do with this passage, and that will have to wait until next week, but I do want to point out that the Spirit was given as a pledge with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. What this means is that the Spirit was given to us to assure us, comfort us and establish us in this truth: when it is all said and done, Jesus wins; and since we belong to Him, since we are His own possession, we also win!

Being the bride of Christ is a marvelous thing and since He cares about us in every way (emotionally, physically, psychologically, and practically) and is always available for us, we are the luckiest woman that has ever lived. So take joy in this truth to the praise of His glory. Let His praises ring from your lips and worship Him, adore Him for He is the **One** and only who is able to love us in this manner. Believe me, no man or woman will ever be able to satisfy us the way Jesus can. In fact, this is such a monumental mountain of truth that we all must first and foremost find our security, comfort, and assurance in His love so that we will be free from worry, free from insecurity, free from paranoia, and hence entirely free to love.

Let's Pray

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When we ended last week I stated that we had a bit more to discover in this passage before we could move on. So let's pick up again beginning in verse 11.

### ***Ephesians 1:11-14***

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that **we** who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, **you** also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of **our** inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

I want you to notice that Paul made a shift from talking about “we” to “you” and then finally to “us.” This is another foreshadowing of a central theme in Chapter 2 (and one of the Biblical mysteries) and that is that even though Jesus came and preached the gospel to the Jews (who Paul refers to as “**we**”), the Jews would be used to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (who Paul refers to as “**you**”) and both Jew and Gentile become one in Christ (hence the reference to “**our**” inheritance). Again, this will be more fully developed in Chapter 2, but Paul is giving us a preview of what is to come.

Paul says that “we” (the Jews) were the first to hope or to place our trust in Jesus Christ. In the Greek, this hope is in the perfect active tense. This means that once they placed their hope in Jesus, this action was perfectly completed and nothing else needed to be done. Thus, they could be at rest knowing they belong to God and that the effect of that decision was always active in their life. This is once again another confirmation that our place as sons of God is secure and is never in jeopardy: we are at rest.

The implication of this truth is ginormous in terms of our living as sons who belong to God. We will dive down deep when we get into Chapter 2 but for now I want you to fixate on the word “rest;” because if that does not describe your day-in-and-day-out existence with Jesus, then you have a serious problem. There are beliefs which you hold to—beliefs about God and about you—which are not in alignment with the truth! This is something we must remedy! But there will be more of that to come.

Then he says that they (the Gentiles) also heard and believed and in effect placed their hope in Jesus Christ, which is why they were also sealed in Christ with the Holy Spirit of promise. I don't want to go past those two words too quickly—heard and believed. This combination of words paints a beautiful picture for how God delights in working in and through His body. Sure, as God, He could snap His fingers and a person would believe; but that is not how He chooses to work. He works by reaching out to people and touching them flesh to flesh. He lets their ears hear from our mouths. He lets their eyes see a glimpse of Him in how we live and relate to God as our Father, to Jesus as our Lover, and to the Holy Spirit of promise as our Counselor. And then He lets them choose.



Please understand, in God's economy we are more than important. We have a vital role to play in the expansion of His kingdom and He has uniquely placed each of us exactly where He wants us to best fulfill His purposes. Again, this should help you find rest with your life (there's that word again) and the things God has called you to do. It should help you be at peace with where He has you right now.

I know we all are always longing for something bigger and greater (which I believe is an imprint from the Father), but nothing can be bigger and greater than being exactly where the Lord, the creator of the universe, wants us. And He has us in our jobs, in school, in various relationships, etc., so others (whom He has specifically appointed for us) will believe because: they were **touched** by His Spirit; **saw** Him as He lived in and through our lives; and **heard** Him as we spoke the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. Paul speaks to all of this in **Romans 10:14-15**.

It is an amazing way to live when you become convinced that you are more than just "Joe Blow" or "Jane Blow" walking around here on earth trying to survive as a "good Christian" and start to understand that you are chosen by God, that your life has been pre-ordained, your body tabernacles the very presence of God on earth, and you are the possessor of the mysteries of the God—the truth—for which others are in desperate need. Talk about having a reason to live and a reason to not waddle around in puddles of self-loathing and despair.

As we move on in this passage, Paul then prays an amazing prayer for the saints, a prayer inspired by the Spirit of God, a prayer which covers you and me.

### ***Ephesians 1:15-23***

Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.

I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.

The first thing that is over the top amazing is the picture we get of Paul's heart. Paul is so into the bride of Christ and is so encouraged that they are in love with Jesus that he says that he has not ceased to give thanks and make mention of them in his prayers and what a beautiful prayer he lifts up on their behalf.

Notice that Paul linked the notions of “*faith*” and “*agape*” love (the kind of love that comes only from God). As we grow in our faith in Jesus Christ, as we learn to trust ourselves to Him, then the fruit of our lives will naturally produce His love for other believers. Agape love is a fruit of the Spirit of God (***Galatians 5:22***). The Spirit loves His own; therefore, as He controls more and more of our heart, we will likewise love His own since He will be the one who will love through us.

This is the exchange that we have talked about on many occasions. As we give Jesus more and more control over our lives, the selfishness, which is a direct byproduct of our old sinful nature, diminishes proportionally and, in exchange, Jesus’ love is produced and expressed from our lives to others. And if it is not, then despite what you might think or feel about your spirituality, you are not practically living by faith. The fruit of your life says it all.

So let’s hone in on this notion of faith producing love. According to ***Hebrews 11:1***, faith is all about believing—choosing to bet our lives on the truth about God. This is how we were saved (we heard and believed the truth) and this is how we are to live (***Romans 1:17, 2 Corinthians 5:7, Galatians 2:20***)! But for many of us this truth is unfortunately forgotten. We are ok knowing that we were saved by faith, but in terms of day-to-day living we tend to want to wrench control of our lives back from God because 1) we don’t really trust that His is good and has good intentions for our lives, 2) we don’t like the fact that His good is about having more of Him and not necessarily more of what we want, 3) we don’t like the way He is managing the details of our life—we want bigger/better/different, and 4) are afraid to let Him into those scary rooms in the corridors of our soul which we keep locked down and protected because of the ways we have been hurt and severely wounded.

Thus, instead of living by believing that He is our Daddy, our Lover, and our Great Comforter and Counselor who is in absolute control of all the details of our life and has planned wonderful goodness for us, we give Him a feigned nod of obedience wrapped around good Christian pleasantries, but all the while we are still trying to be our own god—our own sovereign.

This is one of the reasons that we get caught up in serving God and being what we think are good obedient Christians who follow all the “rules.” It’s a way to cover or compensate for the fact that we do not really trust our lives to Jesus. The problem is that this way of living does not produce Agape love because it does not result in God living through you; thus, this way of living is sin. Sure, all our effort gives us something to feel good about but it is a spiritual and emotional deception.

This is why trying to appease all the rules of the religion of Christianity simply does not please God. The only obedience which pleases Jesus is the obedience of faith: when we learn to trust ourselves to His Lordship over our lives in every area of our life. This is what it means to abide in His love and cling to Him for everything; and according to ***Hebrews 11:6*** it is the only way we can be pleasing to God—for “without faith it is impossible to please Him.”

When you choose to bet your life on what is true, trusting His love for you, and trusting that: 1) His is good and has good intentions for your lives; 2) more of Him is exactly what you need; 3) nothing is bigger/better/or more different than being in the center of His will; and 4) He wants to bring His warm light into all of those scary rooms which are filled with years and years

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of pent up emotion and actually bring healing so He can fellowship with you—or dine with you—in those places where you were once hurt, then your body will be like a huge faucet of His Agape love pouring out to others.

I want to jump ahead about 30-years in Ephesian history and turn to the book of Revelation, chapter 2 where Jesus Himself pens a letter to the church at Ephesus. It is only 7 verses but it addresses this issue and it is from Jesus' own lips.

***Revelation 2:1-7***

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place — unless you repent. 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'

Wow this is a pretty sharp rebuke; and, as we know, the lampstand has since been removed and the church at Ephesus no longer exists. Sadly, Jesus did exactly as He threatened. According to Paul they started off wonderfully and their faith produced God's Agape love which was beautifully expressed toward other believers. But it seems they forgot what was really important to God—how to be in love with Jesus and trust themselves to Him—and instead chose to be really good Christians. And boy they were good; their deeds were well known. But it was all to no avail. To God their effort was worthless because it was not a byproduct or fruit of His living in and through them but was merely their best (but totally lame) attempt at being good. They forgot that only God is good.

I love the way Jesus uses a very romantic description—you have left your first love—but even then it seems lost on them. And what is sad is that their departure did not occur over hundreds of years where they slowly migrated away from truth, but during one lifetime. Again, Jesus' letter was written probably just over 30 years after Paul wrote his letter and only about 40 years after the church had been established.

Knowing the love of God and living in the love of God is the key to experiencing all that God has for us. And when we understand how marvelous His love for us really is, we can remember that we did nothing to earn our relationship with God; it was a gift. Thus, there is nothing we can do "for" God to maintain that relationship except to believe and abide in His love. We need to learn this lesson and not follow the unfortunate path ultimately chosen by the Ephesians and

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instead follow the example of faith and love that they set for us at the beginning of their love affair with Jesus.

And please take note that once you start down the path of trying to be a good Christian, there seems to be a hardening in your heart that makes it very difficult for you to hear (and by that I mean receive) what Jesus Himself says to you. They didn't; it was lost on them. This is why the writer of Hebrews warns us: "Today you must listen to His voice. Don't harden your hearts against Him" (**Hebrews 4:7** quoting **Psalm 95:7-8**). Please don't go down that path; it is dry, empty and void of life and love. I spent way too many years on that path, but thank Jesus that He is the one who grabbed me by the nape of the neck and said, "No more." He saved me from myself and my foolish desire to be obsessed on what I could "do" for God.

Remember life as a son of God is all about faith—about abiding in His love. 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Now as we move forward in this prayer, I want you to understand that this was a prayer inspired by the Spirit of God; thus, what Paul prayed gives us insight as to what God desires for us to experience in Him.

First, Paul prays that our glorious Father would give us spiritual wisdom and insight (or revelation), so we might grow in our knowledge of God. The goal then is for us to grow in the "knowledge of God," and the spirit of wisdom and insight are the means by which that takes place.

First let's talk about the "knowledge of God." The Greek word that Paul chose does not just mean to gather information and to be familiar with data and facts about God, but it means to know Him personally and implies a participation in that knowledge. In other words, our goal is not just to know the Bible, but to know God as our Daddy, Jesus as our Lover, and the Spirit as our Great Comforter and Counselor. In the Greek, the word "knowledge" infers deep intimate and personal knowledge through experience and relationship.

With this understanding, it makes sense why the spirit of wisdom and revelation/insight are the means to our knowing God. Wisdom gives us insight into the true nature of God and revelation/insight is the unveiling of all that is God to us—in other words revelation/insight opens up for us an understanding of how God interacts with our lives so we can know both what to believe about God and how we can bet our lives on His character and nature.

Now just so you know, when it says "spirit" of wisdom and insight, I do not believe that is a reference to the Holy Spirit, but I think it refers more to a disposition or attitude we are to have which desires wisdom and insight. I say that because according to **verse 13**, we were given the Holy Spirit when we first believed; so obviously Paul could not have been praying that God would give the Holy Spirit.

It is clear, however, that wisdom and revelation come only from God. **Proverbs 2:6** says that the Lord grants wisdom and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding. But He grants it as the fruit of our getting to know Him and trusting ourselves to Him and **not** as a fruit of our knowing about Him. Wisdom and revelation are fruits which accompany intimacy with Jesus.

One thing I noticed about the woman in Song of Songs is that she is always watching for her lover. She is always attentive and she notices everything about him. She says that his cologne is fragrant (which means she must be near to him). She says that his name is pleasing, which is why all the young woman want him (**1:3**). In so doing, she compares his name or his character to perfume, which meant that his character/nature was pleasing and something that is attractive to all and in no way repulsive.

She says he is like a sachet of myrrh lying between her breasts (**1:12**). She was constantly taking in the wonderful fragrance of his character and nature—like breathing in perfume. In other words, he was constantly in her thoughts; she filled her mind with thoughts of him, the fragrance of which overpowered the stink of her own thoughts. She said he is a lovely and pleasant sight (**1:16**). Most likely she was not just referring to his physical beauty but again to how beautiful he was to her because everything about him made her feel so secure in his love.

She said that he is like the *finest* apple tree in the orchard and she just loves to sit in his delightful shade and eat of his delicious fruit (**2:3**). In other words, He is a rare find—unique, sweet, and fragrant and she is totally protected by his love. She is shaded from the sun which had scorched her (the sun being a reference to her prior life of slavery which is a metaphor for the world and our bondage to Satan). Moreover, because she is protected she can just sit and enjoy the tasty fruit of being in relationship with him. This reminds me of what David says in **Psalm 34:8**, “Taste and see that the Lord is good. Oh, the joys of those who trust in Him!”

He brings her into the banquet hall and his banner over her is love (**2:4**)—in other words, everyone can see how much he loves her. She knew he was not ashamed of her and that he delighted in her and he wanted everyone to know about their love. In fact, he made a public display of his love. Again, this made her so secure in his arms.

She is even found searching all over for her lover. One day while she was asleep he came to her room. The door was closed and he knocked and knocked just wanting to come in and be with her. When she finally got up and opened the door he was gone. She yearned to just hear his voice so she searched for him but could not find him anywhere (**5:2-6**).

The picture these passages paint powerfully communicates that she knew her lover in a very intimate way. She observed him, studied him, knew all about him and yearned for him with her entire being. She knew his character and nature were trustworthy and something she could depend upon. She also experienced his protective care and the sheer joy and glory of belonging to him. She knew her man and the more she experienced him the more she fell head over heels in love with him. She loved the sound of his voice, his smell on her body, the way he looked, and everything about him. She could not live without him and would search the city over just to be with him.

With this picture in mind, let's read **Proverbs 4:5-9 and Proverbs 2:1-6** and hopefully it will breathe life into these verses which will help us understand the meat behind Paul's prayer that God might give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation.

**Proverbs 4:5-9**

Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth. "Do not forsake her, and she will guard you; Love her, and she will watch over you. "The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom; And with all your acquiring, get understanding. "Prize her, and she will exalt you; She will honor you if you embrace her. "She will place on your head a garland of grace; She will present you with a crown of beauty."

The blessings of obtaining wisdom are amazing. Wisdom and understanding will guard you and watch over you. She will exalt you if you prize her and she will honor you if you embrace her. A garland of grace and a crown of beauty will be yours. Beyond the grandness of what wisdom has to offer, what strikes me is the urgency in the tone of this passage; it is intense. Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forsake her! Prize her!

Now, at first glance the notion that we have to acquire wisdom may seem to contradict Paul's simply prayer that God would grant us wisdom. But it is not. In reality they are perfectly aligned. Wisdom is a gift that God gives, but to receive it or acquire it, you have to pursue knowing Him. So the Holy Spirit through the writer of Proverbs is really shouting: know Jesus, love Jesus, experience Jesus, and find your entire life in Jesus, for wisdom is the beautiful and wonderful fruit of knowing God. Listen to what else the Spirit says:

**Proverbs 2:1-6**

My child, listen to what I say, and treasure my commands. Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding. Search for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures. Then you will understand what it means to fear the Lord, and you will gain knowledge of God. For the Lord grants wisdom! From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

You see, we are to be like that woman who loves everything about her lover. We are to study His ways. We are to see how He does things and how he interacts with others. We are to observe how He is faithful to His character and nature of love. We are to yearn to always be with Him. We are to obsess on Him and let thoughts of Him fill our minds. We are to soak Him up like a cachet of incredible perfume which hangs around our neck and overpowers the stink of our own thoughts.

Yes, we are to be so close to Him that we even have His smell on our bodies. We are to trust ourselves to His character and nature and thereby dwell in His protective shade. We are to eat of the fruit of His wisdom. We are to listen to every sound of His voice and pay attention to what He says. We are to cry out to know and experience more and more of Him. He is to be of more value than even ourselves. We are to want Him more than we would ever want the greatest of riches or anything else for which we would otherwise desire.

He is to be our lover. When we seek to be in relationship with Him in this manner, then we **will** come know what it means to fear the Lord (or to only love what He loves), and then we **will** gain the knowledge of God, for He **will** grant us wisdom and insight **from His own mouth**. It will be like the most amazing, wonderful, deep, passionate, and intense kiss you could ever imagine! You will never want to leave His embrace and you will long and desire for more—more wisdom, more understanding, more of Him.

By the way, He loves that kind of kiss as well. In **Hosea 6:6** He says He delights in our obtaining the “knowledge of God.” It literally brings Him great joy to love us in this manner and share more and more of Himself with us.

Paul then prays that our hearts will be flooded with light so we can understand (or know) the confident hope he has given to those He called—his holy people who are His rich and glorious inheritance. This is totally mind blowing and I believe it takes special illumination from the Holy Spirit for us to really understand this truth. We can hear the words, but to live as if we were worth everything to Jesus is another matter altogether. But it is true! We are Jesus’ reward. We are His gift—handpicked by the Father and made holy for His Son. We are Jesus’ rich and glorious inheritance. Let these truths flood your mind that you may know them to be true. In the Greek, this word “understand” or “know” is in the **perfect active** tense. These truths are to be perfected in us as our ever present reality. This must be how we live!

**Hebrews 12:2** says that for the joy set before Him Jesus endured the cross. You have to come to believe that you are that joy. To Him you were worth His leaving heaven, setting aside His glory, and taking on the form of mortal man. You were worth the mocking, the brutal torture, and you were worth dying for. You and I are His delight. This is why the Song of Songs says that He is captured by just one glance from our eyes (**4:9**)

Last week I mentioned the mysteries of the kingdom in Matthew 13 and two of the parables speak directly to this point.

#### **Matthew 13:44**

"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Jesus is this man who found us in the field of the world. From sheer joy over finding us, He left heaven and became a man so that He could die and with His blood buy the field (Jesus died for the sins of the world) just so He could be the possessor of you and me—His hidden treasure.

#### **Matthew 13:45-46**

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

In this parable we are the pearl and Jesus is the merchant and believe it or not He is actually seeking to find us (**John 15:16**, He chose us we did not choose Him). And here is the mind blowing thing; Jesus would have died for you even if you were the only person to ever believe in Him. Even if it was just you (upon finding one pearl of great value), He still would have left heaven, became a man and died just so He could redeem you, or purchase you with the price of His precious blood. That is how valuable and precious you are to Jesus. We need to have our hearts flooded with light so we can understand this truth and live in this truth.

The hope of our calling is glorious. You mean everything to Him. In fact, you are His glory. I pray that you would let this truth sink into your soul and penetrate every area of your being so that you would come to fully understand why you can—and why you must—trust yourself completely to Him.

Do you understand God is not out to hurt you or do horrible things to you? He loves you and you are precious to Him. I know at times the things He allows in our lives can be really horrible, but it is not because He is not obsessed with you; it is because He is. It is because He wants you to know and experience what it is like to abandon your own wisdom and understanding and cling to Him for your very life so you will come to believe that He is trustworthy and faithful and come to know the joy and delight of being loved by God.

I think that is enough to try and absorb tonight. What Paul says next is even more mind-blowing than what we covered tonight, if you can imagine that, so I think I want to save that for next week. So for now, let's just spend our week meditating on how valuable, precious, and desirable we are to Jesus. Let these truths flood your mind constantly. Personally, I want to believe this in every fiber of my being so I can begin to know what it is like to live all the time with this truth being a pillar upon which my life is built. I am His precious possession. I am His glory. I am His beloved and He is always obsessed with me. My prayer is that each of us will come to know this to be true and live as if it is our truth.

Let's Pray



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We are going to continue with Paul's prayer to the saints in Ephesians 1.

***Ephesians 1:19-23***

*I pray that you will understand* what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (ESV)

Just so you know, the first part of this passage which I italicized is not in the original text but I included it for clarity sake since the rest of the line is to be understood as a continuation of the statement in **verse 17-8** (remember this is one long sentence) where Paul says that he prays that our glorious Father would give us spiritual wisdom and insight (or revelation) and that our hearts will be flooded with light, so we might grow 1) in our knowledge of God, 2) understand the confident hope He has given us, and 3) understand or know **perfectly** the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe.

As we studied last week, the "knowledge of God" is all about knowing and experiencing God personally, intimately, and tangibly. This is far different than just knowing about God and about the things of God. We are to know and experience God as our Father, Jesus as our Lover, and the Holy Spirit as our Counselor/Comforter; likewise, we are to perfectly know the mega-power which has been bestowed upon us who believe.

Therefore, in the same way that knowing God is far beyond a casual observance, ritualistic participation, or even a detailed study of, and adherence to, Biblical truths, knowing the power unleashed towards us is to be something we experience personally, intimately, and tangibly in every aspect of our being such that others, if asked, could testify to God's existence because of how He has made Himself manifest in our lives.

This word "power" ("*dunamis*") is literally a spiritual dynamic force and it's where we get our word dynamite. Paul then adds a further description of this power using 3 entirely different Greek words when he says this is the same mighty power which raised Christ from the dead. Sometimes when we read words like power and might we treat them as metaphors because they don't describe our day-in-and-day-out experience. But our lack of experience does not make it a metaphor; it just means we do not yet know or understand this power.

Paul says that this power which is unleashed toward us is according to the working ("*energeian*") or energetic power (where we get our word energy), of the might ("*kratous*"), or the dominate power that overcomes any obstacle, of His power ("*ischyos*") or forcefulness. In other words, God's power toward us is always active, it is invincible, indomitable and therefore

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beyond what any of us have yet to imagine. This is the power that God wants us to daily experience.

Paul then gives us examples of how that power was manifested toward Christ as a way for us to understand how it is manifested toward us.

- First, it was the power that raised Christ from the dead and literally animated dead tissue and transformed Jesus' fleshly body into a supernatural body. A body which had shape, substance, could touch and be touched, could eat, and yet walk through cave walls and even suddenly appear in the midst of a room where all the doors were locked.
- Second, it was the power that seated Jesus in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. After Jesus rose from the dead, He still walked amongst humanity. But one day everyone saw Him rise into the sky where God took Him into the heavens and sat Him at the seat of power. Culturally, the notion of the right hand or right arm refers to strength, power, and authority (since for most people that is their strongest arm). Further, the fact that Jesus is seated means that there is no challenge or threat to His authority, He is firmly planted.
- Third, it is the power that placed Jesus far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. Who can legitimately shake their fists at Jesus? Can puny mankind? Can the demons? Can Satan? Can any of the other angelic beings? Can anything at all stake a claim that they can be like God? Satan sure tried and well let's just say that his end, and all those who believe his lie that they can be like God, is not pretty. Jesus is above all! No one is greater than our Lord!
- Fourth, it is the power that has put all things under the authority of Christ. Not only is He the supreme authority, no one can circumvent His will (*Ephesians 1:5, 11*). We are told that every world leader and every national power rises and falls by His power alone (*Psalms 2, Daniel 4:35; 9:24*). Even Satan is submitted to His rule and authority (*Job 1-2; Daniel 9:25; Revelation 20:10*). He has scripted out the destiny of man and has given us very specific details about what nations and people groups are going to do and how they will come against His people; and no one will escape their destiny (*Revelation 13:10*).
- Fifth, it is the same power that has made Him head over all things for the benefit of the church. A little side note, 5 is the number of grace and we, of His fullness, have been given grace upon grace (*John 1:16*). This blows my mind. All this power and authority is expended specifically for our benefit. All that He has done and all that He will do is for you and me. As we studied in **verse 10**, all things will be summed up in Christ in order that He might bestow blessing upon blessings upon His bride. Talk about being loved, safe, secure, and cared for; everything He does is for us. His glory is our glory, His victory is our victory, and His rule is our rule.

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This exertion of power and might “for our behalf” is a concept that I think few has understood; but we are direct recipients and participants of this power. I say participants because we are to experientially live in and with this power. So understanding these truths is not to be a matter of simply knowing good Bible doctrine; rather, in some tangible way, shape and form, this is to invade our practical life. As I was contemplating this reality, God brought me to a verse that I have always had a hard time understanding much less believing—a verse which speaks of this power in a way that is totally mind-blowing.

### ***Matthew 21:18-22***

Now in the morning, when He was returning to the city, He became hungry. Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He said to it, "No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you." And at once the fig tree withered. Seeing this, the disciples were amazed and asked, "How did the fig tree wither all at once?" And Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen. "And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

To me this is not only a freaky verse but it has been mishandled by many teachers. And although I think God has given me some insight into how to understand it, I have to admit that I am a little reticent to walk around believing that this kind of power and authority is mine. Now the key in this verse is obviously faith. But it is not the kind of faith that you muster up such that if you believe hard enough, without doubting, you are able to do whatever it is that “you” want. No! We have to understand this passage in light of true Biblical faith and not some mystic, personal empowerment, or wealth and prosperity notion of faith where narcissistic Christians pursue only what will give them pleasure here on earth (***James 4:3***).

Thus, if you actively believe the truth about God, and thereby do only what your Father tells you to do, only when He tells you to do it, then there will be times when He tells you to take power and authority in His name and then what you ask for in prayer, believing, you will receive—even crazy supernatural things. He will answer because it will just be the Father working out His will in heaven on earth in and through your life.

Sometimes it will be manifested in a purely naturally supernatural way—like the way Jesus cursed the fig tree and it withered and died—and other times it will be manifested in your ability to remove the mountains of wrong belief and twisted false “truths” to which you have held. [Just so you know, in the Bible mountains are often used as metaphors for the places of security, the false god’s, or belief systems, in which we have tried to find life (***Deuteronomy 32:37; 1 Samuel 2:2; Isaiah 17:10; Jeremiah 23:29, Revelation 6:15***).] But either way, it will be an undeniable exertion of supernatural power that comes from God. The key to experiencing this power is in “knowing” God, knowing His voice in your life, and doing only what He tells you to do; nothing more and nothing less!

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As I mused on this verse, I started to think about how this power has been manifested or exerted toward me in crazy ways. I thought I would share some of my experiences as a way to both encourage you and hopefully entice you to trust yourself to God so you can know/experience His power toward you. I want you to have the courage to step out and move—even in the crazy supernatural—when the Father tells you to move.

Now, just so you know, I am telling you these stories as a way to edify and encourage you and not as a way to draw any attention to myself. These stories are about God and His power and might—they are **NOT** about me. I just happen to be a vessel of His mercy upon which He has, from time to time, decided to bestow His power in some pretty cool ways; and, for that, I am thankful.

First, it is the power that has given me new life. I have learned that it is absolutely possible to daily live as a man who has been raised from the dead, free from the bondage of my old life, free from slavery to myself, free from the power of sin, free from slavery to the world and to the ruler of this world.

Not too long after I became a Christian the “religion of Christianity” got a hold of me and strapped me with all sorts of burdens and duties. I was told that my obedience to God had first and foremost to do with not sinning. This led me on an impossible quest to become a godly man by purging the sin in my life. Sure I was able to master control over many of the “visible” sins which others saw, but I knew what lurked within; I knew what darkness and conflict reigned in my heart. This was like the worse prison ever. I knew that God was holy and wanted me to be holy, but I did not comprehend that He had already made me holy. So I strived and strived to be like Him and I always, always failed.

But He taught me that only God is good and I therefore needed to stop trying to be like Him. He taught me that all my efforts at not sinning were just a waste of time since apart from Him I am sin. Yes, He taught me that everything about me—every thought, every attitude, every motivation, and every behavior that did not come from Him were sin—even my righteous and religious deeds, my service for God in the ministry, and all my attempts to not sin.

He taught me that the obedience of faith is what He desired: my willingness to believe that Jesus is God, such that I am willing to bet my life on His character and nature. He taught me that I had to believe that Jesus is both my personal Gatekeeper (thus, nothing happens in my life that He does not specifically allow), and my Good Shepherd (thus, all that He allows is good and loving). With these truths tucked safely away in my soul, I discovered I could daily trust myself to His rule over my life.

He taught me that He has given me new life and has put within me a new nature. He showed me that it is entirely possible to live from this new man. He taught me that what I needed to do was renew my mind by believing the truth about Him. He asked me to let go of the lies I had been fed about Him by the enemy who has relentlessly worked within the “religion of Christianity.” Just so you know, whenever I make a reference to the “religion of Christianity” I am referring to all those parts of our belief system that have been man-made— whether or not they have been built on or comingled true Biblical concepts. If it is from man and not from God then it is religion.

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He taught me that no matter how much I thought I could trust my life to myself and in effect be my own God, make my own decisions, and plan my own life, I could not. He is my Good Shepherd; therefore, I must know and follow only the decisions He has made for my life. Therefore, I must stay so close to Him that I actually know what He wants of my life. He taught me that it is only in Him that I can know and experience His life, power, and every magnificent promise He has made for those who believe Him.

I have found that it is possible to daily live in freedom. This is not something that I have psyched myself into believing; rather, this freedom has come to define my life (in other words it has been something that has been a sustained reality and is evident to all those who know me). I have been given new life in Jesus Christ and it is miraculous.

It is the power that brought supernatural healing into my life. When I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade I got a bad case of pneumonia and within a few months of getting over that I got bronchitis. Both of these conditions left me with an asthmatic state that seriously impacted my sports endeavors. Whenever I would run or wrestle I would literally almost pass out. I remember tournaments where they would put a bag over my face to help stabilize my breathing. Practice was the worse. Wrestling focuses so much conditioning and I would always want to work harder than anyone, but my condition made it impossible.

The guys who had been wrestling with me for many years knew how intense I was at working out before all this happened and they were bummed that I got so sick. Then in the Spring of my Freshman year I received the Lord and that summer God had a man pray over me for healing. As he prayed I had some weird sort of energy released all through my body and I was shaking and shaking. Tears were literally shooting from my eyes and I could feel God's love being poured out on my life. That night I was healed. I went to practice the next week and once again I could be at the front of every sprint and wrestle as if there was no tomorrow. Everyone in the team freaked out and the fear of God literally fell on that group of guys as they knew that God was not only real but had done something supernatural in my life.

It is the power that brought supernatural healing on another as a result of my prayers. I was at church one evening and this man who worked construction came and asked me to pray for him. He was so upset and crying. He had blown out his knee that day and the doctors told him it would take months to heal. He had it braced and it was swollen the size of a basketball. The problem was that he had no insurance coverage from work and his family was totally dependent upon his income; however, since he was an hourly worker he would not get paid for taking time off due to injury.

I took him back to the prayer room and asked a few others to come with me. I laid hands on him, anointed him with oil, and prayed for God to heal him. I prayed as I felt God lead me and I prayed authoritatively in the Spirit for healing, but honestly at the same time my mind was filled with doubt and I was saying to myself, "please God, please God, please God let this work."

As we were praying, the swelling in his knee started to dissipate right in front of our eyes and he was freaking out; we all were freaking out. When we were done praying he took off his brace and could stand on his knee. The next thing I know he was jumping up and down on it putting all of his weight on that knee (and he was a big guy well over 200-lbs) and he had

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absolutely no pain and no impairment. Here he was this big huge tough construction worker and he was balling like a baby because the power of God that had been release toward him.

It is the power that took authority over Satan, cast out demons, and kept them at bay as they amassed themselves against me. A close friend of mine called me one day saying she picked up this girl sitting outside of a grocery store who looked very sick. She had taken this girl home to see if she could help or contact her family or someone who could help. But when this girl came into the house and saw a Bible on the table she started to manifest a demonic spirit. She began speaking in strange voices, gyrating and twisting in ways that a body is not supposed to move, and making blasphemous statements about God. My friend freaked and called me at work and told me to get out of my meeting and come over right away.

So I did and when I arrived there was already a small gathering. Apparently she called a few others as well. When I went into the house she flipped out and dropped on the floor and was having what looked like epileptic seizures. She was foaming at the mouth, her eyes rolled back in her head and when they returned I could tell they did not belong to her but to some other spirit as they looked totally different. Then she started speaking with the scariest voice I have ever heard and started saying horrific things. My friend who whose house we were in was pregnant at that time and the demonic spirit said that she would have a girl and then started cursing the baby and trying to reach out and touch my friend's stomach saying that it wanted the child, it wanted the child. Shortly after this whole ordeal my friend had a miscarriage.

Well that started what would be a 3 day experience of casting out 15 demons from this girl. I had no idea what I was doing and was totally dependent upon the Holy Spirit leading me and instructing me how to handle each separate demon. I knew there were 15 because when I asked the first demon to tell me how many were in her, it kept saying 3x5, 3x5. That first day we cast out 12 demons; each one is a full story in and of itself. But when the 12<sup>th</sup> was cast out this girl all of a sudden came to her senses and acted as if she was totally healed. She spoke in a lucid manner with a very soft and affectionate tone. She kept saying: Steve, it's me, it's me. I am ok now. Thank you so much; I am ok now.

During all this drama her parents arrived. My friend had riffled through this girl's belongings and found something that led her to her parents. Surprisingly, they let us do our thing despite the fact that they could hear their daughter screaming and freaking and making all sorts of indescribable noises. I thought for sure they would call the cops and I would be in jail, but God held them at bay.

Keep in mind they had never met me or anyone from our church before. Can you imagine? They get this strange call, they come over to this house and see people outside praying and they hear all this horrific stuff coming from inside the house. The mother later told me that she jumped out of the car and pushed by everyone and went to come inside and when she put her hand on the doorknob God told her to stop, back off, wait, and let what is happening happen. She freaked but she backed off and waited.

They had been pretty hopeless in terms of their daughter; she lived in constant darkness and depression. She had separated herself emotionally, psychologically and mentally from her family and as we found out later was into some very bizarre demonic activities (vampirism and

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things of that sort). But on that day God told the parents that this was necessary for their daughter's survival.

Now once the 12 demons were gone and she was in her "right mind" her parents came into the house. Her dad was this huge man who could probably have squashed me like a bug if he really wanted to so I thank God that he had restrained them on my behalf. But with their being in the room and the girl talking and acting like she was totally healed, I knew that I was not to do anything more that night. But, I also knew that we were not done. I have to say I was a bit confused for I knew there were more spirits but she seemed so ok and acted like a person who was totally set free and delivered. Even her parents noticed the total change in her countenance. So we all joined hands and prayed and while people were deep in prayer she looked up at me with those eyes that were not her own and started to just silently laugh and laugh as if they were saying, "we won—she still belong to us." By the way, that look scared me to death. I can still remember it and I hate it.

Now this all happened on a Friday and the next day I went to her parents house and all kinds of amazing things happened. Her dad gave his heart to the Lord and her mom totally recommitted her life to Jesus. The next day they brought their daughter to church and it was not pretty. Being in the presence of God seemed to make those remaining spirits start to manifest once again and she started to make those "noises" and everyone was freaking out. When the service was finished we ushered everyone out and said they had to leave right away and that started another long day and night of trying to cast out the final three demons. The first two had come out sometime over the next 5 or 6 hours of praying and battling but the last one was dug in and seemed as if we were powerless to cast it out. He was the silent one that never said anything to us but only to her.

At one point the spirit caused her to go into what seemed like a coma and she would not move or wake up and laid there with her eyes rolled back in her head. So we used that time to go to her house and search her room for everything connected to darkness and evil. Her mom was with us and we cleaned out her room and prayed over the room, as well as the entire house (which by the way was one of the most horrific terrifying experiences). There were evil spirits all over that place. We took her stuff out to a field and burned it and when we tossed the match into the pile I swear it literally exploded and the flames leaped out of this pit and burned one of the kids who were with me.

That whole process took us the entire night. We went back to the church early in the morning and somewhere around 8 or 9 she woke up and once again began manifesting. She started to get extremely violent and this little girl that weighed perhaps 98-lbs was able to keep 5 large men (including her dad) from restraining her. I have never seen anything like it. And just so you know, this little girl also suffered from cerebral palsy so there is no way on earth, under any circumstances, she should have been able to do what she was doing.

Through the next 7 hours we finally broke the power that this demon had over this girl. I could tell when it finally happened and I was expecting it to leave when all of a sudden the strangest thing took place. It started to have a conversation with this girl telling her that she needed him to live and he is the only one who has ever loved her and has ever truly been her

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friend. It said, “God is the one who struck her with her horrible disease and he is the one who has helped her all these years.” She started to talk back to it and say that she needs him, can’t live without him, and does not want him to go but wants him stay and be with her.

This conversation went back and forth for a while when suddenly she once again became entirely lucid and said that she was done. She said she did not want the spirit to leave and so we stopped. I knew there was nothing more we could do; our work had been done. I also knew that the power of this demon had been broken and it could no longer control her against her will. I knew that as soon as she decided she wanted it to leave it had to leave; it had no choice and it had no power to do otherwise.

After that experience, I could literally see legions of black spirits around my house and around the neighborhood in which I lived. I was encircled by these spirits. My 2-dogs would not even leave the porch; I had to drag them down the driveway in order to go running and pray over them so they would not be so freaked. It was weird that I could see these spirits, but I think God wanted me to know that even though a great army was amassed against me, I had nothing to fear. He had provided a circle of safety of which they could not penetrate. His power toward me was indomitable. And while that was fine and wonderful, being able to see them for all those months was more than a little unnerving.

Throughout the next year I would see that girl from time to time as her parents would bring her to things and it was always scary. That thing inside of her would look at me with total hatred and make horrific noises as if it wanted nothing more than to kill me. But during that year people from the church started to reach out to this girl and be her friend and show her the love of Jesus. In addition, the dynamic in her family totally changed now that her dad was a believer. And every time I would see her I would tell her that God loves her; although I would stand a bit beyond scratching distance as she tried to attack me on different occasions.

Then about 1 year later she came up to me at church and wanted to talk to me (I have to admit I was a bit scared and kept my distance). She proceeded to tell me that she was thankful for how I loved her and for all I did for her and wanted me to forgive her for everything she had said and done, including all her attempts to hurt me. She said she wanted to go to the prayer room and pray to receive Jesus. Ok, my mind was totally blown! God let me see and participate in her great deliverance. The demon lost; it had to leave as it was no longer welcome. Her heart was no longer its home. Jesus filled her and she now lives as a child of God free from the darkness.

It is the power to be invisible. Most of you have heard this story but it is totally cool so I will tell it anyways. The day before the girls were going to leave and hike the AT, and be gone for 6-months, Andrea and I wanted to go and have a quiet lunch together. But as we paid for our food and turned the corner to go sit down, seated in the dining area was a person who is totally obsessed with Andrea and is very well known to me. If she would have seen us our time would have been ruined. She would have been all over Andrea with no sensitivity at all to our wanting to be together—I am not exaggerating about this woman’s obsession.

Andrea and I quickly turned around and went the other way where there were a few scattering of places to sit, but the problem is that the utensils we needed were right behind



where this person was sitting. There was no way past her and she never misses anything; she is the most observant person I know. So we had to decide if we were going to leave or stay with the possibility that our lunch and day would be ruined. I told Andrea that I did not want us to be controlled by anyone in that way and God did not want us to live in fear. So Andrea suggested we pray that God would make me invisible as I go and get all the utensils; and so we did. I was nervous but I confidently walked right up to her table and went around it got our stuff and walked back right in front of her table and she never noticed at all even though both she and the person she was with (who also knows me) were staring right at me the entire time.

Andrea and I were praising Jesus and we got to have a wonderful lunch together. Then we saw that they were getting up and we were sure they were going to walk in front of us on their way out so we prayed again for invisibility and sure enough they got up and left and never noticed us. This may sound silly, but you have to understand this person does not miss anything. I have been back to that place many times and she always sees me no matter where I happen to be or who I happen to be with. God's power was manifested over our lives and covered and protected us.

It is the power to walk through fire and not be burned and pass through the waves of the storm and not drown. As many of you know, just over 8-years ago God told me He was going to bring a storm into my life and He was going to so rock my world that I would cringe in terror and reel and stagger around like a drunkard. And boy did He unleash a doozy of a storm that still has waves which sweep over my life. Fortunately, He warned me about what He was going to do. He told me that I would have enemies in my own household that would attempt to destroy me and that those who I thought were friends and loved ones would turn against me and assail me. He said they would even hunt me down and purposefully hurt and damage me.

The scale upon which this became true is still mind-numbing. He took away jobs, money, and pretty much everything that was precious. I even almost lost my daughter's life to a horrific disease. But the worst of it was not the things of this world that were taken from me but the pain that He inflicted me with in my soul. I remember one day God let my friend Lesley feel, for about 3 minutes, the pain that I was inflicted with 24-hours a day. She was overcome and could not even function for those 3 minutes and was in sheer agony. So believe me it was more than real. God also stole away my sleep and I still have no idea how I functioned.

But the miracle is that during this entire time His power was manifested toward me. Even though this storm has been worse than I could ever have imagined, He has held me in His right hand and I have stood. In all my reeling and staggering around He made sure that I did not fall. He sustained me and in the darkest of days, in the midst of the greatest pain, He taught me about Him. He showed me how much He loves me and taught me to always turn to Him. He even had me care for others and teach them everything that He had been teaching me. As I look back on it, I am not sure how that happened but it did and God used me to help others become convinced that He is love and all that He does is love.

He also enabled me to forgive those who treated me so horribly—now for the life of me I don't trust many of them, but I hold no bitterness toward them. This is not normal. It is totally the supernatural power of God being manifested in my life because if you knew what they have

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done you would know that I would normally want to hurt them real bad. But God's mercy has prevailed over my heart.

These are just a few of the stories from my life which demonstrate the ways in which the great and mighty power of God has been manifested toward me. And if it has been manifested toward me, then it is also available to be manifested in your life as well.

### ***Ephesians 1:22-23***

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (ESV)

Verse 23 is something of a mystery in that it says we—the church—play some part in fulfilling Jesus. Make no mistake; this is not to be understood in the sense that God is not complete because He is. Rather, this to be understood in light of the means by which God has chosen to manifest Himself to all of creation. He has chosen to live in and through His bride and to let her be a physical manifestation of His presence here on earth. God has chosen to take sinful men and women and make them holy and present His lovely and perfect bride before all of creation so that everything seen and unseen can marvel.

Now God fills the world with His presence—He fills all in all—and no one has failed to be exposed to His glory and majesty. But He also does something extra special and supernatural with His bride. God has given Jesus as our head so we can be continually filled with the very presence and glory of God, with His wisdom, goodness, truth, holiness, righteousness, and the power to live unto Him.

He has also bestowed upon us the power to live united, as one, with all the pieces of the body fitting perfectly together such that His body is complete in Him. The head “needs” the body (only because that is how God has chosen to work—remember He is in no way limited in His ability to manifest Himself in any way He wants), and the body most desperately needs the head in order to even know how to move or function. We are inextricably connected with each other and wholly dependent upon Jesus to tell each one of us what to do and when to do it. This is a truth we must never forget; He is the head and we are not. And because He is the head He is always ready to manifest His mighty power in our life. We just need to stay connected to the head and cling to Him so we are not out there on our own separated from the life that is our inheritance.

Well that finishes this amazing prayer and we will venture into Chapter 2 next week.

Let's Pray

***Ephesians 2:1-10***

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Last week we talked a bit about the power that God has bestowed upon us: the power that raised Christ from the dead and literally animated His dead tissue and transformed Jesus' fleshly body into a supernatural body; the power that seated Jesus in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms; the power that placed Jesus far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come; the power that has put all things under the authority of Christ; and the power that has made Him head over all things for the benefit of the church. We talked about how that power is expressed in our lives and is to be practically experienced by each and every one of us. In this passage, Paul continues with that train of thought. He focuses our attention on the fact that this same power has not only raised us from the dead and given us new life, but it has seated us in the heavenly places and given us power which is far above the spiritual forces of darkness which rule this world.

Paul starts by making the point that prior to Christ bringing us new life we were dead in our sins and trespasses. Does that phrase mean anything to you—"dead in our sins and trespasses?" Does it just sound like Bible talk and do you kind of gloss over it when you hear it or read it? I am afraid that most of us still have not entirely accepted this truth or understood the serious implications of this truth. Yet, it is tantamount for us to believe this truth in order to abide in Christ.

I say that most of us have not accepted this truth because we still do not live as if we are thoroughly in every way, shape or form, 100% dependent upon Jesus for all things; rather, we live as if we need Him for some things, the really important things, but for the most part we believe we have it covered (even if the way we live our life brings us no peace, no joy, no rest, and no love). Believing, however, that we have any ability whatsoever to manage our own lives is a lie from the devil. In fact, it is one of the devil's most powerful deceptions. Sadly, he has too many of us convinced that we can actually control the outcomes of our life or at least protect ourselves in order to survive our lives. The devil has tricked us into living as if we are, in essence, our own god. But that is simply not the case!

Outside of the new life we have received in Christ we are dead men. This means 1) we have nothing to offer to God, and 2) are in no position to even try and manage our own lives. Thus, all our attempts to be good people—good Christians even—and all our efforts at controlling our lives are futile. The reality is that everything in our life that does not come directly from Jesus is tainted with the stench and corrupting influence of death.

You see, prior to receiving Christ we were walking dead men. Literally, we were zombies—animated tissue with a lifeless soul. When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race; it was like a permanent mutation of our spiritual dna that has subsequently been passed on to every human, without exception. This sin brought death (present and eternal separation from God), and death spread to everyone, for everyone who has ever lived has sinned by nature and by choice (this idea is captured by Paul when he says we were dead in our trespasses and sins as this covers both the willful sins and all the unintentional errors which may not be so “bad” but still fall short of God’s standard of perfection).

This “death” resulted in eternal condemnation, which is why Paul says that we were children of wrath. We were all sentenced to spend eternity not just separated from God, but our eternal destiny included abject suffering. The metaphors which the Bible uses to describe this “**wrath**” are nothing short of terrifyingly horrific: fire, weeping, gnashing of teeth, where the worm, which eats you alive from inside out, never dies. And this lasts for eternity; it never ends, it never wanes, and there is never any comfort to be found from anyone. The “**wrath**” of God is the scariest thing I could ever imagine and despite what some people might think, there will be no “partying with your friends” or “kicking it with the devil.” See also **Romans 3:23; 5:12-21; John 12:31, 16:11.**

And not only were we dead, condemned, and sentenced, we were also mere puppets of the one who is the prince of the power of the air whose very nature is sin and disobedience. How degrading. We were enslaved to Satan and his demonic hordes to do their bidding. We saw that in the **Song of Songs** when the woman says: “The sun has burned my skin. My brothers were angry with me and sent me out to tend the vineyards in the hot sun. Now see what it has done to me” (1:6). She was compelled to serve at their commands and it severely damaged her, but she had no choice she was simply unable to tend for her own vineyard or garden; therefore, it fell into neglect.

When you look around the world it is so tragic and humiliating. People really think they are rulers of their own domain, masters of their destiny despite the fact that their own garden (their own soul) is in complete disarray and neglect and they are unable to find protection from the sun. They don’t even realize that they are just these zombies walking around unwittingly doing the bidding of their master the devil. Satan must just relish in our foolish pride as he yanks upon another string or two and people jump to do his bidding.

I know this sounds bizarre and is the kind of thing by which we get labeled “fundamentalist freaks;” but labels aside, we cannot ignore the fact that the Bible makes it clear that this tangible world is basically likened to the matrix (it is not real) and the intangible world is what is real. If you closely read the gospels you will see that the things Jesus says pretty much always focus on the fact that the spiritual is the hard reality and the physical is just a temporary almost

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ethereal existence. In fact, so much of what is here on earth is just a copy of that which has already existed in heaven—that which is eternal.

In this unseen world there are powers, principalities, mighty rulers of darkness and wicked spirits in the heavenly realms (**Ephesians 6:12**). In other words there is a whole army of demonic spirits which are organized and ranked by responsibility and authority (just like in any military) and they are posed against us. You see, we are in a war, even though we rarely seem to know of its existence. And the reason so few people are aware of this war is that the last thing the devil wants anyone to know or believe is that he is real or that there is a God. So this prince of the power of the air operates in stealth and stays in the shadows. With deception and lies he keeps people entirely blind to their true condition.

Make no mistake, Satan does not have to try and win over anyone; they all already belong to him. Satan just works really hard to try and prevent light from reaching into the darkness and stealing away from him those that are in his control. This explains why when God's light does pierce the darkness in the heart of a person, Satan moves with a two prong attack. First, he immediately clothes himself as an angel of light, and his servants clothe themselves as servant of righteousness (**2 Corinthians 11:14**), in order to try and deceive a person to remain in his artificial light and thereby stop short of entering into God's light. However, if they do enter into God's light, he quickly deceives them into believing that they need to be "doing" something to please God and serve Him knowing that this lie will prevent the person from actually living in God's light—hence the "religion" of Christianity. So he either keeps them out or tries to keep them neutered.

Now, I want to make this next point very clear since it has been a product of great demonic deception. In the same way that physical death separates us from all those who are living, spiritual death separates us from all those who are spiritually alive, and there is no middle ground. There is not a category for those who are good people or mostly good people. A person is either dead or alive. I say this so emphatically because as believers we cannot be deceived and have to understand that these truths also apply to how we live in our new life in Christ.

For instance, in terms of living as a Christian, there is no category which captures our ability to be good or "do" good, for only God is good (**Mark 10:18**). Therefore, what comes from our lives is either from God and is by definition "good" or from our old nature of death and is by definition rotten, putrid, and evil. The idea that there is some middle ground of goodness is simply another demonic lie. I know it does not often feel as if it is satanic since the ramifications of the things we do from our old sinful nature are not always immediate or even always "bad" in the practical sense (especially the religious things we do). But we must remember the truth and live the truth: it does not matter what we feel or even experience in this "matrix;" it matters only what God says is true.

Paul says each of us once walked like dead men and abided in the lusts of our flesh (our old sinful nature), indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind. This is a very important point. Paul adds this little tag "and of the mind" because there is a distinction between our old sinful nature (which he calls "flesh" or in the Greek, "sarx") and our mind. In fact, this distinction is critical to Paul's whole theology of new life in Christ where there is a division between our new

creation in Christ, the old sinful nature, and our mind which is able to choose the master it wants to serve—God or “unwittingly” the devil. I say unwittingly since most of us do not consciously make a choice to become beholden to the devil; we just fall prey to his clever deceptions. Remember, there is no middle ground. It’s scary but true!

The flesh always desires us to abide in its nature, as sons of disobedience; and, in the past, since we were slaves to the prince of the power of the air, we had no choice but to bathe ourselves in all that was not of God—which he calls “the lusts of the flesh.” Please, don’t be thrown off by Paul’s use of the word “lust.” In our vernacular we tend to apply that word to very lurid (shocking) aspects of our life but that is not the case. Every aspect of our lives yearned for all that was not God. It’s how we lived and our minds were soiled by this existence and freely gave our bodies over to the desires of the flesh.

The mind and the flesh worked together and indulged themselves—bathed themselves—in all that is not God. Again, we are not just talking about the more base aspects of our human depravity (greed, sexual perversion, prejudice, abuse, murder, and so on), but about every thought, every motivation, every deed (no matter how kind and altruistic) that does not measure up to God’s standard of perfection; i.e., everything that does not derive from God Himself.

But unlike the “flesh” which is hopelessly depraved, the mind is something that can be cleansed; it can be washed or renewed. It is not something that is innately evil and corrupted with sin like the “flesh;” therefore, it plays a very important part in our learning to live in the power that has been bestowed upon us in Christ (**Romans 12:1-2**).

So our condition was critical—we were walking dead men—but God, being rich, lavish, or plush in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us from eternity past, even though we were dead, sentenced, condemned to wrath for all eternity, chose to make us alive together with Christ. He bestowed upon us the same power that raised Christ from the dead and in so doing He raised us from the dead and literally put His life into these bodies of ours. And now it is from Him, by Him, and through Him that we live.

Notice that this same power also **seated** us with Christ in the heavenly places. Now this might seem as if Paul is speaking in hyperbole since clearly we are here on earth and not physically in the heavenly places. But he is not. Again, we must remember that this physical reality is just like the matrix, an illusion, and does not represent the true reality which is captured in the spiritual world.

First of all, this power has seated us—it is in the past tense so it is not something that we are waiting for but it is, and has been, our reality. The fact that we are seated means that we are at rest. This is an allusion to Paul’s Jewish heritage and the way in which priests who were doing their service in the temple never sat down but were always up and always working, day after day, offering sacrifices that really could never take away sin or make them right with God. But they were always busy “doing” for God. In contrast, Jesus, our Great High Priest, offered Himself to God as one perfect sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then He sat down at the place of highest honor at God’s right hand for the work was completed (**Hebrews 8; 10:11-12**). As He emphatically stated right before He died: “*tetelestai*”—it is finished (**John 19:30**)!

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And we who have believed, we who have been “born-again,” have entered into His rest and like Him are seated. We have found rest and do not need to try to make ourselves right with God, try to make amends for our sin, or work to obtain any sort of approval from God (**Hebrews 4:3-11**). He is seated and we are seated. This has powerful implications for how we are to live in Christ. This is why practically our lives in Christ are not about “doing” anything for God (a.k.a. the “religion” of Christianity), but about believing what Christ has done and learning to simply live in this rest.

We have been presented as sons of God; therefore, there is nothing that God requires from us in terms of our salvation. Besides, we did not deserve it in the first place; we were dead men and condemned to wrath. Our salvation was a free gift which He chose to lavish upon us—for by grace we have been saved. And in the same manner in which we were saved we are to live—It is through faith that a righteous person has life (**Galatians 3:11**); it is not through our ability to do anything right or do anything for God.

Therefore, in terms of practical living, our “work” so to speak is the same as it was in the beginning—to believe! It is through belief that we can daily experience His full outpouring of grace on our lives. We need to continue to believe that our old sinful nature is dead and is therefore completely worthless and something that our mind is no longer to indulge. Rather, our mind is to indulge itself in the things of the Spirit and thereby be transformed to believe that we are sons of God seated in the heavenly places. We simply need to continue to believe that we can do nothing because Christ has already done everything; and His work was perfect and is all that we need.

### ***Galatians 3:3, 5***

“Have you lost your senses? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?...I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law of Moses? Of course not! It is because you believe the message you heard about in Christ.

We need to live as men and women who can just enjoy the love and acceptance of our precious Father. I know this may sound too good to be true; but it is the truth. If we can grasp this truth in our souls we will begin to know why it is safe to trust ourselves 100% to His lordship over our lives. We will know why it is safe to relinquish the “control” that we constantly try and exert over our lives.

Now, because this message is beautifully simple, the demonic forces work relentlessly to combat and confuse this truth. They continually bombard us with lies and tempt us to take life into our own hands and: strive to do things “right;” strive to appease God; strive to experience peace and love (if you can imagine); strive to be accepted; strive to not sin; strive to be obedient to God; strive to serve God; strive in ministry; and even strive to connect to God and experience His presence. They are all demonic lies. This leads us to our second point.

Our having been seated in the heavenly places also speaks to the fact that this power has given us position above the dark rulers, authorities and powers in the unseen world. Last week I said that Christ's victory is our victory. I know that sounded like some Christian cliché but it is the truth. Jesus sits in the seat of ultimate authority and Satan and all his demonic forces are in total submission to His rule. Likewise, since we are sons of God, joint heirs with Jesus Christ, and seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus ("in Christ Jesus" is the key to this passage), we also have power and authority over the powers of darkness. Now most of us are so experientially unaware of this power but it is ours none the less and we need to learn how to live in this power.

This power over the dark forces is not only the power to cast out demons and the like, but the power to live free from demonic manipulation and control over our lives. It is an absolute tragedy; but too many Christians have chosen the lies of the enemy as the foundation of their lives. It forms their identity, it is their abode in this world, and is the very basis for all their interactions with others and with God. You name it, you pick the lie: I am never going to be loved; no one accepts me for who I am; I am worthless; it must be my fault—I must deserve what I have received; I am too weak to do it right; I cannot trust anyone; I cannot trust God; I am a loser—always has been and always will be; I will always fail; I am not attractive or worthy to be adored; I am going to be abandoned, I just know it; I am afraid; God does not hear me; in fact, no one cares to hear me or really listen to me; God does not help me; He does not care about me; I will always be alone; no one understands me; I need to protect myself and guard myself from harm; I need to shelter myself from those who hurt me; I need to shut down and not feel for the feelings hurt too much; and so on. The list of lies is as long as we can imagine. But they are all lies and are not to be what we build our lives upon.

We are to build our lives upon the cornerstone which is Christ and the truth that He has done it all just so we can be lavished with His grace, mercy, and love because for some reason we are precious to Him. We are that pearl of great price that He searched the world over to find and He chose us to know His love and to live like sons of the Almighty. In fact, He gave up everything to purchase our lives from the enemy and seat us right next to Him.

This means we have the power to blow to shreds the control that these ridiculous lies have had in our lives. ***Ephesians 6:16*** says that our faith can extinguish every lie that the enemy sends our way. In fact, because we are seated with Christ we even have the power to cause not just his demonic hordes, but Satan himself to flee from us (***James 4:7***). If you resist the devil in truth He will flee; He has to since Jesus already defeated Him for you.

Because these dark and wicked spirits are submitted to Christ they are also submitted to you in the sense that they cannot get their hands on you, they cannot control you, and they cannot continually bombard you with these lies unless you allow them. When we choose to abide in the power that the Father has bestowed upon us in the Beloved by holding on to the truth of who we are in Christ, the enemy cannot touch us and we are safe (***1 John 5:18***). Then, and only then, will we experience the peace of mind that all of us so desperately desire.

However, when we choose to clothe ourselves in the devil's lies, he throws everything at us in order to make us feel as if we are the ones who are defeated and the ones who will never



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win. In fact, being the prince of the power of the air who is in control of all those who do not live in the Spirit, he manipulates things and people (even Christians who have not learned to live from their new creation) so that the circumstances of our lives and every encounter just seems to reinforce the lies in which we live. And we are left feeling trapped, feeling like we are crazy, feeling like God does not work, and feeling like it is hopeless. So we read our Bible more and pray more and strive and strive to get control and still it does not help. I am here to tell you it won't help until you choose to take off those lies believing they are filthy rotten clothes of a dead man and leave them on the ground and instead clothe yourself in the grace and mercy of Christ and the truth that you are accepted in the Beloved and you are a son of God seated in the heavenly realms with Christ.

Now, let's go back to this notion that we were saved by grace through faith. The faith part was our "work" so to speak (**John 6:29**). We had to choose to bet our lives on the truth that Jesus is God, that He was the perfect sacrifice for our sins, and that He died in order that we might live. We had to choose to accept Him as our Lord and Savior. No one forced us to believe. We had to choose with our mind and our will to believe. We had to choose to repent from our sins and in effect "exercise" our faith. And when we did, we experienced our "coming out," so to speak, as a child of God. But I want you to note how **everything** about our new life was a gift from God's hand—for by grace you have been saved.

**Romans 12:3** tells us that even our ability to have faith and express faith came from God—as He has given each man a measure of faith—therefore, we are not to think more highly of ourselves than we deserve. It was all Him. Again, every part of our life, even our ability to believe, was from Him. That is why when asked who can be saved, Jesus said: "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God" (**Mark 10:27**). He gave us faith and then merely asked us to choose to make Him the only object of our faith.

With the truth that it was all God—it was His grace from beginning to end—I want to talk about 2 major blasphemies or lies which the enemy has worked relentlessly for us (Christians) to believe.

First, it is an abomination to think that a person has to do something religious in nature, like clean up their lives and stop their sin, before they come to Jesus (they don't!)—the invitation to come is for all. Besides, as Jesus said in **Mark 2:17**: "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." So all a person needs to do is choose to come to Jesus; and, as we know, if they have been chosen from before the foundations of the earth, they will come.

Second, it is entirely and wholly blasphemous to try and add anything to the completed work of Christ. And when we strive to be something for God or do something for God we are saying that His work was not sufficient. This is what the entire book of Galatians addresses. God chose us from before time to be His own. He then predestined the affairs of our life to ensure that we would choose Him. He purchased our freedom and forgave our sins. He adopted us into His family and calls us His sons. He perfected us—made us holy and blameless. He made us new and He gave us His life. He even seated us in heavenly places above the rule and power of the

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enemy. He has done all this work and it is perfect and glorious. This is why we are to stop striving and instead trust ourselves to Him—He has earned it.

This is why I often speak so vehemently against the “religion” of Christianity—that part of our spiritual heritage that tries to move the responsibility for our *living* as sons of God from His hands into our own hands. Remember, our only “work” is to live by faith—to believe what God says about Himself and about us—for that is the only thing that pleases God anyways (**Hebrews 11:6**).

Besides, you have to trust the fact that if we live according to our new life in the Spirit the entire dynamic of our lives is different. In fact, we will not indulge ourselves in the desires of the flesh (**Galatians 5:16**)—even the desire to clothe ourselves in the lies which the enemy has been telling us since we were just children. It simply won’t happen; the Spirit of God will be in control of our lives and He does not indulge Himself in sin.

Now we have to ask ourselves, why did God do all of this for us? He says that He did it so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. This is represented in that beautiful picture we see between the man and his woman in **Song of Songs 2:4**. She says, “He brings me to the banquet hall, so everyone can see how much he loves me.” And in **6:9-10**: “The young women [of Jerusalem] are delighted when they see her; even queens and concubines sing her praises! Who is this, they ask, arising like the dawn, as fair as the moon, as bright as the sun, as majestic as an army with banners?”

The bride of Christ is glorious and He will proudly bring us into His hall so that all who are invited to attend the marriage supper of the Lamb can bask in our beauty. All the citizens of heaven will sing our praises and will be delighted and amazed at how much He loves us. In the same way that we marvel at a beautiful sun rise or a bright and shining full moon, they will just stare and stare and stare at us and in pure delight they will sing our praises!

The young women of Jerusalem cannot even take their eyes off of Solomon’s bride and they yearn to be in her presence. They say: “Return, return to us, O maid of Shulam. Come back, come back, that we may see you once again.” And her lover tells them: “Why do you gaze so intently at this young woman of Shulam, as she moves so gracefully between two companies (or two armies) (**Song of Songs 6:13**).

In other words, the bride of Christ (which is you and me) is on display before the hosts of heaven and the demonic hoards (the two armies), and everyone is captivated and enthralled by our beauty. He parades us in front of His angels who just yearn to be in our presence and He parades us in front of His enemies so they can be thoroughly humiliated in their defeat. Yes, even the demonic hordes will be fixated on our beauty and the depth of His love for us. Keep in mind, they were part of God’s original creation and yet He did not die to redeem them from their sin. They will be forever wondering, “Why them? Why them and not us?” You may not know this, but God’s love for us is something which the angelic beings do not have the capacity to understand but they yearn to know (**1 Peter 1:12**).

Yes, there will come a day when every created being will know and declare the praises of God’s magnificent love toward His bride. And the story gets even better. You see we are not just this lovely woman (although that is an amazing and thoroughly captivating metaphor), but

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our entire lives are His work of art—a story that He has personally written with His own hand; a story which continues throughout the ages. When Paul says we are His workmanship (that our *new creation* is a product of His particular design—**2 Corinthians 5:17**), Paul uses the Greek word “*poieema*” from which we get our word “poem.”

Think about it this way, the product of God’s marvelous workmanship is our *new creation*. He made it holy so that Jesus, through the Spirit, could dwell within our bodies. And with Christ in us He has written a marvelous poem about our lives with His Son; and we get to live out this beautiful tale of redemption and love which boasts of His glory. This is a story that He will read before all of creation. They will come and marvel at the way God intertwined us into this beautiful temple in which He lives and accomplishes His good works. It’s will be just like in the ***Song of Songs*** where the lover just goes on and on about the beauty of his woman and he lets everyone know how, to him, she is perfect in form; there is not one part of her body that he left out in describing her exquisite and phenomenal beauty. She was magnificent from head to toe; a sight for all to see (***Song of Songs 4, 7***).

We are His beautiful piece of art. Honestly, in so many ways, this is still so unfathomable to my mind; but I know that we have to start believing how marvelous we are in His eyes. We simply must let these truths form our identity and self-image and we must replace the lies of the enemy with these truths.

Now were created in Christ Jesus for “good works,” which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. Once again we come across both this idea that since only God is good these have to be His works, and the notion that God pre-ordained these “good works” for us. In this regard, I think it is intriguing the way that God’s plan was not just to take us up to heaven and be holy and blameless before Him up there with the angels; but instead to live holy and blameless as heavenly men and women here on earth. His design is that we let Jesus live through our *new creation* such that all that is accomplished through us is really just Jesus completing these supernatural pre-ordained works through our bodies. We just get to walk in them. Sounds pretty effortless; which is why He says His yoke is easy and His burden is light (***Matthew 11:30***).

That is why I have said over and over again that walking in the Spirit of God, by faith, means that we will only do what the Father tells us to do, only go where the Father tells us to go, and only say what He tells us to say—for if the Spirit is in control of our lives, Jesus is the one who will accomplish the Father’s good works through us. Yes, this power that gives us life from the dead and victory over the darkness is to be daily experienced in these marvelous works.

Imagine this. The tale of our lives gets displayed before all of creation and they get to hear about how we, who were once dead, walked by faith, overcame the enemy, overcame our flesh, and actually became vessels of His love. All of creation will listen to this story and marvel at the miraculous lives we have lived.

Then they will watch us step up, receive our rewards, and then suddenly take those rewards and place them at the feet of Jesus as we bow before Him and acknowledge that it was really all His doing (***Revelation 4:9-11***). From beginning to end it is Him; all the praise and glory belongs

to Jesus Christ. It will be a beautiful tale that the Father tells about you and me and everyone in the heavenly places will shout: "Amen!"

Let's Pray

In chapter 1, Paul lets us know who we are, who we belong to, and informs us of all the rights and power that comes with being a son of God. The Spirit through Paul (and Solomon in the Song of Songs) has equipped us with amazing weapons of truth with which we are to fight both the liar and the lies that have been spoken over our lives since we were just children.

I encourage you to keep these truths close in your heart and your mind. When you are feeling overwhelmed, attacked, or even powerless, turn to these passages and bathe in them as they will refresh in your mind and remind you that you do not belong to this world and you no longer belong to Satan, but you belong to God. You are His son and you have been seated with Christ in the heavenly places; with all the rights and privileges which He has bestowed upon His beloved. Besides, if you learn to actively live in these truths you will be protected from the enemy and all his attempts to destroy you will be futile.

In our passage tonight, Paul takes us on a historical and cultural journey to convince us of yet another truth about who we are in God—a truth that is to radically impact how we live and specifically how we are to be in relationship with each other. Paul tells us that we are members of God’s family along with all His holy people; we are His house which is built on the cornerstone of Christ; and we are carefully joined together becoming a holy temple for the Lord where God lives by His Spirit. In this truth we can understand how the Father is fulfilling Jesus’ prayer in *John 17:20* where He says: “I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me because of their testimony. My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one.”

But like with all of us, before any truth can really sink deep within our souls such that it permanently impacts how we live, we need to have our pride, our bias, our prejudice, and our wrong beliefs about who we are peeled back from our souls. And this is what the Spirit attempts to accomplish with these Gentile believers, both in the passage we are going to study tonight and all throughout Chapter 3.

### *Ephesians 2:11-22*

Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

This passage is so full; the Spirit imbeds a little bit of Jewish history, sarcasm, and Biblical numerology to help communicate His message. In addition, the Spirit seems to intentionally provokes both Gentiles and Jews, almost as if He wants to elicit an emotional response and bring to mind their embittered history which was based on years and years of prejudice, hate, and segregation.

As I thought about this I was really perplexed. Why would the Holy Spirit want to bring up these sensitive issues? Then I remembered that in order for these believers to truly experience God, they would have to learn to worship Him in Spirit and truth (*John 4:23-24*) and come face to face with everything in their soul that was not from Him—all that does not reflect His character and nature.

You see the historical backdrop of hostility and separation between Jews and Gentiles had quite naturally infiltrated the church and was negatively impacting the relationships between brothers and sisters in the Lord. The church found its beginnings in Jerusalem and was initially comprised entirely of Jews. But in Acts 10 we find that God sent Peter to preach the gospel to Gentiles under this charge: “if God says something is acceptable, don’t say it isn’t” (*Acts 10:15*). This was very difficult for Peter, a good Jew, to accept and when he went to the home of Cornelius he could not help but remind this Gentile of his proper place: “You know it is against the Jewish laws for me to come into a Gentile home like this. But God has shown me that I should never think of anyone as impure” (*Acts 10:28*).

Excuse me! How condescending and downright insulting! It was simply not enough for Peter to just go and, in love, do what God had commanded him; rather, he had to make a point and bring up the separation, division, and prejudice. It was almost as if he was saying, “look, I am doing you a big favor here because I have to not because I want to.”

But in obedience, Peter told them about life in Jesus and even while he was speaking the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the message (*Acts 10:44*). This was the beginning of the gospel spreading amongst the Gentile nations. And as would be expected, when Peter returned to Jerusalem he faced some intense hostility by the Jewish believers in his little community who were not cool with his having gone to a bunch of Gentiles. In their mind, Christianity was Jewish and belonged to the “chosen” ones and not to those who were considered to be inherently unclean and unacceptable.

This story of Peter and Cornelius gives us a glimpse into the deep seeded hostility and division between the two groups. We also have to understand that by the time Paul is writing this letter the “spiritual” tables have turned. The great growth in the church had primarily come from amongst Gentiles and not the Jews. Thus, the Gentiles had begun to grow their own identity separate from the Jews which just added to the cultural division that had existed for centuries.

But again, the Spirit’s goal is to bring unification between the two groups—a real healing—but he first has to start by tearing open the wound so he can apply the medicine of the truth. First of all, he reminds them that in their flesh they were just Gentiles. This is kind of a two sided comment. On the one hand he is reminding them that they are not the “chosen ones,” while on the other hand he is hinting that in their Spirit they are altogether something new. Then he takes a crack at the Jews by saying that those who have historically looked down on the Gentiles, the so-called “Circumcision,” are really not “all that” since their circumcision was not of the heart

and it was not performed by God but it was merely men keeping with religious traditions without any understanding that the physical act was to represent a spiritual reality—the cutting away of the old sinful nature from our souls.

Then the Spirit employs a fascinating Biblical literary technique where he incorporates a form of Biblical numerology to make his point. As we have studied before, God is big on numbers throughout the Bible; numbers which because of the pattern in which they are used come to signify very specific concepts. A few examples of some of the most commonly used numbers are: 1 which refers to unity (the Lord(s) our God is one); 2 which refers to division; 3 is understood as the number of divine perfection; 6 is the number of man; 7 is the number of completion; 8 is the number of new beginnings or new life; and 40 is the number of trial or testing.

But in this passage the Spirit uses the number **5** which has a dualistic meaning that is kind of like the flip sides of a coin. On the one hand the number **5** means God's grace (the grace that is extended and bestowed upon us) and on the other hand it represents our absolute need for the grace which God has freely given. The number **5**, therefore, encapsulates God's strength and provision as well as our weakness and utter destitution.

In this passage, the Spirit actually gives us **3** of **8** lists of **5**'s which are found beginning in *Ephesians 1:3*. It took me a while to see what He had done, but the more I stared at the passage the more He showed me the marvelous and intriguing design which He gave to Paul. In *Ephesians 1:3-2:10*, he gave us **5** lists of **5**'s (all of which we will review). He started with **3** lists of **5**'s which first speak to the perfectly divine magnitude, or opulent abundance, in which God grace has provided for our need. Then he added **1** list of **5**'s which addresses our uniform and desperate need for the grace which God has provided. He then caps that section with another **1** list of **5**'s which speaks to how the grace has been imparted to us and has unified our experience into Christ's experience.

Then in our passage tonight in *Ephesians 2:12-22*, he gives us **3** more lists of **5**'s. **1** list of **5**'s which speaks to why all the Gentiles were, uniformly, in place of total destitution and he follows it with **2** more lists of **5**'s which are intended to draw a complete division between our true life, which is hidden in Christ in God, and our former lives as Gentiles who did not know God.

Let's first review the list in *Ephesians 2:1-3*, which indicates why everyone, both Jew and Gentile, are desperately in need of the grace which only God provides.

1. We were dead in our trespasses and sins,
2. We walked according to the course of this world,
3. We walked according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience,
4. We formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and
5. We were by nature children of wrath.

The second list, found in *Ephesians 2:12*, focuses on why we—the Gentiles—were especially

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bad off since we did not even really know about God.

1. We were separate, or living apart, from Christ,
2. We were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel (or God's "chosen people"),
3. We were strangers to the covenants of promise,
4. We had no hope, and
5. We lived without God in the world.

This is a pretty intense list; yet, it captures the primary (but not exclusive) dispensation of how God chose to work in times past. He made Himself known to the Jews, they were His chosen people, He gave to them a whole slew of covenants and promises by which they could know Him and experience Him, they had hope of eternal life, and they lived in this world with the Spirit of God literally dwelling within their midst.

In contrast, the Gentile nations received only the scraps that fell from the table of the Jews. Even when a Gentile chose to believe that the God of the Jews is God and were converted (circumcised even), they were still kept separate from participating in the formal worship. Literally, there was a wall in the Temple which kept even these believing Gentiles separated from the Jews.

And while this contrast and division comes across to us as unfair to the Gentiles, the Holy Spirit brought His medicine of grace in order to bring healing to this great wound with which we and others have always struggled to understand. And boy did He ever bring an abundant supply of His grace. Let's review the first **3** lists of **5**'s which indicate that there has been a perfect and divine outpouring of God's grace toward us who believe. Let's review: ***Ephesians 1:3-6***

1. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,
2. He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,
3. In order that we would be holy and blameless before Him,
4. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, and
5. All of it was according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

This first list speaks of the plan which God put into place and then caused to come to fruition on our behalf. The second list, in ***Ephesians 1:7-14***, speaks of the way this plan to pour His grace out on our lives has specifically been manifested toward us believers.

1. In Him we have redemption through His blood,
2. We have the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which



- He lavished on us,
3. In Him we also we have obtained an inheritance,
  4. We were predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, and
  5. We were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

This third list, found in *Ephesians 1:19-23*, expresses how the Father has backed up everything He promises and confirmed that His grace is perfect and is enough for our lives because it is all been lavished upon us in accordance with the working of the strength of **His** might which He brought about in Christ:

1. When He raised Him from the dead,
2. When He seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,
3. When He seated Him far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come,
4. When He subjected all things under Jesus' feet, and
5. When He gave Jesus as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

So the Father ensured that **His** power was manifested to Jesus in order that through Jesus the Father might similarly manifest the same power toward us. According to *Ephesians 2:5-10*, we can have complete confidence in the reality of what this grace has done for us because:

1. He made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),
2. He raised us up with Him,
3. He seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus,
4. For by grace we have been saved through faith; and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, and
5. We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

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And in the final 2 lists of 5's, in *Ephesians 2:13-18*, we see that the division which was caused by our being Gentiles no longer exists in Christ for we have been brought together in new life. The first list captures what God did through Christ.

1. We have been brought near by the blood of Christ,
2. He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,
3. He abolished in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,
4. He reconciled them both [*Jews and Gentiles*] in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR, and
5. Through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

This second list, found in *Ephesians 2:19-22*, captures the effectiveness of what the Father did through Christ in our lives—how His grace is manifested toward us:

1. We are no longer strangers and aliens,
2. We are fellow citizens with the saints,
3. We are of God's household,
4. We have been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, and
5. We are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

We are going to back track and talk deeper about *verses 13-22*, but I wanted to show you the way that the Holy Spirit architected every aspect of the Word of God with such beauty and magnificence such that the very structure of the words, even the way He has gathered them together, speaks to the power and potency of the message. 8 lists of 5's—all of which speak to why we (whether Jew or Gentile) have through grace found new life and an entirely new beginning in Christ. A new life free from everything that haunted us in the past: 1) free from our selves, 2) free from our old nature, 3) free from the enemy and all his vicious attempts to lie to us, 4) free from the hate, prejudice and division that marked our lives, and 5) free to live both individually and corporately as a new man who always remains in perfect peace with the Father. It's so beautiful! The whole thing is simply beautiful!

*Ephesians 2:13-16*

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

Just so you know, “have been brought near” is in the past tense (it’s been done); yet, “He is our peace” is in the present active tense. Therefore, because of the fact that we belong to God—we have been brought into His presence by the blood of Jesus—we can every moment of every day enjoy a personal and intimate relationship with Jesus Himself and thereby experience the all “illusiv<sup>e</sup>” peace for which all of humanity searches.

As we studied in the gospel of John, peace is not some end of itself; which is why all the pursuits of men to find peace, to create peace, never result in “peace on earth” or even an ongoing form of individual peace. The peace which man seeks is completely illusive and once you think you have found the way to enjoy it, whether through religion, meditation, or by achieving some level of health, wealth, prosperity, and independence, circumstances suddenly change and the pursuit starts all over again, and again, and again.

True lasting peace is a fruit of knowing Jesus and daily, presently, actively, trusting Him. He is peace! When we choose to let go of the control over our lives and believe that He is God and we are not, and when we are fully convinced that He loves us and we are accepted in Him, we will experience sustained peace because we will rest in the **fact** that every aspect (yes, every detail) of our lives is controlled by Him, authored by Him, and is part of His plan for us to experience Him deeper. We will rest knowing that even when we blow it, He will cause all things to work together in order for us to become further convinced of our need to trust ourselves to Him. That is why all He ever asks of us is to believe what He has said about Himself and what He has said about who we are in Him. Believing is the only pathway to the One who is our peace!

His peace also allows us to live with others in peace; specifically, in this passage, with our Jewish brethren. Now for us here in America this is a bit of a theoretical notion since there does not seem to be such ardent hostility toward Jewish believers, just because they are Jews. But there are parts of this world where racial hostility toward the Jews is a real issue, even amongst believers. It is totally a demonic thing.

But Christ, in His body, through His death on the cross, destroyed any reason for separation because both Jew and Gentile have been made into “one” new man that lives through Jesus. Individually we have been made into these amazing new creations, hand crafted by the Father in His image, imbued with His nature, and collectively we have been made into **one** body to be presented to Jesus who is our head. We have been made into **one** and all parts of this body are essential for the whole to be healthy and functioning in the way God desires.

Because we have been made **one** in Christ, all the commandments (the dividing wall) which were aimed at keeping the Jews a separate and distinct group of people among the nations have been abolished or made null and void because this new man has been set apart and made distinct

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not by rules and rituals but by God choosing us before the foundations of the world to belong to Him.

Besides, both Jew and Gentile believers are reconciled together in this common truth: the grace of God has been lavished upon those who were dead men, sentenced and condemned to spend an eternity separated from God. This is our common truth which we share with all believers; and faith—presently actively believing and betting our lives on the truth—is how we come together and mutually experience and live in His peace.

***Ephesians 2:17-18***

AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

The phrase “and He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near” comes from a beautiful passage in Isaiah 57.

***Isaiah 57:15-19***

For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite." For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry; for the spirit would grow faint before Me, and the breath of those whom I have made. "Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry and struck him; I hid My face and was angry, and he went on turning away, in the way of his heart." I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and to his mourners, creating the praise of the lips. Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near," says the Lord, "and I will heal him."

Jesus to him who is far (the Gentiles) and Jesus to him who is near (the Jews); for in Him every wound of division and hostility is healed. Praise Jesus! What is impossible with man is always possible with God!

Then to think that Jesus gave us all access in one Spirit to the Father. When you consider the historical context of this statement, it is radically crazy. Imagine, the Gentiles could never actively participate in the ritual worship of God. As I said, even Gentile's who converted to Judaism had to stay behind the wall. But now, as Gentiles, we get to walk right past that wall and into the court of the Jews. We can go through the doors that will lead us into the Holy Place. And even then we will see that the curtain which blocked the way into the Holy of Holies has been torn, ripped from the top to the bottom. Therefore, we get to boldly walk right into the presence of God where His glory is manifested as His Spirit rests over the mercy seat above the ark of God. We get to experience Him and enjoy the blessing of being in His presence any time we want. This is what makes prayer such a privilege. And since God is our Dad, we can lay it all out to Him, no holds barred. It is truly amazing and a privilege unlike any other

***Ephesians 2:19-22***

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

As a result of what Jesus did for us on the cross, we belong! We have a home! We have a family! We are all united in Him! There is no more division! And what's best is that our family is eternal. We will be with each other for all time. We will be with the ones we love and all those that we have only read about and are dying to meet. We will be able to enjoy relationships with Paul, Abraham, Sarah, David, Peter, Stephen, Elijah, Elisha, Deborah, Daniel, and all the saints throughout time. Story time will be amazing.

I want us to think for a moment about this word picture of a Temple. God uses this metaphor quite often to describe those who belong to Him. Consider that the Temple was the center of the cultural, spiritual, and even economic life in the community of Israel. It was the place to be—the heartbeat of the Jewish society. The Temple was a structure that God, the creator of the universe, chose to inhabit. Now the Temple could never contain God, but He chose to let His presence be visible and made known in that place.

Likewise, we are center of God's economy. We are the structures, individually and corporately, in which He has chosen to dwell and make His presence visible and known. Every believer who walks in the Spirit of God is a marvel for a lost and dying world that desperately needs that grace that Jesus desires to bestow upon all who will come to Him. As we trust ourselves to Jesus, His glory shines in us so that others will either desire to be warmed by His light or will choose to affix their decision to live in darkness.

The Apostles and prophets laid the path before us and have set the example for us to follow. They have shown us that it is entirely possible to trust ourselves to Jesus and be at rest with Him in this world. Jesus is our immovable rock, the foundation upon which our lives rest, the foundation upon which every promise has been made to us. Everything rests upon Him.

But this metaphor of a Temple also speaks to the manner in which we need each other and why it is so important for us to stay connected in the Spirit. It starts with each of us in this little fellowship. We need each other. Each one of us has been chosen by God to be here to fulfill a very specific purpose in each other's lives. Each of us has been chosen to express a unique aspect of God's character that the others all need. This is why, in the Spirit, we must stay connected in fellowship with the common goal of experiencing the One who is our peace. He has to at the center of all our relationships and everything we do.

Over time, our connectedness will eventually extend to others who have built their lives on the foundation of Christ and not the foundation of demonic lies. We have already seen that happen with our friends and family in North Carolina, New Mexico, Washington, and elsewhere. Though we are not physically present with each other, we are close and our lives are supernaturally intertwined. It is a beautiful thing! And one day, the Father will sum all things up

in Christ and all the pieces will fit perfectly; we will be one big, gigundus, happy family—a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Again, it is all simply beautiful beyond description. Through the grace of God we have been afforded a new life in Christ, a new family in Christ, and a new beginning; free to know and experience the grace of God as it is poured out new every day (every moment of every day). Again, Praise Jesus that we belong to Him!

Let's Pray

***Ephesians 3:1-6***

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

As we discussed in Chapter 1, this letter was likely not written specifically to the Ephesians who would have known Paul personally since he founded the church, but it was a letter that was intended to be circulated amongst the Gentile churches in Asia Minor. Thus, there are some believers who may not have actually met Paul but knew that he was called specifically to pass on to the Gentiles the substance of the revelation that he had received. God had entrusted Paul with an amazing truth that for centuries had been hidden from the eyes of others; but with this revelation came great responsibility. Paul was given a stewardship that compelled him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles regardless of the consequences, which at this point in his life meant being imprisoned in Rome.

This speaks powerfully to the way Paul had separated himself from the things of this world and had identified himself in who he was in God and in the purposes for which God had chosen him. And although Paul writes this letter while literally chained to a guard, what was going on in the physical world was of little consequence and did not control either his attitude or his actions. Rather, he was focused on the spiritual and completing the work that God had set before him. The things of this world had lost their power and control over his life.

Do you identify yourself based on who you are in God? Do you filter everything in this life through the unique way that God wants to express Himself through you to others? Are you still controlled by what you consider to be the “good” things and the “bad” things that happen in your life?

I believe that at this stage of his life Paul had come to a place of rest. He knew that he was in Rome and was a prisoner because that was His Father's will; and he was ok with it. Instead of moaning about his circumstances he seems to express a sense of privilege. It's as if he knows that his imprisonment was just another tool by which God was going to express his supernatural power through him to others. It was just another tool that would convince the Gentiles that it is possible to live detached from this world. They may lock him up for life or even kill him, but it does not matter for his real life belongs to God.

Let's look at verse **13**: “Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.” Paul does not want these believers to become distressed by focusing on the horror of his circumstances. Rather, he wants them to see that like him, regardless of their circumstances, they can live in the Spirit of God with all the power and might that has been bestowed upon them in Christ. He wants them to be convinced that they too can be at rest regardless of where God has them or what God is doing with them. He wants the **8** lists of **5**'s found in **1:3-2:22** to become their living reality. Therefore, he can honestly say that his suffering is for their glory.

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Bringing it close to home, this is not unlike the way that God has, for your benefit, required a lot from me in terms of suffering and living separated from this world. The things He has asked of me and the way He has instructed me to live are simply not normal; they are difficult. In addition, I have suffered a fair share of persecution, slander, and intentionally malicious defamation for the message that God has given me to teach. In the past I seriously struggled with the “why” and I was not very happy with what God was doing with me. But over time He helped me see that my suffering was more than necessary in order that you and others might see and become convinced that it is possible to live in the Spirit separated from the world, and to know His peace in the midst of ridiculous circumstances.

He wanted you to know that He will provide strength when you are weak, comfort when you are in despair, companionship in the midst of isolation, light in the midst of darkness, provision in emptiness, and even joy when there is absolutely no practical reason to take delight in anything. He wanted you to become convinced that the power which He has given you in Christ is really accessible. He wanted you to see these truths at work in someone you know, someone you could talk to, and someone with which you can daily interact. He wanted His words of life to be demonstrated so you know that His truth is far more than just words on a page but His truth is alive with power.

Now trust me I am not saying that I have always done it “right” and been this great example, because God knows I have not. But even in that you have had an opportunity to learn that it is not about doing it “right” for God already made complete provision for your failures. Therefore, regardless of whether or not you do it “right,” you are accepted. Even your failure is just another opportunity to learn why you must trust yourself to Jesus.

So in all of this I have come to learn that my suffering has been necessary and has been for your glory so you can actually start to believe and bet your life on the truths that we studied in the 8 lists of 5’s and thereby actually experience God by choosing to walk by faith in the Spirit of God.

Paul also makes it clear that he did not make up the concept that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel; rather, he came to understand this truth by revelation which was given by the Spirit. Also, take note of the fact that he did not say that God gave him knowledge of something new, but God gave light to his eyes to see what was already written but which had not been understood.

When you consider this, it kind of makes sense why Paul prayed in *Ephesians 1:17-18*, “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened,” since that is exactly what happened to him. Paul believed that he received this revelation not because of anything he did but merely because God chose to open his eyes and reveal it to him (as well as to the apostles and prophets); and he clearly believed that it was possible for any believer to likewise receive such insight and wisdom into the Word of God, which is why he prayed in this manner.

In other words, Paul did not believe that he was some “exalted one” that had a special “in” with God; rather, he believed that what happened with him is normative and could happen to any believer. He believed that receiving insight into the Word of God is just one of the amazing treasures which come with being a son of God.



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Now this mystery of the Gentiles and the Jews becoming one in faith was revealed in the Old Testament but no one seemed to grasp even the idea because it was so far outside of their worldview that it never even dawned on them as they read and interpreted the scriptures.

Imagine, centuries had gone by where the Jews were identified uniquely as God's chosen people amongst all the nations of the earth and this reality was so embedded in their cultural dna that they had no capacity to see things in any other way. After all, it was the Jews to which God revealed His glory. He made covenants with them and gave His law to them. They had the privilege of worshiping Him and receiving His wonderful promises. Their ancestors were great people of God, and Christ himself was a Jew as far as His human nature was concerned (*Romans 9:4-5*). So you can imagine that their identity as a unique people belonging to God was cemented into their personal, cultural, and national dna. Everything they knew reinforced the notion that they belonged to God and the Gentiles simply had no part!

It is really not unlike this whole concept of living from your *New Creation* as you walk by faith in the Spirit of God. Once God opens your eyes to this truth, you see that it is clearly written and disclosed all over the Bible, but for the most part it has been a mystery that has been hidden right in plain view. Throughout the ages there have been those who have understood this truth but it has largely stayed "hidden" because of our own jaded worldview.

You see it is entirely foreign to us to give up total control of our lives to some invisible God especially considering the things He asks of us. Can you imagine that He actually tells us to seek first the kingdom of God and not worry about all the other details of our life (our food, our clothing, and our provision)? It kind of makes our bodies cringe to think about living this way. He even tells us that the only way to please Him is to believe Him, to bet our lives on the truth and give Him access to every part of our soul. That's it. He promises to do the rest.

Even for us who have been taught these truths it is still so hard to understand that Jesus wants to live in and through us and be for us all that the Father requires. Yet, this is what true Christianity is about. The Father has given believers a *New Creation* which has been fashioned after His image (we are His workmanship), and Jesus, in the Spirit, dwells in us and if given access to our soul He will fulfill the Father's will in and through our lives. Sadly, this truth has been misunderstood and most believers are still busy either trying to please God by what they can do or avoiding God because they don't think they can be what He wants and they are sick of failing all the time.

Further, believers' still seem to be convinced that this physical world is their primary reality and we have an extremely hard time disconnecting—believing that our true life is hidden with Christ in God. Thus, we are obsessed with the things of this world and the affairs of our life. We get so wrapped up trying to control the outcomes of our life and it is all futile. We belong to God and, as heavenly men and women, He controls and manage the outcomes of our life. Besides, no matter how hard we squeeze, manipulate, and work to make things in our life go the way we want, He is the one who gets the ultimate say. But again, we live in a strong delusion and our worldview is centered upon our attempts to be like god.

For instance, we believe that it is up to us to do it "right." We have such a distorted notion of obedience and honoring God. Few of us live as if we are 100% dependent upon God for all things—even in our ability to love and obey Him. We don't rest in the fact that *only* God is good therefore only what He does in and through our lives is what matters to Him.

The point is that our worldview of Christianity has completely impacted our ability to behold the truth and live in the truth; therefore, generations have gone by living in the “religion” of Christianity trying to be “good” Christians without every truly knowing its power or living in its Peace. But for some reason God decided to give me revelation, to open my eyes, so that I could see this truth which again is nothing new but is found all over the Bible from beginning to end. Believe me, I take no credit for understanding this stuff; I was as much a part of the “religion” of Christianity as anyone. But it was the Spirit of God who brought to me a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of my heart enlightened.

This is the dynamic which Paul was addressing. Generation after generation had gone by with very few ever understanding that the Jews were to be the light to the Gentiles and that God’s desire was not that the Gentiles were excluded from His plan but that the Jews would be the lamp through which His light and glory would be revealed to the nations. This truth was in the Word, but they were blind to it. They did not understand God’s methodology. They confused God having set them apart to be light with the notion that they were to keep the light exclusively to themselves. But it was never God’s plan that His family would be comprised of just the Jews; it has always been His plan, from before time, to pour forth His grace on the Gentiles as well the Jews.

### *Ephesians 3:7-13*

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

In *1:1* we were told that Paul was chosen by God to be an apostle and here he tells us that he was also made by God into a minister, which just means one who would serve others. Do you realize how much comfort this little statement should bring us? The word “made” is in the passive tense which means that we don’t have to try and “be” anything for God, “do” anything for God, or “become” anything for God. He will do with us as He desires if we trust ourselves to Him. He will exert His power and His might and make us into what He desires according to His good purposes.

Further, it does not matter who we are in terms of worldly stature or what natural gifts and talents we possess. Even Paul, who considered himself to be the least of all the saints, was given this marvelous gift just because it brought great pleasure to God. This is a beautiful expression of the greatness of His power toward us. And best yet, He does it all; we just are recipients of His marvelous grace. This is another reason why His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

As we studied in *John 15*, our job is to abide in Christ, trust ourselves to Him in the deepest

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recesses of our souls, let go of our control and let Him be God (literally clinging to Him for everything), and His job will be everything else. He will make you into a minister to uniquely express His Agape love to others.

Why do you think Paul said he was the least of all the saints? In the Greek Paul combined words to capture this idea that he was literally “less than the least.” Perhaps he struggled with forgiving himself for having hunted down and killed believers and therefore considered himself unworthy to receive anything from God. And while that might be what he is hinting at here, it is likely that he is using a superlative to overemphasize that the privilege that he had been given to preach the unfathomable riches of Christ to the Gentiles had nothing—absolutely nothing—to do with him, but it was all the working of God’s grace in His life.

In this statement, Paul provides for us an example of the humility that is to mark our lives. Oh, without a doubt, we have been privileged in Christ! From before time, He chose us to be His children. He predestined the affairs of our lives to ensure that we would have our day of presentation before all of creation—our coming out as sons of God. He even selected us from the millions upon millions and again predestined the affairs of our life to ensure that we would know the truth about our need to live from our *New Creation* and walk by faith in the Spirit of God. However, He did these things not because we deserved it any more than the next guy. It had nothing to do with our being somehow more worthy of this great privilege; it was just because that is what He wanted for our lives because He loves us and it brought Him great pleasure to open our eyes to see.

This truth should cause us to daily bow our hearts before God and live with an attitude of thanksgiving and a spirit of humility. For like Paul, we get to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ and bring to light for everyone what is the plan or the mystery hidden for so many ages, and that is that only God is good; thus, the only thing that matters is what He does in and through our lives as we trust ourselves to Him. What a privilege we have been given.

Think about that phrase, “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” As we discussed in Chapter 1, we have only begun to scratch the surface of not just understanding but experiencing the power of God in our lives. His love for us is so vast and limitless in its expression that we will never exhaust the ways in which He desires to blow our minds and express Himself in our lives.

**Verse 11** is a bit odd. It is a strange concept to think that our lives are on display and made a spectacle to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (this includes both the good angels and the fallen angels). Paul preaching the good news to the Gentiles accomplished the revealing of God’s mysterious plan to all of humanity. But interestingly, his preaching also crossed the boundaries so to speak between the physical and spiritual world and penetrated deep within the heavenly realms so that the heavenly hosts might also come to know the wisdom of God in all its rich variety through you and me and all those who comprise His church.

Remember, the way God works with humanity is largely a mystery to the angelic hosts. **1 Peter 1:12** says that they long to look into and understand these mysteries; but instead of getting direct revelation from God like we do, they have to wait and see how His plan is played out in our lives. They get to see the way in which Jew and Gentile live as one in the body of Christ and actually love each other, which based on the history of these two groups, and the hostility that has been perpetuated by demonic forces, is nothing short of miraculous.

Once again, the Spirit communicates these truths to us so we can comprehend who we are in

God. He wants us to know just how privileged we are. He wants us to let these truths penetrate our “inner-man” so we will choose to live as sons of God and not as slaves beholden to the ruler of this world. God wants us to know that His grace and power toward us in Christ is something that He has not chosen to bestow upon others, but upon us. This is amazing when you consider the glory and power which He has bestowed upon angelic beings; yet, their glory and power is nothing compared to what He has unleashed towards us.

Imagine; according to *verse 12*, we get to boldly and confidently come before the throne of God, though faith, any time that we want. Once again, this is not a privilege granted to others. Even in the Jewish system, only the high priest could go into the presence of God and that was just once a year. Surprisingly even the angelic beings have limited access. Based on what we understand in *Job 1:6* and *2:1*, there are appointed days or times when angelic beings can present themselves before God, but they can in no way walk up to Him whenever they want, call Him daddy, and enjoy His presence. But this is something that has been afforded to you and me according to the eternal purpose that the Father carried out through the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. I want you to understand however that the throne of the Father is only open and accessible to all us because in our *New Creation* we are holy as He is holy. Through Christ He made us new and made us in His image (*Ephesians 4:29*).

I pray that the Lord will give you revelation to this truth and open the eyes of your heart so you can get beyond just an intellectual understanding of these phenomenal truths and actually, like Paul, begin to live by faith in the reality that as a son of God your spiritual life is your life! This world and what it has to offer, in comparison, is nothing (we will go deep into this truth in Chapter 4). It is empty and provides no life. It is temporary and will come to a sudden end. So don't hold on to it and for goodness sake stop trying to identify yourself by what you do here. All that matters is who you are in God and what He desires for your life. So let go and let Him be your God for in so doing you will become fully convinced of God's love for you and you will become immovable in your faith. This is the idea expressed in Paul's prayer in verses *14-19*.

### ***Ephesians 3:14-19***

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

This prayer is amazing; Paul can sure cram so many ideas and thoughts into one short phrase. But before we unpack this prayer, I want you to observe a couple of high level aspects of this prayer.

- 1) Paul references the Father, the Spirit and then Christ to ensure that we understand that the entire godhead (the trinity) is at work in our lives to ground us in the truth of His love for us.
- 2) Paul's prayer is interestingly not about himself or for himself, but it is for us. Here he is in prison probably dying to get out and get a real meal, sleep in a real bed, get cleaned up,

and just have back his freedom instead of having this Roman guard attached to him 24/7, but instead he thinks about us and prays for us. To me this is the unspoken finale or the fruit of being filled with the fullness of God—considering others more important than ourselves (*Philippians 2:1-4*). Paul prays that we would be filled with the fullness of God knowing that we will then no longer be fixated with our lives and our troubles but we will seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and God’s agape love will freely flow from our lives to others.

- 3) Paul’s petitions are not just a random collection of thoughts, but they are intentional and progressive in nature—they are like stepping stones which reveal the whole idea of God in us with the result being that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. This is so powerful especially when you consider that Christ in His bodily form was filled with the fullness of God.

Now, when Paul considers all that God has done for us and all that He has bestowed upon us in Christ, when he even stops to think for a moment about the fact that we are sons of God, he drops to his knees in humility before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named for he is overwhelmed by the reality of it all.

I think Paul makes this statement about the names of humanity because he once again wants to impress deep in our “inner-man” how special we are. You see everyone, without exception, derives their existence from God and culturally (during the 1<sup>st</sup> century) a person’s name spoke of their character and even their destiny. Therefore, Paul is saying that the lives of everyone is in the Father’s hand but you, yes you, are different from everyone else for you, amongst all the families on the earth, can be strengthened with power according to the riches of His glory.

As we talked about in *1:7*, this “power” which strengthens us does not come from the riches of His glory but according to the riches of His glory. This means that in the same way that God’s glory is never diminished, is always over the top amazing, and revealed in so many ways, there is an endless supply of power available to us and it is beyond what we can fathom. He gives us this power in abundance and in so many different ways that it is mind-numbing. Like God’s love, the extent of His power toward us is unsearchable.

Notice that we are strengthened with power by the Spirit in the “inner-man” so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith. This speaks, surprise – surprise, to this whole idea of our living from the *New Creation*. I believe this reference to our “inner-man” is synonymous with our mind or our soul—the place that is being renewed and being transformed by the Spirit so that we can know what the Father desires for our lives (*2 Corinthians 4:16; Romans 12:1-2*). As we are strengthened with the power to believe in all that God has spoken about us, the result will be that Jesus will take up more and more room in our hearts.

This idea of Christ dwelling in our hearts is a powerful metaphor which helps us think about the many rooms and closets in our soul where we have literally closed the doors and locked out God as well as others. Again envision a long hallway with many, many doors some of which are open and many of which are closed. Jesus roams the hallway and wants to enter every room and fellowship with us. But as long as we refuse to trust ourselves to Him and refuse to let Him into these places, we are in effect playing god of our own lives and we keep Him out. We foolishly act as if we are capable of being our own protector, defender, and provider; but that is simply not the case. In reality we are horrible gods. We don’t have the power the foresight or the even the ability to ever truly control the outcomes of our lives. It’s all some sick delusion that the enemy

has tricked us into believing.

But as we let the truths found in the **8** lists of **5**'s penetrate our "inner-man" and we choose by the power of the Spirit to bet our lives on these truths, we will open up those doors to Jesus and let Him come in and disclose to us the depth of His love and bring healing even to the deepest and most horrific of wounds.

I know it is scary and so hard to open up those doors and risk being hurt all over again (especially since most of us have worked so hard to pretend that those doors don't even exist in our souls). But this is why the Spirit has been communicating to us over and over again the truth about who we are in Christ. He wants us to know that we don't have to live entrapped by our pain or controlled by all the dysfunctional ways in which we have tried to play god. He wants us to know that even in the most horrific tragedies, which He allowed in our lives, we were at all times being loved by God. Everything has been necessary so that we could come to Him and find our life in Him. And with every door that by faith is opened, Jesus enters that room, cleans out the junk and the gunk, and expands His residence to include that room. Thus, He dwells more and more in our hearts.

As a result, we become rooted and grounded in His love. These words have deep meaning. Being rooted implies that *as we* believe, and let Jesus into yet another room, we will experience Him so fully that our "inner-man" will be enmeshed in the reality of God's love such that like a deep rooted tree we will not be moved or ever again believe the enemy's lies that we can be like god. His love will become the grounding or literally the foundation of our lives. Everything we are and all that we will ever do (every choice that we will make in the "inner-man") will be built on the truth of the surpassing greatness of God's love for us.

Wow! What a powerful fruit of our believing and choosing to live by faith. Now, I say it is a fruit because both "rooted" and "grounded" are in the perfect passive tense. This means that God is the one who will perfectly establish us in His love *as we* trust ourselves to Him. It's as if with every door we open up and leave open, He will cause us to understand and rest in His love.

God roots us and grounds us in His love so that along with all the saints we will have the strength to comprehend, know, and experience what is the breadth and length and height and depth of His love which surpasses knowledge. You see God's love is something that can only be spiritually discerned, for it surpasses knowledge, yet at the same time it can be known or fully experienced. But it is experienced together, with all the saints. This speaks, once again, to our need to live connected with other believers. As we fellowship with each other in the Spirit, we will learn more and more about His love as it is uniquely expressed through the lives of others. You see, we all really need each other in order to fully know the love of God.

I want to make a quick comment about the way that Paul added a dimension to our lives. You see we don't live in just a 3 dimensional world (breadth, length, and height), but there is a spiritual dimension which encompasses all of humanity. That is why he includes "depth" in describing the magnitude of God's love. It is in this spiritual dimension that our real life is found and which I believe is described quite accurately in the **8** lists of **5**'s found in the first 2 chapters.

And finally, all of this is to result in our being filled with the fullness of God. In the same way that Jesus was filled with the fullness of the godhead (*Colossians 1:19-20*) God intends for us to be filled. And keep in mind, it pleased God to fill Jesus in this way while He was in bodily form (*Colossians 2:9*). So it is possible; this is not hyperbole. He wants to occupy every room in your

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soul. He wants to have such total control over your life that you get off the throne and let Him be God so He can lead you in love.

***Ephesians 3:20-21***

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

I am in awe! Everything we have studied so far in Chapters 1-3 is beyond anything we could have ever asked for or even thought about. He just gives and gives and it is always in super-abundance. The emphasis of this passage is on what God is able to “*do*.” In other words, all that we have studied is not just an exercise in religious ideology and thought, but it is truly what He wants to do. And what is amazing is that He does these amazing things through the power that is at work within us—through us—His life in ours. He has chosen to express Himself in this age not by externally revealing Himself through signs and wonders but by showing the world who He is though how He lives and expresses Himself in us. This is His marvelous plan hidden throughout the ages! Glory to God! We are privileged beyond words.

Let's Pray

**As a foundation for my faith, I must know who I was without Jesus.**

1. I was dead in my trespasses and sins,
2. I walked according to the course of this world (it was all I knew),
3. I walked according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience (I was enslaved to do whatever Satan and his minions wanted me to do),
4. I lived in the lusts of my flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind
5. I was by nature a child of wrath (I was sentenced to eternal condemnation),
6. I was separate, or living apart, from Christ,
7. I was excluded from the commonwealth of Israel (or God's "chosen people"),
8. I was a stranger to the covenants of promise,
9. I had no hope, and
10. I lived without God in the world.

**This is why it has always been about what God does for me, in me, with me, to me, and on my behalf and has nothing to do with what I can do or need to do. And since my starting place is clearly absolute brokenness and neediness, everything He bestows upon me is from an outpouring of His grace simply because He loves me.**

1. I have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,
2. He chose me in Him before the foundation of the world, in order that I would be holy and blameless before Him,
3. In love He predestined me to adoption as a son through Jesus Christ to Himself according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on me in the Christ the Beloved.
4. In Him I have redemption through His blood,
5. I am forgiven of my sins and trespasses (intentional and unintentional), according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on me,
6. In Him I have also obtained an inheritance,
7. I was predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will (all that has happened in my life was not random, but it has been with a purpose according to the counsel of His will), and
8. I was sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who was given to me as a pledge of my inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession (I am His possession and I will be redeemed), to the praise of His glory.
9. He made me alive together with Christ,



10. He raised me up with Him,
11. He seated me with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace **in kindness** toward me in Christ Jesus,
12. For by grace I have been saved through faith; and that not of myself, it is the gift of God, and
13. I am His workmanship (His very own masterpiece), created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that I would walk in them.
14. I have been brought near by the blood of Christ,
15. He Himself is my peace,
16. Through Him I have access in one Spirit to the Father,
17. I am no longer a stranger or alien but I am a fellow citizen with the saints,
18. I am of God's household, and
19. Because of Christ and my faith in Him, I can now come fearlessly into God's presence, assured of His **glad** welcome.
20. From His glorious resources He will strengthen me with His mighty power through His Spirit in the inner-man,
21. He will be more and more at home in my heart as I trust Him,
22. He will cause my roots to go down deep into the soil of His marvelous love,
23. He will give me the power to understand how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love really is so that I can know (fully experience) the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge that I may be filled with the fullness of Christ, and
24. By His mighty power, He is able to accomplish infinitely more than I would ever dare to ask or hope.
25. I along with my brothers and sisters in the Lord are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit, and
26. We have all been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord.

**This is who I am and the Father has accomplished all of this through Christ.**