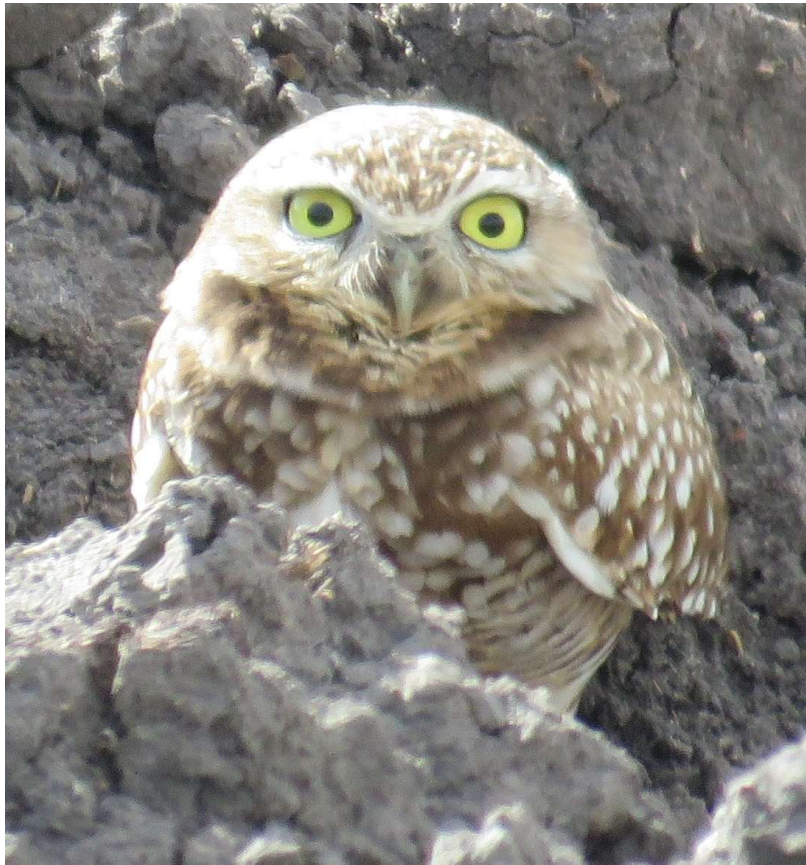


# TODAY'S THOUGHTS



VOLUME 4

WILLIAM E. WRIGHT



# Today's Thoughts

Volume 4

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William E. Wright

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Doctrinal Ministries  
Houston, Texas

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**For God so loved the world that He gave His only  
begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should  
not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16**

Cover Photo:  
Burrowing Owl, Tejano-Formosa Wetlands  
near Port Lavaca, Texas

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## Preface

This volume of *Today's Thoughts* contains the last of the daily Bible study devotionals that I wrote and emailed to family members and a few friends. A small number of Volume One was printed and distributed to members of the email list. My plan in the future is to edit and update a Second Edition of Volume One.

In the four volumes I have written about verses from every book of the Bible. My approach has been to try to understand what the original authors were trying to tell their readers and how the readers would have understood what was originally written. That is the Bible study part of what I have written. From there I moved on to asking how I can apply this in my life. That is the devotional part. The end result is these devotionals go into more depth than typical devotional books.

The pastors and others who have taught me have followed a literal, historical, grammatical approach to understanding the Bible. I have tried to capture the essence of what each passage of Scripture says and to develop my applications from that. Understanding some of these passages is challenging and I have had to be more technical than I would have preferred, while still striving to make it readable.

Each devotional was written to stand on its own. As originally written these were emailed on an almost daily basis to the original recipients.

There are several themes or Bible subjects that keep reappearing throughout these Bible study devotionals. On the subject of salvation, I believe in what is known as "free grace." We are saved by "faith alone, in Christ alone." Our works have nothing to do with our salvation. As John 3:16 says, "For God in this way loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." We are told to believe in Jesus Christ. When we do that, God saves us.

Second is the importance of learning and then applying God's word in our lives. I have been seriously studying the Bible for over seventy years and I am still learning new things. God has given us His word in the Bible and the Holy Spirit to teach us through gifted pastors and teachers. As we utilize these resources and then apply what we have learned, we grow spiritually in our relationship with God.

When we apply God's word in our lives, we are obeying God and His commands. How well we do that has eternal consequences, not in the sense of whether we will spend eternity in Hell or with God in the new heaven and new earth, but rather in our position and eternal relationship with God in eternity. Our works have nothing to do with our eternal salvation, but they have a lot to do with how we, as believers in Jesus Christ will spend eternity. In these Bible study devotionals you will find many references to the Judgment Seat of Christ that you may never have considered in the sense of a judgment.

Finally, my approach to prophecy again follows the literal, historical and grammatical approach to the reading and understanding of Scripture. Yes, there are idioms, figures of speech and other non-literal expressions in the Bible as there are in all good literature. But they are apparent from the context and the study of the Bible as a whole. Just because a passage is difficult to understand does not mean that a reader should try to allegorize its meaning. Too often this has been done in the past which has left us with a myriad of false teaching. Most of the books of the Bible were written to condemn false teaching and other departures from obeying God's commands.

It is my prayer that God will bless you as you read these devotionals.

I want to thank Pine Valley Bible Church in Houston, Texas, and Dean Bible Ministries ([deanbible.org](http://deanbible.org)) who are making copies of these books available without charge to anyone who wants one.



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Psa. 8:1-9. O LORD, our Lord, How excellent *is* Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens! Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, Because of Your enemies, That You may silence the enemy and the avenger. When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all *things* under his feet, All sheep and oxen—Even the beasts of the field, The birds of the air, And the fish of the sea That pass through the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, How excellent *is* Your name in all the earth!

Psalm 8 is a magnificent praise to God. It serves as an example for me in how I should praise God. When I give praise to God or thank Him, do I just say "Praise God" or "Hallelujah," or am I specific as to why I repeat these expressions?

"How excellent is Your name in all the earth." His reputation is above anything on the earth.

"When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and stars, which you have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him?" God created the heavens, the entire universe including the sun, the moon and the stars. Gen. 1:14-19 tells us that God spoke and they appeared, like snapping His fingers. I am insignificant in comparison to God. Why should He care about me?

Heb. 2:6-8 quotes this psalm, using the third century B.C. Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the *Septuagint*: What is man that You are mindful of him, Or the son of man that You take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet." Heb. 2:6 quotes this in reference to Jesus. In this section of Hebrews, the writer was demonstrating Christ's superiority over angels.

The *New King James Version* follows the *Septuagint* and the Jewish traditional handling of the statement in Psa. 8:5 that God made man "a little lower than the angels." But the Hebrew word translated "angels" is generally translated "God." So many of our Bibles translate it "a little lower than God" (or "heavenly beings"). Some think that what David was saying when he wrote this Psalm was that human beings were made in the image of God, but were not gods. Our souls may be everlasting, but they are not eternal, since we have a beginning. We are not omnipotent or omniscient. But we do have the ability to choose our destiny. We have enough of the image of God that we can have a relationship with God.

God created man to have dominion over all the earth and the universe. This included everything living. I can be sure that there is not some extra-terrestrial creature out there that has superior powers and abilities than man does. Well, there are angels and mankind was made "a little lower than the angels" as we are told in the book of Hebrews. Also as Hebrews tells us, Jesus Christ is superior even to angels. When Jesus returns, Satan will be removed as ruler of this world. Jesus Christ will be seated on His own throne (not at the right hand of God the Father) and will rule the earth and the entire universe. "Jesus, come quickly."



Olive Sparrow, Brownsville, Texas



Psa. 119:101-105. I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Your word. I have not departed from Your judgments, For You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste, *Sweeter* than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way. NUN. Your word *is* a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible. Every verse in this psalm looks at God's word and its importance for believers. "I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Your word." The psalmist writes about his walk. He avoids all forms of evil that he may obey God's word.

"I have not departed from Your judgments, For You Yourself have taught me." Jesus taught His disciples, and the Holy Spirit guided the writers of Scripture, so we have God's full revelation of everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). Today God has given some men the spiritual gift of pastor-teacher so that they can teach us God's word. Knowing God's word is the way we can know what the will of God is for us in our lives.

"How sweet are Your words to my taste, *Sweeter* than honey to my mouth!" I need to follow the example of the psalmist and make knowing God's word a high priority in my life. Can I set aside time each day to read and study God's word? Do I enjoy it as much as I look forward to dessert after dinner?

"Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way." I can understand God's will for my life through the teaching of His word. Comparing Scripture with Scripture is the way to sort out the false ideas that are often taught.

"NUN." This is a letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Psalm 119 is divided into sections identified by the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This was a mnemonic device for the Hebrew readers to be able to remember the psalm.

"Your word *is* a lamp to my feet And a light to my path." This verse is as true today as it was when it was written. Knowing God's word provides light to show how I must live my life.



Yellow-throated Vireo, near Navasota, Texas

Psa. 136:1-9. Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is* good! For His mercy *endures* forever. Oh, give thanks to the God of gods! For His mercy *endures* forever. Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! For His mercy *endures* forever: To Him who alone does great wonders, For His mercy *endures* forever; To Him who by wisdom made the heavens, For His mercy *endures* forever; To Him who laid out the earth above the waters, For His mercy *endures* forever; To Him who made great lights, For His mercy *endures* forever— The sun to rule by day, For His mercy *endures* forever; The moon and stars to rule by night, For His mercy *endures* forever.

This is a praise psalm. It as probably written to be sung antiphonally. The leader would sing the first statement in each verse and then the congregation would sing responsively, "For His mercy *endures* forever." The word "mercy" is variously translated, "loyal love," "love," "steadfast love," and "kindness." The way God loves us is beyond verbal descriptions.

The first three verses identify God by three of the major names by which God was known in the Old Testament: "LORD" ("Jehovah" or "Yahweh"); "God" ("Elohim"), and "Lord" ("Adonai"). The psalmist leaves no doubt as to whom the object of our thanksgiving should be.

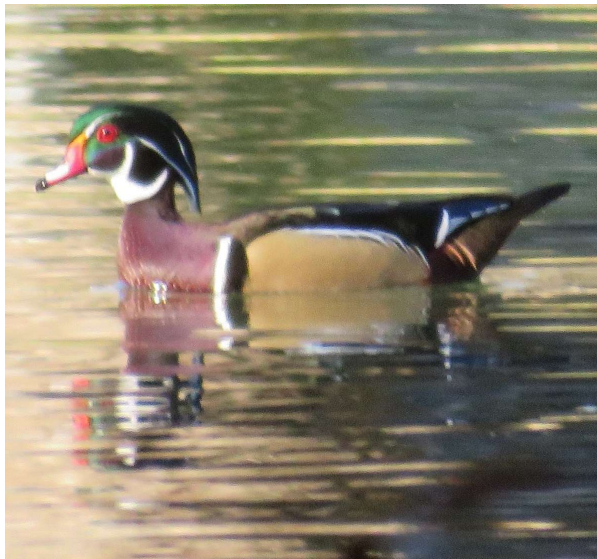
"To Him who alone does great wonders." The idols and false gods of Israel's neighbors were carved in wood or stone and were incapable of doing anything.

Psa. 136:5-9 review God's great acts of creation. He made the heavens by His wisdom. In Psa. 136: 6, *The Holman Christian Standard Bible* translates the word usually translated "earth" as "land." As Gen. 1:9-10 says, "and let the dry *land* appear, and it was so. And God called the dry *land* Earth." During creation week God separated the dry land from the waters on the earth.

"To Him who made great lights ... The sun to rule by day, ... The moon and the stars to rule by night." This world in which we live was created by God six to eight thousand years ago. It was not the result of "once upon a time, there was a big bang." How could life spontaneously generate itself and then keep on reproducing new life? These are the ideas of modern day mythologies.

This psalm demonstrates how I should praise God. I should be saying more than just "Praise God" and "Thank you, God." I should put some meat on those statements by being specific as to the great things God has done and continues to do.

The remaining verses of this psalm describe the history of Israel and how God brought them out of slavery in Egypt. The psalm concludes with Psa. 136:26, "Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven! For His mercy *endures* forever.



Wood Duck, Dickinson, Texas

Psa. 139:7-15. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You *are* there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You *are there*. If I take the wings of the morning, *And* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," Even the night shall be light about me; Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light *are* both alike *to You*. For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And *that* my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, *And* skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

This psalm of David looks at God's omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience. "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?" I cannot hide from God. He sees everything I say or do. He knows all my thoughts. The Holy Spirit is God and is always present. The reference to "hell" is transliterated in some translations as "Sheol." It is best understood as the place of those who died during Old Testament times.

"If I take the wings of the morning, *And* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me." "The "wings of the morning" may be looking at the way the sun advances across the sky. God created this world and was well aware of the motions of all the stars and the objects of His creation. God has provided His word to lead me. His hand is always there to protect me and to provide for me. Even in the darkness of night, God can see.

"You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb." When God created this world, He designed it so that all physical life would continue to be generated from existing life. Now if my understanding of God's creation of angels is correct, He created all the angels at one time. Angels do not procreate in the way human and animal life procreates. This verse addresses the material or physical part of human life. But we also possess an immaterial part of our being which we know of as our soul and spirit. Gen. 2:7 describes God's creation of human life. "And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." When God made animals in Genesis 1, it does not say that He breathed the breath of life into them, nor does it say that they were made in the image of God. By God breathing into humans the breath of life, He imparted the image of God into us through the immaterial part of ourselves. Did God create the souls of all people in Gen. 2:7 or does He create our souls as each of us begins to exist? I think our souls are a special creation that occurs throughout time. My soul has everlasting existence, but it is not eternal.

"Marvelous are Your works, And *that* my soul know very well." I see life as an ongoing demonstration of God's omnipotence. As Col. 1:16-17 says of Jesus Christ, "All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist." Jesus sustains the entire universe and all life according to the rules that God has designed into this world.



Little Wood Satyr, butterfly, Liberty County, Texas

Prov. 3:5-7. Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil.

Prov. 3:5-6 is a familiar passage from Proverbs that I often hear quoted. Faith, hope, trust, all synonyms, are the very core of the Christian life. Our faith requires an object. For a believer, that object is God. He has promised. Do I believe Him? Do I even know what He has promised? If I do not know what God has promised, am I then leaning on my own understanding?

Christian faith is not a blind faith. We have God's word in the Bible that tells us what He has already done, as well as what He has promised to do? He has done great things in the past. He has promised that He will continue to do great things.

Prov. 3:1 begins this chapter with the command, "My son, do not forget My law, But let your heart keep My commandments." For Solomon who wrote this, that was all 613 commandments of the Law God gave through Moses. For me today, God has given me a far greater revelation of what He wants me to know.

"In all your ways acknowledge Him." This is not just tipping my hat to God as I pass through life. This is more than just nodding my head to God once a week when I go to church. This is not just spicing my conversations with appropriate ("holy-speak") words. "In all my ways ... " This is my daily walk, step by step, knowing and applying what God's word has taught me.

"And He will direct your paths." I make many decisions every day for which there are no right or wrong answers. Those moral decisions for which there are obvious right and wrong answers are easy. I do not always choose to obey even these. But the promise here goes beyond those right-wrong moral decisions. Learning and knowing God's word builds a frame of reference in my mind to guide me in every decision I make in life. I can't recall all the times that I have made elaborate plans to do something or to go in a certain direction and have gone off another way. Was this God directing my steps or just a random roll of the dice? This verse gives me the correct answer.

"Do not be wise in your own eyes." In Rom. 12:16 the apostle Paul wrote, "Do not be wise in your own opinion." It is all too easy to be drawn into the ideas and thinking of the world when I do not know God's word.

"Fear the LORD and depart from evil." As used in the Old Testament, the word "fear" is a synonym for trust and faith. Is departing from evil additive to this thought?

Am I to both fear and trust God and to depart from evil in a moral sense? There certainly was a moral component in the Old Testament law. Or does trusting God contrast to departing from evil? So that when I trust God I have departed from evil? Many times in the Old Testament we are told that Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. What were they doing? They had listened to their friends (sometimes to enemies) and neighbors and had turned to worshiping idols, the false gods of their neighbors. When I fail to trust God and put my trust in my own ability or in anything else, I am following another god in my life.



Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Fort Bend County, Texas

Prov. 3:11-14. My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor detest His correction; For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son *in whom* he delights. Happy *is* the man *who* finds wisdom, And the man *who* gains understanding; For her proceeds *are* better than the profits of silver, And her gain than fine gold.

This passage is quoted in Heb. 12:5-6. "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." God only disciplines us during the time we are living in this world. He will not discipline believers in eternity. There will be no need for discipline of believers in resurrection bodies after Jesus returns and establishes His kingdom that has been promised to Israel. These new resurrection bodies no longer have a sin nature.

He will not even discipline us when we appear before Him at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Our sins have already been judged by Jesus' death on the cross as our substitute. The penalty has been paid. At the Judgment Seat of Christ our lives will be evaluated as to how well we have walked in the power provided by the Holy Spirit and have obeyed God's word.

Now no discipline is pleasant when we receive it. The purpose of divine discipline is not for punishment, but for training. God wants us to grow up to spiritual maturity. He wants us to think the way he thinks, and not with all the false ideas that the devil plants into the world. God wants the best for each one of His believing children. So we read "For whom the LORD loves He corrects."

"Just as a father the son *in whom* he delights." A parent who loves his child disciplines that child as a training and teaching tool. In this way, a child learns what he is supposed to do. He also learns to respect authority. The world tells us that spanking a child teaches violence. Yes, a child can learn violence from an angry father who loses his temper, beats his wife and does the same to his children. Discipline needs to be applied properly. As Gal. 6:1 says, "If a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness." The same applies to the discipline of a child by a parent. It must be firm, but gentle, and done in love, not anger.

"Happy is the man who finds wisdom." My Bible has a paragraph mark at this verse suggesting Solomon was starting a new thought. But discipline is a way of instilling wisdom in believers, as well as, a means for children to develop wisdom. A parent first teaches the rules to their children. But just knowing the rules, does not insure that a child will obey the rules. Discipline teaches children that obeying the rules is expected. When a child applies the rules to his actions and words, he is demonstrating wisdom by the application.

Rev. 3:19 states the same principle. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent." This was written to the church of believers in Laodicea. This is not telling them to repent for eternal salvation. They had become lackadaisical in their Christian walk. They are to repent by changing their minds and becoming serious in learning and applying God's word. The alternative is divine discipline while living in this world and the loss of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Job 5:17-18 also speaks of God's chastening. "Happy *is* the man whom God corrects; Therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty. For He bruises, but He binds up; He wounds, but His hands make whole." Divine discipline is just for a time. If I learn my lesson, I can move ahead in my life in obedience to God. The wisdom that I learn is better than the material things of life like gold and silver and even the rubies of Prov. 3:15.

Prov. 6:6-11. Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, Which, having no captain, Overseer or ruler, Provides her supplies in the summer, *And* gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to sleep— So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, And your need like an armed man.

"Go to the ant, you sluggard!" Solomon uses ants to teach us wisdom. He addresses a group of his readers whom he calls a "sluggard," or we might call a "lazy man." The motto for some people seems to be "don't do today, what you can do tomorrow." Call it, procrastination. "Consider her ways and be wise." We can learn from watching how ants function.

Which, having no captain, Overseer or ruler." I don't know much about ants. But I have heard that each ant nest has a queen, whose job is to lay eggs that will populate the nest with workers. What Solomon seems to be saying is that the workers who hatch know instinctively what their duties and responsibilities are. These might include protecting the queen and the nest from invaders. Others are food gatherers. But there does not seem to be a hierarchy giving orders as to which ant does what. This is like human beings who are born male or female and know instinctively what their roles are unless someone comes along and teaches them otherwise.

Dr. Harry Ironside in his book *Notes on the Book of Proverbs* comments on people who ridicule Solomon's discussion here saying that ants are carnivorous and Solomon was confusing ant eggs with grain seeds. Then an ant species was discovered in Israel which does feed on grain. In Texas we have an ant species called a Texas Leaf-cutter Ant. They are large red ants probably a little larger than a quarter inch long although I have never actually measured one. I have found them marching toward their nest carrying leaves. I expect Dr. Ironside is correct. Solomon knew the difference between the ant eggs in ant nests and barley or wheat grain.

"Provides her supplies in the summer, *And* gathers her food in the harvest." Comparing various translations, these two statements may be parallel to each other. Both describing ants who gather or harvest their food when it is available. I don't see leaf-cutting ants in the winter when there aren't any green leaves.

To me this is an illustration of the "Joseph principle." In Egypt God warned Joseph that there would be seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. So what did Joseph tell Pharaoh and then do? He set aside and saved during the seven years of plenty so that there would be food during the famine. For us, wisdom says to set aside savings out of every paycheck, so that when I face future financial surprises I have money set aside to meet my family's needs.

"A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to sleep—So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, And your need like an armed man." We live in a time with a lot of opportunities for recreation and entertainment. While there is nothing wrong with entertainment and recreation, they can be a distraction from more important things.

How I use my time is a wisdom issue. I worked for a subsidiary of IBM at one time. One day I was asked if I wanted to work overtime that night. I declined, but later thought better of that snap decision. But I had missed my chance. How much time do we spend on recreation compared to time spent in God's word and prayer? Do we spend time on personal calls and doing personal things on our phones when we are supposed to be working?



Prov. 6:16-19. These six *things* the LORD hates, Yes, seven *are* an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, A false witness *who* speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.

When Solomon wrote, "These six *things* the LORD hates, Yes, seven *are* an abomination to Him," he was telling us that the list is not exhaustive. God hates all sin. We will not be able to spend eternity with God if we have any unforgiven sins. When we believe in Jesus Christ we are accepting His gift of forgiveness that He provided by suffering the penalty for our sins by His death.

First up in this list is "A proud look." The first sin ever committed was pride. Isa. 14:12-13 tells us that Satan's pride caused his fall. "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! ...For you said in your heart, 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne Above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north.'" Pride underlies all of our sins. I know what I am supposed to do, but I say, "I will do things my way, not God's way." When people think they can live a good life and that will be OK with God, they are guilty of the sin of pride. The same goes for people who add elements of works to faith for salvation. Believers, who think that all the good fruit they produce in their lives prove that they are saved, are demonstrating pride and arrogance. Since we are saved through faith, and not by works (Eph. 2:8-9, Tit. 3:5), works cannot prove we are saved. A person's good works or good fruit can never provide total assurance of salvation. I know I am saved because I believe what God has promised, that when I believed in Jesus Christ, God saved me. 1 John 5:11-13. "And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life."

"A lying tongue." "A false witness *who* speaks lies." This would include what we call "white lies."

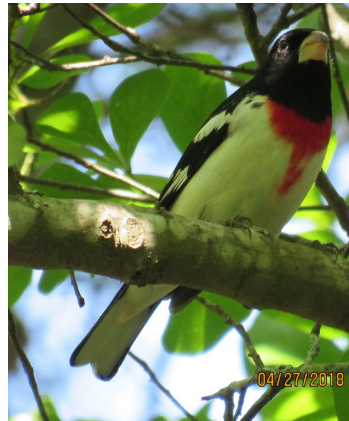
"Hands that shed innocent blood." Murder is the only overt sin on the list.

"A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil." I consider both of these as mental attitude sins. Along with pride this would make three of the seven sins God hates as mental attitude sins. What I think can be just as sinful of the words I speak or the overt sins I may commit.

"And one who sows discord among brothers." We can do this many ways, but the ones which come to my mind are verbal.

This would include lying, gossip, telling others all the wrong things someone has done to you, and criticizing others. This also ties these seven sins back to previous verses in this chapter. Prov. 6:12 says, "A worthless man, a wicked man, Walks with a perverse mouth." Then Prov. 6:14 adds, "Perversity *is* in his heart, He devises evil continually, He sows discord."

So the list of seven sins that are an abomination to God includes one overt sin, murder, three verbal sins, and three mental attitude sins. This is not the way the average person on the street thinks of sin. The Bible has many other commands by which we should live. To disobey any one of them demonstrates pride and is a product of our sinful nature.



**Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Edith Moore Sanctuary, Houston, Texas**

Prov. 10:26-29. As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, So *is* the lazy *man* to those who send him. The fear of the LORD prolongs days, But the years of the wicked will be shortened. The hope of the righteous *will be* gladness, But the expectation of the wicked will perish. The way of the LORD *is* strength for the upright, But destruction *will come* to the workers of iniquity.

A former pastor of my wife and me taught us an important principle for interpreting Proverbs. Most of the proverbs should be considered maxims. The statements are generally true. But they are statements of wisdom. They need to be understood from the standpoint of wisdom and not from the standpoint of absolute commands, promises or truths. These verses are good examples of maxims.

"As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes." I have never drunk straight vinegar, but the idea is that it sets your teeth on edge. I expect most of us have enjoyed a campfire at one time or another. You don't want to be on the side of the fire to which the wind is blowing the smoke. When that happens you move to the other side. The contrast is with a lazy man whom you send on an errand who doesn't do the job or fails to complete it in a timely fashion. I was new on a job years ago. My boss gave me a check that needed to be delivered somewhere. When I was a few blocks away from the office, I realized I had lost the check! I returned expecting the worst. When I arrived back and reported that I had lost the check. The answer was "I know. Someone found it and brought it back." The good news was I didn't lose my job over this. I never figured out how the check beat me back to the office. Thinking about this, I must have dropped it before I ever got out of the door. Solomon's point is that if you are given a job to do, do it to the best you can and do it in a timely manner.

Under the Old Testament law God promised Israel that if they obeyed the law, He would bless them. But if they disobeyed, Lev. 26:14ff provided for seven series of curses or discipline that would come to the people. Lev. 26:14-16 speaks of the first series of judgments. "But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, *but* break My covenant, I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart. And you will sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it." The chapter goes on for another twenty-three verses describing increasing levels of discipline.

These verses in Proverbs are promises to Israel while under the law. The promises do not apply to us in the Church Age. But the instructions as to how Israel should live still apply since they are repeated in the New Testament.

"The fear of the LORD prolongs days." Our God is a just God. If we fail to walk as we should, we can expect divine discipline. We also may forfeit rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ which would be ours if we did obey Him. Respect and trust both are aspects of fearing the Lord.

"The hope of the righteous will be gladness." A righteous life knows God's word and obeys it. Hope is the confident assurances that what God has promised He will do. If I know that Christ could return at any moment, does this make a difference in what I am going to do next?

"The way of the LORD is strength for the upright." As I walk in obedience to God's word, the Holy Spirit strengthens me and directs my paths.



Prov. 16:8-9. Better is a little with righteousness, Than vast revenues without justice. A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

The point of Prov. 16:8 is not that wealth is evil and poverty is good. Solomon is asking "What are my priorities?" The overriding sin that is of concern here is coveting. Is my desire for material things overriding my application of God's word and commands? I consider the tenth of the Ten Commandments to be the stealth commandment. We all commit this sin and never recognize we are doing so. I have spent too much money and time on hobbies. Some people spend more money than they can afford on travel. Others may build up a large credit card debt.

Prov. 16:9 may appear to be a new subject, but perhaps it is related. Do I make plans for building my future wealth and well-being and ignore what God tells me in His word what is the proper course of action I should be following? This reminds me of James 4:13-16 "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you *ought* to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'" Working out a budget is a wise thing to do. Do you then follow it? I left my last salaried job sixty years ago and have in essence been self-employed ever since. Developing a business plan for a new business is a good idea. Just don't leave God out of the picture. Leave time in each day for prayer and building your relationship with God through His word. We all make plans for what we will be doing. Some are relatively trivial, what color shirt to wear or where to eat lunch. Some are more far reaching. What career or job should I seek? Where should I go to school? Whom do I choose for friends?

God may have different ideas on these matters. "The LORD directs my steps." How does He do so? Does God in His sovereignty force me to follow particular courses of action? If so, why do I sometimes sin and fail to obey Him? Does He allow me to make My own choices? The answer may be: Yes, all of the above, but at different times. God, in His word tells me what I should do. His word has everything I need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). At times I have done the wrong thing because of ignorance of God's word or more likely because I ignored what God's word has told me. Other times God brings circumstances into my life that send me off in the direction He wants me to go.

If I were to pick a date when I trusted in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of my sins and eternal life, it would be September 7, 1947. I was nine years old. Later, when I was twelve years old, my parents gave me a *Scofield Reference Bible*. I decided that I wanted to know more about the Bible. I started out reading it. I had no idea what I was reading and it may not have lasted much more than a day or two. Then in 1954 I was invited to attend a Friday night Bible class at a church with a different kind of name. The church was in a Quonset hut building in downtown Houston. God was showing me how I could really learn something about the Bible. This has been an important part of my life ever since. "A man's heart plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps." God provided me with this opportunity.



Western Grebe, Lake Balmorhea State Park, Texas

Prov. 22:17-21. Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, And apply your heart to my knowledge; For *it is* a pleasant thing if you keep them within you; Let them all be fixed upon your lips, So that your trust may be in the LORD; I have instructed you today, even you. Have I not written to you excellent things Of counsels and knowledge, That I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, That you may answer words of truth To those who send to you?

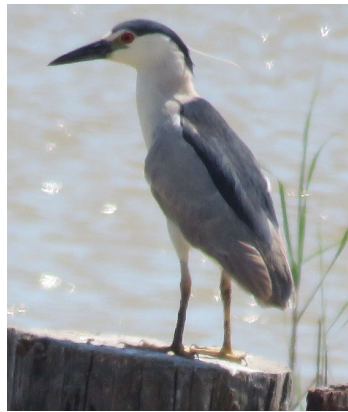
When you compare translations of Prov. 22:20, you will find that the word "excellent" is translated "thirty" in the *NET Bible*, the *English Standard Version* and elsewhere. The *New American Standard Bible* follows the *King James* and the *New King James Version* and uses the word "excellent." The *Septuagint* which is a Greek translation of the Hebrew text dating back to about the third century before Christ uses the Greek word meaning "three times." The word "thirty" is used because these verses introduce thirty proverbial sayings that follow in Prov. 22:25-24:22. Then an additional six sayings are added in Prov. 24:23-34. These thirty-six sayings may not be original with Solomon and he may have copied them from somewhere else. They are included in the Bible and we should consider them as part of God's word.

"Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise." These "words of the wise" are the thirty plus six sayings that follow. Solomon is telling each of us to "apply your heart to my knowledge." Again referring to the thirty-six wise sayings. Why bother to learn God's word if I am not going to use and apply it?

"It is a pleasant thing if you keep them within you." The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* says "It is pleasing to memorize the sayings (keep them in your heart)." "Let them all be fixed upon your lips, So that your trust may be in the LORD." A good reason to be able to quote and talk about God's word is that it encourages people to trust in the Lord.

"That I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth." Solomon repeats these sayings to assure his readers that these are "the words of truth." Again, God expects us to share what we know from God's word with others.

- What are some of these thirty-six sayings to which Solomon refers?
- > Prov. 22:22. "Do not rob the poor because he is poor." Don't take unfair advantage of others.
  - > Prov. 22:24-25. "Make no friendship with an angry man, ... Lest you learn his ways."
  - > Prov. 22:26. "Do not be one of those who shakes hand in a pledge." Don't guaranty another person's debts.
  - > Prov. 23:4. "Do not overwork to be rich"- a corollary of the commandment against coveting.
  - > Prov. 23:13. "Do not withhold correction from a child."
  - > Prov. 23:22. "Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old."
  - > Prov. 24:3. "Through wisdom a house is built, And by understanding it is established." For success in any undertaking, business or plan, a person needs knowledge and understanding applied with wisdom.
  - > Prov. 24:26. "He who gives a right answer kisses the lips." Speak truthfully. Do not lie.



**Black-crowned Night-Heron, near Quintana, Texas**

Prov. 24:30-34. I went by the field of the lazy man, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; And there it was, all overgrown with thorns; Its surface was covered with nettles; Its stone wall was broken down. When I saw it, I considered it well; I looked on it and received instruction: A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest; So shall your poverty come like a thief, And your need like an armed man.

This is a rarity in Proverbs: five verses building on one idea. Most of the statements in Proverbs are not absolutes. They are better understood as maxims. That is, statements that are generally true, but may not always work out in the expected way. A typical example is Prov. 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it." Most of the time this happens, but there are exceptions.

A person who shirks his or her work will soon run out of money. He thinks, "I can fix that stone wall tomorrow. Today, I will go fishing." Tomorrow comes and a neighbor invites you to play golf.

How I use my time is important. I have to balance my time between service to God, family, work, and play. I also need to eat, sleep and attend to personal hygiene.

When I was in college, the demands of classes and time to study taught me to organize my time. For my first semester, I was told what courses I had to take and was given a schedule of classes. However, for the second semester, I again had a required list of courses, but I had some latitude on when to schedule classes. I thought I was smart! I scheduled no 8 o'clock classes. I soon realized that by doing so, I lost 30 minutes every morning. Breakfast in the Freshman Dining Hall was served from 7-8:30. If I wanted to eat breakfast, I had to get there by about 8. I finished, but class didn't start until 9 or 10. I found it difficult to make good use of that time gap between breakfast and the first class. For the rest of my time in college and graduate school I scheduled as many 8 o'clock classes I could. Another trick I learned was, as much as I could, to schedule classes back to back. If I had an hour break between classes, theoretically I could study. But that did not always work out well.

A piece of advice I was given, was to do your studying before going out to play. In college I had classes scheduled over five and a half days (including Saturday mornings). While the typical load was 18 credit hours (meaning 18 hours in class), the technical courses had three hour labs that earned one credit hour for three hours of tinkering and experimenting. Actual class and lab time worked out to be about 22 hours per week. The average student was expected to spend 2-3 hours outside of class studying for every credit hour. With an 18 credit hour schedule, I could expect to have to spend another 36-54 hours studying. To handle this well, I had to plan my time carefully. I participated in weekly IVCF meetings and Bible studies, attended church twice on Sunday. Our church also had a youth fellowship group on Saturday night. For the first two years I played in the college orchestra and was a member of the model railroad club. I did have to forego the orchestra and model railroad club after two years. I also managed to find a few other fun things to do at times.

Here Solomon is looking at my work, or when I was a student, at the time I spent in class and studying. If I shirk my work or study responsibilities, I will not succeed on the job or in learning. Solomon tells us to plan our time wisely. Fulfill your responsibilities. Do not over-commit, promising to do more than you can do.

Prov. 26:17-19. He who passes by *and* meddles in a quarrel not his own *is like* one who takes a dog by the ears. Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death, *is* the man *who* deceives his neighbor, And says, "I was only joking!"

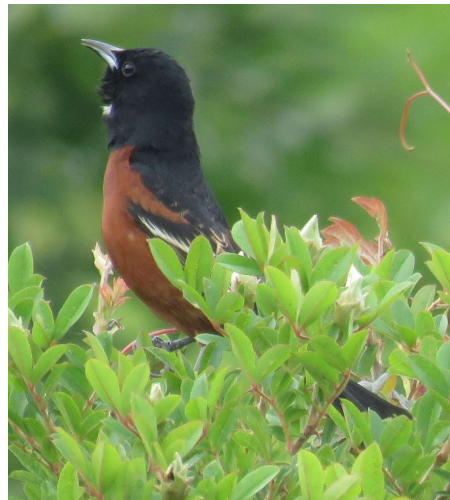
Proverbs is a book of the Bible that is often neglected in our Bible study. It is full of short snippets of one to four verses each. These snippets are wisdom ideas. Since there are 31 chapters in Proverbs, some have suggested reading a chapter a day. This isn't a bad idea, but when a person does that how much of Solomon's wisdom is retained? I have a Bible which divides the twenty-eight verses of this chapter into nineteen paragraphs. That is nineteen different snippets of wisdom and is a lot to retain. Memorizing key verses is a good way to cement them in your mind and enable meditation on their significance. As you read a chapter each day, you could also write down a verse or two that cover one subject on a small card. Then refer to it during the day as a means of meditation.

"He who passes by *and* meddles in a quarrel not his own." Today we would say, "Mind your own business." This is talking about people arguing between themselves over a matter. This is not looking at a physical violence situation where a big bully is picking on someone smaller or where a man is beating up a woman. "*Is like* one who takes a dog by the ears." Today dogs are household pets. To us this sounds like animal cruelty. But in Solomon's day dogs were not household pets. They were wild scavengers. If you trapped one so you could pick it up by its ears, you were going to get bitten.

The next two verses are talking about a lying troublemaker. "The man *who* deceives his neighbor." When his deception is discovered, he smiles, shrugs his shoulders, and says, "I was only joking." Solomon is not kind to such a person. "Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death." The deceiver is compared to a deranged warrior who throws Molotov cocktails, arrows and drives down the street shooting at any target he sees. The deceiver has already done his damage. Saying, "I was only joking" does not solve the problem.

This could also be what we would call today a practical joker whose tricks go too far. Dr. Constable's *Notes* quotes another person's comment, "the only worthwhile humor is that which laughs with, not at others."

When I was in college, someone managed to catch a stray dog. He then took the dog and somehow was able to open a dorm room just down the hall from my room when the residents were in class. He put the dog in the dorm room and locked the door again. Whoever did it kept quiet about it and no one ever figured out how it happened or who did it. Engineers can sometimes figure out ways to do things that are a puzzle to others. In this case the only person laughing was the culprit. The two roommates who lived in the room didn't think it was funny. Another practical joke I have heard done that might be classified as vandalism is disassembling an old Volkswagen beetle, and then carrying the parts up to the roof of a building and reassembling them. Jokes are fun when everyone can laugh.



**Orchard Oriole, Sabine Woods Sanctuary, Sabine Pass, Texas**

Prov. 26:20-23. Where *there is* no wood, the fire goes out; And where *there is* no talebearer, strife ceases. As charcoal *is* to burning coals, and wood to fire, So *is* a contentious man to kindle strife. The words of a talebearer *are* like tasty trifles, And they go down into the inmost body. Fervent lips with a wicked heart *Are like* earthenware covered with silver dross.

These verses look at the way we sin with what we say. When we repeat stories about other people, whether true or false, if what we are saying does not involve the people to whom we are speaking, why are we telling the stories? The Bible calls the person telling the stories a "talebearer." Today, we call these stories "gossip" and think nothing is wrong. But James 4:11 commands us, "Do not speak evil of one another." The evil words we speak about another person could be true statements as well as false statements. If the person to whom we are speaking is not a part of the problem or able to help solve the problem, why do we pass on the failures of someone else? We are just throwing wood on the fire. "Where *there is* no wood, the fire goes out; And where *there is* no talebearer, strife ceases."

Hebrew poetry is not based on rhyming and meter like ours is. It repeats ideas sometimes in parallel statements, and sometimes in antithetical statements. Here verse 21 repeats the ideas of verse 20 as a parallel statement. "As charcoal *is* to burning coals, and wood to fire, So *is* a contentious man to kindle strife." A contentious man is a troublemaker. His words are spoken to build up his own ego and to show how much he knows. They are not spoken for the benefit of the hearer or for the purpose of helping the person about whom he is speaking. As Paul went throughout the Roman world with the gospel, unbelieving Jews constantly attacked him. Many times they stirred up trouble with the authorities. In Acts 16, Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus because of the troublemakers.

"The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, And they go down into the inmost body." Someone will say something like, "Did you hear what Lucy did? ..." The person speaking quickly forgets what he or she said, but the hearers remember it. They may even repeat it. But the repetitions might be with enhancements, or with parts left out. The story goes on and on.

"Fervent lips with a wicked heart *are like* earthenware covered with silver dross." This verse is like a Bob Feller (a Hall of Fame baseball pitcher) fast ball. It whips right past us and we have no idea what Solomon is saying. Let's call the "fervent lips," "flattering words." They sound good. They put a little icing on the cake like "silver dross" or whitewash on a clay pot. They have no lasting meaning. Jesus said to the Pharisees in Luke 11:39, "You Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness."

In Neh. 6:5-9, Sanballat tried to stop Nehemiah from re-building the wall around Jerusalem, by accusing him of trying to build himself up as a king and rebelling against the Persians. He was speaking evil of Nehemiah for his own potential benefit.

Looking at the positive side of what we can say, Paul wrote in Eph. 4:29, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."



**Prothonotary Warbler, Sabine Woods Sanctuary, Sabine Pass, Texas**

Prov. 26:24-27. He who hates, disguises *it* with his lips, And lays up deceit within himself; When he speaks kindly, do not believe him, For *there are* seven abominations in his heart; *Though his* hatred is covered by deceit, His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly. Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him.

Today's verses could be described as operation boomerang. Prov. 26:23 speaks of "fervent lips with a wicked heart Are like earthenware covered with silver dross." Solomon is speaking of flattery.

"He who hates disguises *it* with his lips." He does not express his true thoughts, but the deceit and malice build up within him.

When he speaks kindly, do not believe him, For *there are* seven abominations in his heart." We have all experienced people who say all the right things, but were thinking otherwise. Just because a person says kind and flattering words to you, be wary of their sincerity. Do not do for a flatterer what you would not otherwise do for him.

The commentaries refer to various incidents in the Bible where apparently flattery was used to obtain a favor from a king. In the story of Esther, Haman who was a favored minister in the king's court, was upset because a Jew, Mordecai, did not bow down to him when Haman passed him on the street. Haman had the king sign a decree to have all the Jews killed.

King Saul's emotions were unstable. At times he spoke well of David, but other times he pursued David seeking to kill him.

In Daniel 6 the satraps and governors who ruled the kingdom along with Daniel under King Darius were jealous of Daniel. They approached Darius and said in Dan. 6:6, "King Darius, live forever!" They also flattered the king in Dan. 6:7 asking him to declare a decree "whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast in the den of lions." They knew that Daniel would continue to pray regularly to the Lord (Yahweh) as he always did." They wanted to get rid of Daniel.

These flatterers who keep their hatred hidden may think they fool others. But eventually the truth will come out. "*Though his* hatred is covered by deceit, His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly." In Ezra. 4:1-3 the returning Jews had begun rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. This passage says that "the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard" that the temple was being rebuilt. They offered to help rebuild the temple saying, "we seek your God as you *do*; and have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here." They did not say that they sacrificed to Yahweh, Israel's God. When they used the word "your God," the word in the Hebrew text is "Elohim." This is more of a generic word for God and also could mean "gods" or any of the idols and gods that the Gentiles followed. Under the Old Testament law the only place to sacrifice to God was in the place God told them. That was in the still unbuilt temple in Jerusalem. So the leader of the Jews, Zerubbabel, saw through their false claims and rightly refused the help.

"Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him." Digging a pit was a way of trapping an animal. Similarly, an ancient method to kill an animal was to roll a stone or boulder to the top of a hill and let it roll down into a herd of animals on the other side.

What I call "operation boomerang" is the flattering words and false words to please men so as to get their favor, which when they are discovered to be false will have the opposite effect. A friend of mine likes to say "What goes around comes around."

Prov. 28:9,13. One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer *is* an abomination. He who covers his sins will not prosper, ... But whoever confesses and forsakes *them* will have mercy.

These verses are as applicable today as they were 3,000 years ago when Solomon wrote them. "One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer *is* an abomination." "Hearing the law," means more than just listening to what the preacher says on Sunday morning. Hearing does not mean to let it go in one ear and out the other. My father used to tell me that I did that all too often. For us the "law" is the entirety of God's word, from Genesis to Revelation. Hearing includes listening, understanding and, above all, obeying and applying the word of God. If I am not doing that, I am not walking in fellowship with God.

Here are some more verses that say similar things:

- > Isa. 59:2. "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden *His* face from you, So that He will not hear."
- > Remember what happened to Saul when he failed to obey God. 1 Sam. 28:6. "And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him either by dream or by Urim or by the prophets."
- > In Ezek 20:1-3 "certain elders of Israel came to inquire of the LORD." God told Ezekiel to tell them, "Have you come to inquire of Me? As I live,' says the LORD God, 'I will not be inquired of you.'" In the following verses He describes "the abominations of their fathers."
- > In the New Testament in 1 Pet. 3:12, "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."
- > Psa. 66:18. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear." I first heard this verse about seventy years ago and memorized it as a teenager.
- > I John 5:14-15. "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."

We learn the will of God through His word. Then we can apply it in our prayers. By learning God's word we are obeying the instructions of Rom. 12:2. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* the good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

I recently learned of a major state university which is requiring every student to take a course on "woke" ideology in order to graduate. The Bible teaches us that all people are of the same race. We are commanded to love one another. "Woke" ideology fans the hate, mistrust, and anger inherent in racism. This is just one example of how to be "conformed to the world." Paul wrote "be transformed by the renewing of your mind," so that we can think the way God wants us to think. Those who think like the world can not expect God to hear their prayers.

"He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes *them* will have mercy." This principle is taught several times in the Bible. When John wrote 1 John 1:9, he was not coming up with a new idea. This New Testament verse says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This is not a salvation verse, but is written to believers to tell us what we should do each time we disobey God. Prov. 28:13 adds that we also should forsake the sins that we are confessing. Confessing is not just a routine ritual we do so we can get back to the thinking and ways of the world.



Prov. 28:10. Whoever causes the upright to go astray in an evil way, He himself will fall into his own pit; But the blameless will inherit good.

There are times when I read proverbs and think it sounds good. But does it apply to me? I then move on to the next proverb. This verse contains one proverb. Each of the twenty-eight proverbs in this chapter could serve as a text for a Sunday morning sermon. Even if a person decides to read a chapter a day of Proverbs for a month, think about what you read in the chapter. Then select a single proverb and consider what that means in your own life. The next time you read that chapter, you may choose a different verse on which to meditate.

"Whoever causes the upright to go astray in an evil way, He himself will fall into his own pit." When I was in high school one of my friends did not understand why I would not drink alcoholic beverages and tried to get me to do so. At that time in Texas, the minimum drinking age was twenty-one. When I got to college in New York State, it was eighteen. On another occasion this same friend bragged about his exploits in the back seat of his car.

The experience with my high school friend reminds me of a warning Paul gives us in 1 Cor. 15:33. "Evil company corrupts good habits." This is a truism that if you run with a fast crowd, you will soon start doing what the crowd does. The Lord took me out of that high school crowd with my job working on a ranch the summer after I graduated and then sent me 1,800 miles from home to a college in New York State. As I grew older I learned to be more discerning in my choice of friends. I thank God that I did not succumb to the pressures of those high school friends.

While believers can be led astray in their overt activities, they can also be led astray in their understanding of God's word. I had an aunt who was selected as a deaconess in her church. There also are churches who have women pastors. They ignore or re-interpret Paul's instructions to Timothy in 1 Tim. 3 that clearly teach that these church officials should be men.

When I was in college the only Bible we used was the *King James Bible*. The Ten Commandments in Exo. 20:13 included "Thou shall not kill." At an IVCF retreat we had a discussion as to what that meant. Was it limited to murder, or did it prohibit killing in war and capital punishment? We didn't know enough about the Bible to know that the Bible does prescribe capital punishment for certain crimes.

A church friend who graduated from a Baptist seminary and became a pastor adopted an idea from the world as well as what he learned in seminary that capital punishment was wrong. Someone had led him astray from a proper understanding of God's word.

Some people think that what the Bible says about homosexuality is hate speech. Anyone who teaches the Bible incorrectly, is leading his hearers astray.

"He himself will fall into his own pit." Leading astray is false teaching. The pit is a trap dug for an animal. When the animal falls into it, it finds it cannot get out. So a believer who follows false teaching can expect divine discipline in his life and the loss of future reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ. God holds each of us responsible for learning His word, and correctly applying it.

Then Solomon added, "But the blameless will inherit good." The "blameless" are those who don't lead their believing brothers astray. For us today to "inherit good" can be receiving rewards at our evaluation at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The first warning passage in Heb. 2:1-2 deals with believers who were in danger of being "led astray" by false teachers. "Therefore we must give the most earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape ..."



Prov. 28:11-12. The rich man *is* wise in his own eyes, But the poor who has understanding searches him out. When the righteous rejoice, *there is* great glory; But when the wicked arise, men hide themselves.

"The rich man is wise in his own eyes." At times we might speak of a well-known person in the community who is a "self-made man." He is successful in his businesses and the enterprises in which he participated. People in the community think well of him. He is asked to give opinions about many things. But no one achieves successes without the Lord allowing it. If the rich man is a believer, it may be that his wealth is a test from God. Will this "self-made man" give credit where credit is due? Will he recognize that he is where he is because of God's provision?

In reality, no one achieves success without others opening doors of opportunity. In 1990 a former employee of mine and also a friend came to me with an opportunity. He had resigned his position from the savings and loan association for which we both worked in 1974. We had remained friends. He was now president of another savings and loan. The federal regulators were requiring his bosses who owned the majority of the company to invest new capital. It was a five year plan and they were to buy new stock each year for \$10.00 per share. They wanted to sell their old stock for \$1.00 per share for tax reasons. Since my friend was an "insider," he could not buy the stock. Would I be interested? It was an investment that could end up worthless. But the association was making money and my friend knew what he was doing. I bought the stock. Seven years later the company was sold for \$50.00 per share. The truth of the matter is that there is no completely "self-made person." There are always other people who contribute to anyone's successes (or failures).

"The poor who has understanding searches him out." When this "self-made person" talks about how he built this successful enterprise, there are others who know better. Relatively speaking the proverb speaks of them as "the poor" in contrast to "the rich man." This "poor man" with wisdom knows that any person's success is through God's grace and provision.

Consider the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. The rich man was like Scrooge building up his material wealth. He gave no help to Lazarus. Both died and Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom, but the rich man was on the other side of a great gulf in torments in Hades. It was too late for the rich man to rectify his situation.

Then there was Nabal in 1 Sam. 25, a successful sheep and goat herder. He refused to help David when he was trying to keep out of Saul's clutches. Nabal's wife, Abigail, had better wisdom and saved Nabal from the repercussion of his actions. But the Lord came through with just discipline of Nabal.

"When the righteous rejoice, *there is* great glory. But when the wicked arise, men hide themselves." The clue to understanding this proverb is in the word "arise." When the leaders or rulers of a nation or political entity rise to power, those who have wisdom know to keep a low profile. They don't want to receive the brunt of the tyrannical actions of the wicked leaders. On the other hand, if you have a king like David or leaders like some of the past leaders of our country, then the righteous citizens rejoice and the nation experiences great glory. When the Antichrist enters the Temple in the middle of the Tribulation, the Jews in Jerusalem are told to flee to the mountains (Matt. 24:15-16). The people of Israel had to do the same in Judg. 6:2 when they were oppressed by the Midianites.



**Eurasian Collared Dove, Sanderson, Texas**

Prov. 28:19-22. He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, But he who follows frivolity will have poverty enough. A faithful man will abound with blessings, But he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished. To show partiality is not good, Because for a piece of bread one will transgress. A man with an evil eye hastens after riches, And does not know that poverty will come upon him.

"He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, But he who follows frivolity will have poverty enough." This first verse contrasts a person who takes care of his business, whatever it is. In the millennium before Christ, Israel was an agricultural economy, represented here as tilling your land. In today's world, it applies to doing the job our employer expects us to do and doing it well. The contrast is with a person who fritters away his time on non-essentials, called here frivolity.

Today, we have many more potential distractions. When I was active in business with many employees, the primary distraction concern was with employees spending too much time on personal telephone calls. One time, I had to talk to a person who was actively trading stocks and constantly checking on the status of his trades. Today, with cell phones and apps, computer games and other electronic devices, the opportunities for frivolity have multiplied.

"A faithful man will abound with blessings, But he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished." The verse is looking at a person who is faithful. He who does his job well is trustworthy. Since this is the Bible, we may think of a faithful man as one who is faithful to God. This verse is true in that sense, but it also has in mind a person who faithfully attends to the day to day requirements of his work: tilling the land, planting the seed, removing thorns and briars, and harvesting. The alternative approach is chasing pipe dreams, "hastens to be rich." I must do my job as to the Lord. Whatever God has given me to do, let me do it well and not be distracted by frivolity.

A person who "hastens to be rich" probably is disobeying the command against covetousness. I have seen people who lost so much money gambling that they could not pay their property taxes or their mortgage. When this happened, they lost their property through foreclosure. There are many other ways that may appear as a shortcut to riches. You have a good job and are well paid. But you hear about an opportunity that could pay you a lot more. Do you take it? This could be a decision calling for wisdom.

"To show partiality is not good, Because for a piece of bread one will transgress." It is easy to miss Solomon's point. The first statement is obvious, showing "partiality is not good." But what does that have to do with a piece of bread? A couple of commentaries say that the piece of bread is a bribe, to gain a favorable decision from another. How easily we can be tempted to favor one person over another for even a trivial consideration, "a crust of bread"?

"A man with an evil eye hastens after riches." The Bible translations handle this statement in different ways. The *Holman Christian Standard Bible* calls the person with an evil eye "a greedy man." Others call him "a stingy man." I take it that to "hasten after riches" is a person guilty of covetousness. Of the Ten Commandments this tenth commandment is the stealth commandment. It sneaks up on us and we don't even know we have broken it. Remember Heb. 13:5: "*Let your* conduct be without covetousness; *be* content with such things as you have." But don't fall into the trap of a Sunday School teacher I heard one time that said to be ambitious is wrong. It is OK to try to improve.

Prov. 29:22-23. An angry man stirs up strife, And a furious man abounds in transgression. A man's pride will bring him low, But the humble in spirit will retain honor.

These two verses are a good example showing us that proverbs contains many maxims. A maxim is a statement that is generally true. It is not an absolute promise or command.

"An angry man stirs up strife." In anger a person will say things he regrets later. Anger is also a sin. Eph. 4:26, is a difficult verse to understand and apply. It is normally translated with a command, "Be angry, and do not sin." The command "be angry" is in the passive voice. "I have heard a couple pastors translate it, "Though you have become angry (this reflects the passive voice), do not sin: Do not let the sun go down on your anger." At times we all face situations that we think are wrong. We experience a feeling of anger. We are not to let the anger take control of us in a sinful manner leading us to react in response to the anger. We are to cut off the emotional response, and apply Biblical principles to the situation. God gives us the ability to turn the anger off before it becomes sin.

"A furious man abounds in transgression." If we do not cut off the anger, we will be responding in sin. The elder brother of the prodigal son, in jealousy over his father's treatment of his returning brother, reacted in anger. Luke 15:28, "But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him."

Family relations are important. Many times friction will arise in families and there can be anger and discord between family members. When this happens they need to sit down together and work out the differences. Of course, this also applies in any situation when two people are at odds with each other. When two unrelated people can not reconcile, they can agree to go in opposite directions. But God created the family as a divine institution. Families have a responsibility to support and help family members. The same thing applies to believers in a church.

Jesus gave the overriding principle in John 13:34. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

"A man's pride will bring him low. But the humble in spirit will retain honor." Satan's pride was the first sin ever committed. Isa. 14:12-15 tells us, "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *How* you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation ...; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit."

Pride is a major driver for our sin natures. I want to do things my way. My sin nature wants me to think that I don't always have to do what God or anyone else tells me to do. In Col. 3:12-14 Paul wrote to the Colossians, "As *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection." If I have a "complaint against another," I am not to become angry. I need to forgive the wrong, and respond in love. This takes humility. This is how God wants me to live.

Prov. 30:2-6. Surely I am more stupid than any man, And do not have the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom Nor have knowledge of the Holy One. Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name, if you know? Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.

Prov. 30:1 identifies an unknown writer, Agur. He is speaking to two other unknown persons, Ithiel and Ucal. Could they be his sons? I learned a lot from my father. Even when I was in college, there were times when my parents would correct me. Prov. 3:12 compares God's discipline of believers with the loving actions of a father. "For whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son *in whom* he delights."

When I was in graduate school studying business, my father was an excellent sounding board for the stuff I was hearing in class from my professors. His thirty plus years of experience in business was an excellent resource for me in my studies.

The "Who has " questions in Prov. 30:4 point to God's infinite power. God has created this world including every one of us. Science has tried to find other answers to the existence of the universe, developing its own system of myths. The ancient world had its own mythologies involving many gods: Jupiter, Venus, Mars, etc. Today's myths talk about such unproven speculations as a Big Bang, evolution and climate change. All of these leave God out of the analysis, are unproved, and contain inconsistencies and violations of known and provable "scientific laws."

"What is His name?" This question is asking what do I know about the character and nature of God? "What is His Son's name?" This question is not asking about Jesus Christ as is implied by the capitalized words, but is asking if anyone else possesses the unique character and nature of God who created this world in which I live. Yes, Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but not because He is the born progeny of God. Jesus Christ is the Son of God because He has the same exact character and nature of God. The three members of the Godhead are eternal, having always existed.

"Who has ascended into heaven, or descended?" Jesus spoke in John 3:13, "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven."

Prov. 30:5-6 talks about God's word. The only way we know about God is because He has chosen to reveal Himself to us. He has done so through His creation of this universe. But also through His revealed word in the Bible. God is my shield and protector when I put my trust in Him. Not just for my eternal salvation, but for each day of my life.

"Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar." The final verses in Rev. 22:18-19 echo this warning. "I testify to one who hears the words of the prophecy contained in this book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book; And if anyone takes away from the words of this book of prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city that are described in this book" (*NET Bible*). I find this a warning to be accurate in handling God's word.

Prov. 30:24-28. There are four things which are little on the earth, But they are exceedingly wise: The ants are a people not strong, Yet they prepare their food in the summer; The rock badgers are a feeble folk, Yet they make their homes in the crags; The locusts have no king; Yet they all advance in ranks; The spider skillfully grasps with its hands; And it is found in kings' palaces.

Agur, the author of this chapter (Prov. 30:1), appears to have had an interest in nature. God has created an amazing world in which we live. We can enjoy its beauties and wonders. We have no idea what the original creation was like before the fall of Adam and Eve. God has promised that He will restore it for us in eternity in the New Heaven and New Earth.

All of nature displays a phenomenal balance. All my life, I have heard people comment on how quickly the weather can change in Texas. As the saying goes, "If you don't like the weather, wait a bit and it will change."

A millennium ago, the Norsemen visited Greenland and named it. Why did they call it Greenland? Because it was a large green island, covered with green vegetation. Not the icy glacier-laden place it is today.

Years ago, my Aunt Dot loaned me a diary written nearly two centuries ago, which described a couple of very harsh, cold winters in New Hampshire. The descriptions were difficult to imagine, because today the winters there are milder. Climate change is nothing new. God created a balancing mechanism with our weather, so it warms and cools over multi-century long cycles.

Life is full of what some scientists describe as "irreducible complexity." This term refers to multiple parts of each created thing, with multiple functions that are all required to be in place for life to exist. If one part is missing, there is no life. For the myth of evolution to be true, then all of the parts and functions had to develop simultaneously. God created all life during the six creation days of Genesis 1.

The current issue (July-August, 2023) of *Acts and Facts* published by the Institute for Creation Research has an article on Pale Pitcher Plants. They thrive in marshy areas of the Big Thicket in east Texas. I have seen these plants on my birding excursions to the area. I knew that the plants were carnivorous. But I learned even more from the article. Here are some descriptions from the article. "Pitcher-shaped leaves grow after the flowers fade. Each pitcher looks like a vase made out of one leaf with a hood like a tiny tarp draped over the opening. ... The hood's underside and the pitcher's lip manufacture nectar laced with a narcotic." Insects are attracted to the pitcher because of the sweet nectar. "The drug makes them sluggish. Fine inward- and downward-pointing hairs positioned on the hood's underside and the pitcher's lip nudge the prey toward the plant tube." Here the insects are trapped and are digested as food for the plant. I knew that part of the story. But what was new to me is this. The flowers themselves produce a different nectar that attracts bees. The flowers are constructed with kind of a one way road through each flower. The bees enter one side, but must exit another way. That way when the bees pick up pollen from one flower it can be transferred to the next flower the bee visits. This avoids self-pollination and inbreeding.

I have over-simplified the article in this summarization. These plants reflect God's amazing design. There is no way this could have developed by the random mutations evolution requires. Sorry, I don't have my own photos of these amazing plants. I didn't have a good camera for nature photography back then. The plants are accessible by easy walking trails and boardwalks with free access in the Big Thicket National Preserve.

Eccl. 11:9-10; 12:1. Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; Walk in the ways of your heart, And in the sight of your eyes; But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, And put away evil from your flesh, For childhood and youth *are* vanity. Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them":

In his old age Solomon is giving advice to younger people. But even for me as an old man, there is wisdom here to be learned and to follow. Solomon is known for his wisdom. Solomon's wisdom was a gift from God. In 1 Kings 3:5-15. Solomon had a dream in which God asks Solomon, "Ask! What shall I give you?" Solomon asks for wisdom and understanding. God is pleased with Solomon's request and promises him wisdom and says that He will also give Solomon wealth and riches.

The list of great people of faith in the Heb. 11 "Hall of Faith" begins with Abel and ends with David. Solomon is not listed. God let Solomon build the Temple in Jerusalem. Solomon wrote almost all of three Old Testament books with words of wisdom he received from God. But let me suggest that God may not have provided Solomon with wisdom through deep brain stimulation. He allowed Solomon to build up wisdom through the many experiences he had in life as detailed in Ecclesiastes. Solomon has now passed on to us this wisdom in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. Solomon's first marriage was to a daughter of Pharaoh. With this marriage came the worship of idols in Israel. Both the marriage and idol worship violated the Law God gave to Israel through Moses. In gaining wisdom, Solomon learned from the mistakes he made in his life.

As the apostle Paul wrote, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content" (Phil. 4:11). If you are young, enjoy it. I am older, so I, too, need to accept the circumstances that I face and be content with what the Lord has for me.

"Walk in the ways of your heart." Solomon is not giving young people a free license to practice whatever their sinful nature would lead them to do. "God will bring you into judgment." For the youth of Solomon's day, the Law of Moses needed to be followed and obeyed. Solomon included this judgment warning. Violating Moses' Law could incur harsh punishment. So, yes, young people, pursue the pleasures of your youth, but do not forget God and obedience to His word.

"Remove sorrow from your heart." It looks like Bible translators did not quite know what to do with the Hebrew word translated "sorrow." Various translations render it as "vexation," "anxiety," "emotional stress," and "grief and anger." The message to me is to enjoy life. Pay attention to Phil. 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing." But to do this I need to know God's word, so I can walk the path which He would have me to walk. "For all these God will bring *me* into judgment."

Remembering my Creator is not a casual thought here or there. Solomon is telling me to make following God the focus of my life.

Finally, the time will come, and for some of us it is sooner rather than later, when I just cannot do all the things that I used to do and enjoy. Again in the words of Paul, "I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Phil. 4:12).



**Mute Swan (not wild, a park bird), near Fulshear, Texas**

Eccl. 12:12-14. And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books *there is* no end, and much study *is* wearisome to the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.

These verses close the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon is known for his great wisdom. He started out well, but did not end up so well. These closing words may be the realization of his failures. Under the Old Testament Law, the children of Israel were not to marry foreign wives. Why? Because the foreign wives would bring with them the worship of idols and "foreign gods." So what did Solomon do? He multiplied his wives. To keep them happy he built places for them to worship their foreign gods who were no gods at all. God eventually disciplined the nation after Solomon died with the division of the kingdom of Israel into two separate kingdoms, called Israel and Judah.

So as Solomon looks back on his life, which he does in Ecclesiastes, he recalls all the great works he has done. They are all "vanity," self-aggrandizement. He wanted to build up his own ego as we would say in our Freudian-speak today. Solomon took the wisdom that he had learned the hard way under the guidance of God and wrote Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and most of the book of Proverbs. "Of the making of many books *there is* no end."

"And much study *is* wearisome to the flesh." I can spend a lifetime studying all the world's religions, cults, and worldly philosophies, comparing them and trying to find the best answers to the questions of this life. I will never exhaust all there is to learn about these. God has given me the true answers in His word. It is better to focus on learning God's truth from His word. As Dr. Warren Wiersbe says in his commentary on Ecclesiastes, *Be Satisfied*, "Our textbook is the Bible and the Holy Spirit is our Teacher." I should seek out gifted Bible teachers who teach God's word.

Then his final conclusion: "Fear God and keep his commandments." We use the word "fear" today in a different sense from how we have it here. Solomon was saying to trust God, to have faith in Him. Obey God's word. How can I obey God's word, if I do not know what God's word says?

God has given me everything He wants me to know about Him: beginning in the book of Genesis, all the way through to Revelation. Even after seventy years of Bible study, I can still learn more.

The judgment that Solomon mentions was what had been revealed in Moses' Law. Here is the promise in Lev. 26: 3-4. "If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit." God promised Israel that if they obeyed Him, they would prosper. But if they did not obey the Law, He would discipline them. Eventually both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom were conquered in turn by Assyria and Babylon and went into captivity. Christ came and the Jews did not recognize Him and place their faith in Him and the Romans destroyed the Temple and Jerusalem.

For us today, we have a more complete revelation from God, including the New Testament, and the promise of a future judgment with rewards to follow for those who walk faithfully in obedience to God's word. We are no longer under the Law of Moses which was given to Israel. We are under grace. Paraphrasing Heb. 12:28, "Let me have grace, by which I may serve God acceptably in reverence and godly fear."

Song of Solomon 8:12-14. <sup>12</sup> My own vineyard *is* before me. You, O Solomon, *may have* a thousand, And those who tend its fruit two hundred. <sup>13</sup> You who dwell in the gardens, The companions listen for your voice—Let me hear it! <sup>14</sup> Make haste, my beloved, And be like a gazelle Or a young stag On the mountains of spices.

I have not memorized any verses from the Song of Solomon and so it is the only book of the Bible that has not been a subject for one of these devotionals I have written during the last eighteen months. SOS 1:1 names Solomon as the author. He is again mentioned in the third person here at the end of the book. I have heard this book taught twice. The first time was perhaps 40-50 years ago. I don't remember the details of the interpretation then, but they differ in ways from what I heard four years ago. This last study was presented by Dr. Mark McGinniss at a Bible Conference covering Old Testament subjects. Dr. McGinniss is a professor at Bible Baptist Seminary in Pennsylvania.

The book is a poem, presented as a song. It tells a story of two fictional people who are married. They are very much in love with each other. There are times of separation when they desire to be back together. The book begins with separation and ends with separation. Their love for each other is forever, so this ending is not an end. Marriage is forever, or as my wife and I said in our marriage vows, "till death do us part." There are several sections or movements (one commentator called them strophes whatever that means.) in this song and they are not chronological.

In verse 12 above the Shulamite wife is speaking. But Solomon wrote this story. Through her words he recognizes what he has missed out in his life. The verse rounds up the number of wives and concubines he has to one thousand. The Old Testament Law (Deut. 17:17) forbid Israel's kings from multiplying wives for themselves. Solomon's many wives brought idol worship into Israel.

Dr. McGinniss had this to say, "Song of Solomon is a love story between a couple who revel in their strong love for each other. Through the use of intimate dialogue, this couple shares their desire to be together when separated and passionately enjoy each other when they are together." He also said, "This fictional couple invites every married couple who are wise to enjoy their own celebration of love at the proper time. And it also encourages singles to not arouse this dangerous emotion until the proper time." Sexual intimacy in marriage is not just for procreation but also for recreation.

The husband lover speaks in verse 13. The "companions" of whom he speaks are the "daughters of Jerusalem" who throughout this song express the thoughts of the Shulamite wife. In verse 14 the Shulamite wife speaks.

This is a literal, historical, grammatical, interpretation of this book. There have been many allegorical interpretations, but there is nothing in the story to suggest allegory. While it is true that God loved His chosen people, Israel, and Christ loves the Church, why superimpose these approaches on the text? When a person uses allegory to interpret the Bible, then it can mean anything the allegorist wants it to say.

God established marriage for the human race and said in Gen. 2:18, "It is not good that man should be alone." This book gives details for marriage not covered elsewhere in the Bible.



Mississippi Kite, near Fulshear, Texas



Matt. 5:1-4. And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed *are* those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.

Matthew chapters 5 through 7 are known as the Sermon on the Mount, probably Jesus' most famous sermon. To whom was Jesus speaking? Matt. 5:1 says "when He was seated His disciples came to Him." Some Bible teachers think He was addressing His twelve disciples when He started this message. But in Matt. 7:28 when Jesus finished this sermon, it says, "the people were astonished at His teaching." So did others come up the mountain while He was speaking and join the original disciples? Or was Matt. 5:1 speaking of a larger group of disciples who were following Jesus and doing what disciples do, i.e. learning from a teacher whom they were following? That is what the word "disciple" actually means, a "learner."

Either way, I think I am on safe ground to say that Jesus was addressing Jews and describing how they should live in preparation for entry into the future kingdom that God has promised to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Sermon on the Mount does not teach us how to be saved. People who understand the sermon in that way end up with a salvation by works and not by faith alone in Christ alone.

Another issue that makes understanding these verses difficult is that there are many divergent views today of what the "kingdom of heaven" is. Two thousand years ago, the Jews who heard Jesus knew exactly what kingdom about which He was talking. John the Baptist came and then Jesus and His disciples followed. They both taught: "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." If the Jewish people as a whole had believed in Jesus as their promised Messiah, there never would have been a Church. They did not believe and God's promises of a kingdom to Israel has been postponed.

In Matt. 12 the Jewish leaders accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebub, Satan. At that point Jesus' ministry changes and he no longer teaches "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The kingdom is still future. We know it today as the Millennium. We are not in the kingdom today. Jesus is not ruling the world as King or sovereign. Satan is still the ruler of the world. Luke 4:5-6.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This does not refer to entrance into the kingdom, but that those who understand their desperate need for Christ, their Savior, and having believed in Him, the future Kingdom is their current possession. They are not now in the Kingdom, but God assures them they will be a part of it.

Believers in Jesus Christ have many reasons to mourn. We see the sin in the world. We see tremendous suffering in the world because of Adam's fall. God has given us hope and comfort through His word, and particularly through prophecy. In 1 Thess. 4:18 after the prophecy of Jesus' return for the Church it says, "Therefore comfort one another with these words." In John 14:1, before Jesus announced the promise of the future Rapture of the Church, He said, "Let not your heart be troubled." God's word and promises are a comfort to us.

While Jesus was speaking to the Jews and this is a very Jewish sermon, it contains important messages for us today. The ways the Jews needed to live in preparation for the future kingdom, are ways we also should live today. When I see the world glorifying sinful actions and lifestyles, I should not accept these as normal. I need to learn more of God's word, so I will think the way God wants me to think. I don't want to be misled by every new "-ism" with which the world comes up."

Matt. 5:5-9. Blessed *are* the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. Blessed *are* the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy. Blessed *are* the pure in heart, For they shall see God. Blessed *are* the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

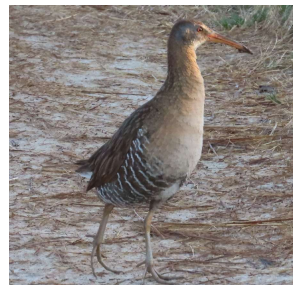
"Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth." It is better to think of "the earth" as referring to "the land," i.e. the land promised to Abraham. Jesus will one day rule the whole world from Jerusalem in the Promised Land of Israel. Many commentaries refer to "meek" as gentle restraint, not as weak. People who do not insist on their own rights. The word "meek" only appears three other times in the New Testament. In Matt. 11:29, Jesus spoke of Himself: "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle (meek, humble), and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." This is the same Jesus who twice threw the money-changers out of the temple. The same Jesus who in Matt. 23 openly condemned the scribes and Pharisees in very strong terms, not the least of which was calling them, "serpents, brood of vipers." Probably the best way to understand this word, "meek" is a person who recognizes those who are in authority over him and willingly obeys that authority. Our ultimate authority, of course, is God.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled." The righteousness mentioned here is the way I should live as a believer in Jesus Christ. This is right living in obedience to what God commands me to do in His word. How are these believers filled? If they truly hunger and thirst for righteousness, then they will demonstrate righteousness in their lives. When they stumble and commit sin, they keep short accounts with God, confessing those sins. God cleanses them from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). But ultimately in the promised kingdom, "The Sun of Righteousness (Jesus Christ, the Messiah) shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves" (Mal. 4:3). Righteousness will be a characteristic of the promised kingdom. It certainly does not describe our present world.

"Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy" at the Sheep and Goats Judgment for entry into the Kingdom (Matt. 25:31-46). For me, as a Church age believer, I will appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ. God will not bring up all my sins for which Jesus died. He will also ignore all the worthless good deeds, I have done for my glory and not for God's glory. If I have done anything in obedience to His word, utilizing the power of the Holy Spirit in my life, that He will consider.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God." Considering 1 John 1:9, are the "pure in heart" those who have regularly and faithfully confessed each sin they commit and received God's cleansing? Before Houston had a major league baseball team, we had a minor league team called the Houston Buffaloes or Buffs. They had a "knothole gang" with special privileges of some sort. The term "knothole gang" referred to children who would stand behind the wooden backfield fence and watch the game through knotholes. Could it be that some believers when they get to the Kingdom will be watching Jesus through a knothole in the city wall, or maybe on the top row in the end zone, while others will be sitting on the front row behind their favorite disciple's dugout?

"Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God." Jesus came to bring peace for men with God. Believers are reconciled to God. Believers who make peace with other people with whom they have contact, are doing what Jesus would do. In that sense they are described as sons of God.



**Clapper Rail, Galveston Island State Park, Texas**

Matt. 5:10-12. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

This is the final promise of blessing in these beatitudes. It differs from the others, in that the previous seven tell us things that we should be doing. This eighth blessing tells us how to expect the world to treat us. We all enjoy our creature comforts. In the USA we have grown up in a nation founded on Judeo-Christian principles. During my lifetime I have seen increasing hostility toward those who seek to live the Christian life as the Bible describes it.

The gym teacher who taught my public high school biology class did not teach us evolution. Now what do they teach? Some people would like to have the ideas of the world about gender identity taught and how you can change your gender. What do English teachers today say about the proper use of pronouns? Do today's history teachers treat our founding father's as scum or bigoted because they did not conform to today's racist standards? Are the people of the world who are promoting these ideas and many others demonstrating the ideals of the first seven beatitudes? Are they poor in spirit, recognizing their own shortcomings? Do they mourn over the evil they see in the world? Are they submissive to those in authority or do they make their own rules? Do they seek to do things in the right way? Do they show mercy to others? Are their own motives pure? Do they seek peace with others or stir up trouble on their own?

The people of Israel lived in Egypt and prospered for a time. Then Pharaoh enslaved them. David saved the army of Israel from Goliath and played the harp to soothe Saul's nerves. Then Saul in jealousy sought to kill him. The story of Daniel and the lion's den was a favorite when I was growing up. Of Jesus' disciples only John died a natural death, but even that was while in exile on the Island of Patmos. "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Everyone of the believers described in Matt. 5:3-10, from those "poor in spirit" to those "persecuted for righteousness' sake" will be in God's promised Kingdom. But Matt. 5:12 adds lagniappe on top of our eternity with God in the form of additional reward. "Lagniappe" is something extra. It is the whipped cream and cherry on top of a milk shake at Jack in the Box, which Whataburger's milk shake does not have.

So when I run into conflict with the world's thinking and ideas, how do I handle it? Do I rearrange "the furniture in my life" to conform to the world? Some people teach falsely that the apostle Paul was a misogynist. He had it all wrong about women teaching in church. Women pastor's are OK. Back in my college days everyone used the *King James Bible*. We had a discussion at an IVCF retreat about the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." A childhood friend of mine went to a seminary in Fort Worth and became a pastor. He was against capital punishment. But Gen. 9:6 is clear, "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed." Today our legal system largely ignores this verse, as do a lot of churches.

Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Tim. 3:12, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." I do not want to compromise how God wants me to live by trying to adapt my thinking and actions to the way the world thinks.



**Common Nighthawk, Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, Texas**

Matt. 6:19-21. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; "but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The primary issue in this passage is what are my priorities? In the previous 18 verses in Matthew 6, Jesus had warned his disciples about doing things for the praise of men. In Matt. 6:1 He said, "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven."

In verse 5, "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward." In verse 16 He said the same thing about fasting.

Do I do what I do for the praise of other people? If this is the way I live my life, do I think I will hear the Lord say, "Well done, good and faithful servant"?

Many commentaries also point out that the issues here include the sin of covetousness and the accumulation of material wealth. Verse 24 warns us that "We cannot serve God and money" (or "wealth"). There is nothing wrong with providing for your family and practicing what I call the "Joseph principle." God told Joseph that Egypt would have seven years of plenty that would be followed by seven years of famine. The Pharaoh at the time made Joseph his chief administrator and Joseph stored up the excess produce of the land for seven years in preparation for the coming famine. We should follow Joseph's example. Out of every paycheck we should set aside a portion to be given to the Lord's work and a portion should go into savings and investments.

The issue is priorities. Is serving the Lord the first priority in my life? Is prayer a regular part of my life, not only saying grace before meals or praying when asked at church or by others? Do I pray on my own? Do I spend time regularly reading and studying the Bible? Do I not forsake "the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, exhorting one another" (Heb. 10:25)?

The Sermon on the Mount is all about how believers in Jesus Christ should live their lives. Are these priorities in my life? Do I grieve over the direction the world is going in rejecting God? Am I meek, submitting to those in authority over me? Do I seek to practice righteousness, obeying God's commands? Do I show mercy to others? Do I confess my sins, naming particular sins I commit? Do I seek peace with people with whom I come into contact? Do I rejoice in adversity and persecution, or do I react in a different way? Do I get angry when I am wronged? How often do I lie? Do I love my enemies? Matthew chapter 5 sets a high standard for how we should live our lives. This is not how we should live so God will let us into His kingdom. This is how I should live because He has already given me a passport into His kingdom. But note the number of times Jesus mentions the potential for rewards in the promised Kingdom. Our God is a God of justice. While He says He will punish unbelievers, He also promises treasures to believers who obey Him.

Col. 3:3 "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." Matt. 6:21, For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." So what is important in my life?



*Two ugly geese (non-native) Egyptian Goose, Blanco, Texas*

Matt. 6:25-34. "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; "and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, *will He* not much more *clothe* you, O you of little faith? "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

This is a long passage of 10 verses. Six times Jesus tells us "Do not worry." Paul tells us in Phil. 4:7, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God." Both Jesus in this passage and Paul in the context in Philippians refers to the basic necessities of life: food, drink and clothing. Without food and water we will not live long in this world. What is the alternative? Jesus is speaking to Jewish believers. He compares them to pagan unbelievers whom He calls "Gentiles." "After all these things the Gentiles seek." God has already determined the time when I will check out of this life, and enter into eternity. Unbelievers do not have the same outlook as I do.

"Look at the birds of the air, ... your heavenly Father feeds them." Even the cardinals have to find seeds to eat and crack them with their bill. Hawks need to search out mice to eat. Vultures fly through the sky looking for dead animals, so we don't have to smell spoiled meat for days. So God is not going to feed us just because we play video games on our smart phones all day (or whatever else we might do) rather than working to provide for our families and others.

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." What is the first priority in my life? Did I skip over the word "first" when I read this verse? God is faithful. He provides everything that we as believers (and also unbelievers) need. But Jesus is not telling unbelievers in this verse, how they may enter the Kingdom of God. He is telling His believing disciples that righteousness, and the way we live our lives now should be of first importance as we prepare for our future in God's Kingdom.

The last verse is interesting. "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." I am sure that others have done as I have done and kept myself awake all night worrying about some big event coming up the next day. I like what Solomon said in Prov. 16:9. "A man's heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps." Yes, God expects us to plan for the future. But even with the best laid plans, sometimes God throws what appears to be a curve ball at us. He has better ideas. So I need to make my plans and move on.

"Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." Problems happen because I live in a fallen world. In His word God has given me solutions to every situation I will face. I need to solve them God's way.



**Fulvous Whistling Duck, Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, Texas**



Matt. 12:25-28. But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. "If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? "And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? Therefore they shall be your judges. "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

These verses mark a turning point in Jesus' earthly ministry. They also come in the middle of a paragraph that runs from verses 22 to 30. Prior to this time Jesus and His disciples had been teaching openly that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. From now on He will teach in parables and He will also include Gentiles in His ministry. The Kingdom has been postponed and was no longer "at hand."

Looking at the context. Verse 22: "Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw." The multitudes who were not ignorant of the Old Testament picked up on the significance of this trifecta miracle. This is a miracle that only the Messiah could do. So they asked a question expecting a positive answer, "Could this be the Son of David?" The Pharisees say "No way, He did this miracle under the power of Satan" (Beelzebub).

Jesus' responds that the Pharisees' thoughts and rebuttal were irrational and absurd. Not only that, but by what power do the Pharisees' sons cast out demons? And yes, it was possible that they could have actually cast out demons. Acts 19:13 gives us an example: "... Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits." Even today there are people who claim to work miracles. Are they real miracles? Whether real or not, always evaluate their message against what the word of God teaches.

Jesus tells us that He performed this miracle by the power of the Holy Spirit. "If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you."

The context also includes the unforgivable sin (verse 32). "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him." There have been many explanations of the unforgivable sin. The one I prefer is based on the context. What was lost in this condemnation by Jesus of the Pharisees, the leaders of Israel? The Kingdom promised to Israel was postponed. That postponement has now run more than 2,000 years. We understand that Nicodemus, a Pharisee, and Joseph of Arimathea were saved, as well a several thousands of Jews in the book of Acts. Even these Pharisees could receive the eternal forgiveness of their sins if they placed their faith in Jesus Christ before they died. The loss of forgiveness was a temporal loss. As leaders of the Jewish people, they lost the opportunity for the nation to see the Kingdom in their own lifetime.

This is the temporal forgiveness we find in 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Eternal forgiveness is a gift of God when we believe in Jesus Christ. As we live our lives, sin interrupts our relationship and fellowship with God. This is a temporal loss in time. Naming our sins to God restores our fellowship with Him. I thank God for the Bible teachers and pastors who have taught this to me.



**Gray Catbird, Sabine Woods Sanctuary, Sabine Pass, Texas**

Matt. 16:16-19. Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Jesus and His disciples have now left the Jewish region of Galilee to go to the largely Gentile area of Caesarea Philippi. Jesus first asks His disciples, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" After the disciples' answer, He then asks them, "who do you say that I am?" Peter's answer identifies Jesus correctly as Israel's promised Messiah and affirms His deity. The term "son of ..." was not always used in the sense of speaking of a person's progeny, but often to state an equivalence. So Jesus called Himself, the Son of Man." He was a human being like all of us. Peter's calling Jesus the "Son of God" is stating that Jesus was God.

"You are Peter and on this rock I will build My church." We know who Peter is, but who is "this rock." A church was formed from one of the ways this statement is understood. As a good Baptist 70 years ago, I was taught that "this rock" was Peter's statement, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Today, I hear Bible teachers say what is probably a better approach. That is "this rock" is actually Jesus Christ. In 1 Pet. 2:4 Peter described Jesus as "a living stone." Eph. 2:20 calls Christ "the chief cornerstone." In 2 Sam. 22:2 David calls the Lord, "my rock." All we have here in Matthew are the words of Jesus, but could His gestures also have been pointing to Himself when He made this statement? He also said "I will build My church."

"Church"? What is that? This is the first mention of the Church in the Bible. The Old Testament tells us nothing about the Church. Jesus began His ministry announcing that the promised Kingdom was at hand. In Matt. 12:25-28 the Jewish leadership reject Him as the Messiah and the arrival of the Kingdom is postponed. Jesus and His disciples have now left the land of the Jews and are in Gentile country. The Church is a new idea and this passage does not tell us a lot about it.

"The gates of Hades will not prevail against it." The "gates of Hades" are best understood as the realm of death. Jesus is alluding to His coming death and crucifixion. He will build His Church, and even His death will not stand in the way.

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." What is the key that will unlock the door to the God's promised Kingdom? The gospel message is the only key that provides admission to the Kingdom. Peter presented the gospel message on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, to the Samaritans in Acts 8, and to a Gentile, Cornelius, in Acts 10.

All of Jesus' apostles likewise carried the gospel message throughout the world. As Paul said to the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:31, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." When I present the gospel to others, their decision to believe or not to believe determines if I have bound them on earth or have loosed them on earth. Binding and loosing was not an exclusive right given to Peter, but includes all believers. The *NETBible* and the *Holman Christian Standard Bible* best translate Matt. 16:19. The *Holman Christian Standard Bible* says, "Whatever you bind on earth is already bound in heaven." The *NETBible*, "Whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven." My part is to tell others about Jesus Christ.

Matt. 28:18-20. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age.*" Amen.

The final two verses of Matthew (28:19-20) are on most lists of memory verses that Christians have. These are called the Great Commission, Jesus' final marching orders for us as believers.

"All authority has been given to Me." Jesus is God. What does it mean that He needs someone, i.e. God the Father, to give Him all authority? Jesus in His deity has all authority. God the Father now has given Jesus in His humanity, all authority. In the temptations by Satan, Satan offered to give to Jesus authority over all the kingdoms of the world. At the time Satan was, and he still is, the ruler over this world. For this to have been a valid offer and a true temptation to Jesus' humanity, Jesus (in His humanity) did not possess that authority at the time of Luke 4. We see in Matt. 28:18 the uniqueness of Jesus. He is one of the three members of the Godhead, yet also truly human.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, He and His disciples, ministered to Israel, and then after Jesus' rejection by Israel in Matthew 12, they ministered briefly to others outside of Israel. Now, we as believers in Jesus Christ are commissioned to carry the message to all nations, to the whole world.

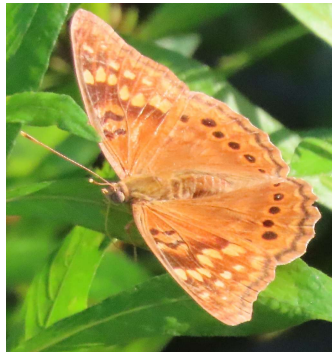
"Make disciples." A disciple is a learner. This commission is first to teach the world about Jesus Christ and His death, burial and resurrection. If a person believes, God has promised that He will forgive their sins and give them eternal life. When a person believes, God then saves them. As a sign of a person's faith in Jesus Christ, Jesus says: baptize them.

"Baptizing them." Although the Bible speaks of different baptisms, such as, baptism by means of the Holy Spirit, this is generally understood to be water baptism of believers in Jesus Christ. The only form of baptism practiced at the time was by immersion. For believers in Jesus Christ it pictured the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptizing identifies believers with Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. It is not necessary for a person's eternal salvation. For example, the thief crucified at the same time as Jesus was, believed, but never was baptized.

"Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Jesus refers to Himself and as one of the three persons of the Godhead. We call this the Trinity, the "three in one." We worship one God. But God is in three persons. Each shares the same essence and attributes. The Trinity, i.e. the Tri-unity of God, allows for one of the three persons of the Godhead, i.e. Jesus Christ, to become a man and to die in my place. We cannot fully understand the mystery of the Trinity. But it shows the magnificence of our great God and His plan for us.

"Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." He did not command them to teach new believers to keep the Law of Moses which was given to Israel. We as believers are not under the Old Testament law. The New Testament tells us how we should live our lives.

Finally, Jesus' wonderful promise to empower and enable me to carry out His Great Commission, "I am with you always, *even to the end of the age.*" Amen."



**Tawny Emperor, butterfly, Houston, Texas**



Mark 10:42-45. But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. "And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Jesus is responding to a question put to Him by the two brothers, James and John, two of Jesus' disciples. James and John had asked Jesus that when He came into His Kingdom that they could sit one on Jesus' left hand and the other on the right. When the other disciples heard about this, they were not happy. "But Jesus called them to Himself." Jesus acts as a peacemaker here to calm down the animosity and jealousy that had arisen among His disciples.

Jesus' response to His disciples was not the first time He taught this. Looking back at Mark 9:35, He had said: "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." Sometimes, I can be hard of listening myself. There are times when I only hear what I want to hear.

Here was Jesus' answer to James and John from Mark 10:40, "to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared." Now I had to think about this a bit to figure out what Jesus was saying. Because in John 5:22, Jesus said: "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son." So who makes the decision of the disciples' position in Jesus' kingdom? Does God the Father, or does Jesus do it because the Father has committed all judgment to the Son? I take it that in eternity past when God planned everything that would happen in His creation of the heavens and earth, He predetermined who would be sitting on Jesus' right hand and left hand in His Kingdom, but Jesus will write the report card.

By using Gentiles as an example, Jesus reminded His disciples that as a general rule the Gentiles received their authority through hereditary rank, or by their own strength in conquering their enemies. Also they held those positions until someone stronger came along. In contrast those who will be great or of first rank in the future Kingdom of God will be those who have served well during their lives now. Jesus points to Himself as the example of service for us to follow.

Also, read the passage again. Did Jesus rebuke James and John or the other disciples for wanting to be top dogs in His future Kingdom. Whatever my role in the future Kingdom, either the 1,000 year Millennium on earth, or in the New Heaven and New Earth of eternity, I will be happy with it. As one preacher put it recently, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, each believer will have a cup which Jesus will fill. Some will have a small demitasse, but others may have a Texas sized jug. As we are living our lives today in obeying God's commands and meeting the challenges and adversities of life in a godly manner, we are developing our capacity to enjoy and appreciate our eternity with God. We all have eternal life. There will be no more tears, sorrow, or death (Rev. 21:4).

Later, Jesus made an amazing promise to His disciples. Luke 22:29-30. "And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." He hasn't said who will be at His right hand or left hand, but the disciples will be over Israel. May we all hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Do I do what I do for the glory of God, or am I trying to build myself up?

Mark 16:14-18. Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; "they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

This passage is a part of a textual variant. Our modern translations suggest that this text was not a part of the original written by Mark. This is primarily based on three reasons. First, the final twelve verses of this chapter are omitted in two of the four oldest manuscripts from which our modern translations were made. Second, some of the subject matter in these verses is difficult to reconcile with other parts of the Bible. Third, the style of the Greek appears to be different from the earlier chapters of Mark. But the other two of the oldest manuscripts of the Greek text as well as the majority of other Greek texts do include these final verses in Mark.

My approach to understanding textual variants is to look at the context and to try to understand what the author of Scripture is trying to say and not to be swayed by theological pre-conceptions. I recently heard our pastor of missions teach these verses. He has been a missionary in Russia and Ukraine for thirty years.

"Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table." Jesus is addressing His eleven disciples. This is after His resurrection and is probably one of His early post-resurrection appearances. "He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen." The disciples still had not fully grasped the fact that Jesus was alive again.

"And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.'" This sounds like the Great Commission of Matt. 28:19-20. But Matt. 28:19-20 was spoken on a mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16). These are two different events. The instructions are similar, but the situation is different. The disciples were already saved, they were having a hard time believing Jesus was alive. So Jesus tells His disciples, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." The disciples had certainly previously been baptized by water. The Bible speaks of at least seven different kinds of baptisms. Since the disciples had previously been baptized, to what baptism is Jesus referring? Mark speaks of water baptism in Mark 1:8. But he also spoke of baptism in Mark 10:49. This latter baptism is sometimes called the baptism of the cup and refers to being identified to a degree with the sufferings Christ experienced. The disciples will indeed suffer greatly as they carry the gospel throughout the world. The "will be saved" part is the disciples' deliverance through suffering.

"And these signs will follow those who believe." Jesus is still speaking about the future ministry the disciples will have on His behalf. Mark 16:17-18 speak of the signs that Jesus said the disciples would do. These are not signs that should be expected for any person other than the disciples whom Jesus was addressing. The Bible confirms that every one of these signs, except the drinking of poison was done by the disciples, plus Paul's experience with the venomous snake in Acts 28:3.

This approach gives me a new appreciation for this passage. Is this the correct understanding? It makes sense, but we may have to wait until we can ask Jesus in heaven. I don't blindly buy the argument that the older manuscripts are better. There are too many differences between the four earliest manuscripts. As noted above it was a vote of two manuscripts including these verses as a part of God's word and two for excluding them.

Luke 1:35-37. And the angel answered and said to her, "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.*"

The angel Gabriel has announced to Mary that she will bear a son. She asks Gabriel how this could be possible for she was still a virgin. So the angel answered: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you." Jesus' birth was a miracle only God could accomplish. From this verse it appears that both God the Father and the Holy Spirit were involved in this miracle.

Because of the virgin birth of Jesus, Jesus entered the world untainted by Adam's sin. Some theologians say of Jesus because He was deity, that "He was not able to sin." But they also add that since Jesus was true humanity. "He was able not to sin." When I was born into this world, Adam's sin was imputed to me. I was also born with a sinful nature because I had a human father who also had a sinful nature. Because of the sinful nature with which I was born, I would inevitably sin. Jesus did not have a human father. Adam's sin was never imputed to Him. In His humanity He could sin if He chose to do so. Luke 4 records three temptations with which Satan tried to trip up Jesus. Jesus successfully resisted these temptations. John 16:31, Jesus tells His disciples, "I have overcome the world." Jesus was victorious over all the false ideas of the world.

Heb. 2:10 says that "Jesus was made perfect through sufferings." Jesus being made perfect means that through the ministry of the Holy Spirit He reached the goal of living a perfect sinless life even though in His flesh He endured unimaginable sufferings. Sufferings that are far more than I can ever expect to suffer. At any point in His life He could have spoken a word and wiped out all of sinful mankind.

Jesus endured to the end and suffered death as a substitute for every person who lived in the world. Just as Adam's sin has been imputed to every descendant of Adam born into this world, so Jesus' perfect righteousness is imputed to every person who believes in Him. Jesus' death paid the penalty for every sin every person in this world has ever committed. But without the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ we would still fall short of the glory of God. Rom. 3:21. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." 2 Cor. 5:21 talks about Jesus bearing our sins and giving believers His perfect righteousness. "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

"Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age."

Gabriel gave Mary a sign in the pregnancy of Elizabeth who was past the age of child-bearing, that Mary, a virgin would also have a son. Mary's Son would "be called the Son of God."

"For with God nothing will be impossible." This does not mean that I can ask God to do the impossible for me. I am not to ask God (if I were ever dumb enough to buy a lottery ticket) that that ticket would be the great winner. Prayer is for the purpose of glorifying God, not aggrandizing self. God in His omnipotence can do anything He determines to do. What God has promised He will do. The better I know God's word, the more effective my prayers can be.



**Hooded Warbler, Quintana, Texas**

Luke 2:7-11. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

I first memorized this passage (verses 7-16 at the time) back when I was 6 to 8 years old. I may not have learned to write cursive yet. So it was not an easy passage to learn.

There are many traditions that have arisen about these verses and I can't cover them all. But first, the innkeeper here is not a villain. There were no Holiday Inns around at the time. The word translated "inn" is the same word used for the "upper room" where Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples the night before He was crucified. It is simply a guest room in the home of a friend or relative.

There were many visitors in Bethlehem at the time because of the required census. Were Mary and Joseph relegated to a cave which is an old idea? We don't know, but there is a more likely location. Homes at the time had two parts. Our counterpart today would be a house with an attached garage. Houses would have one part for the family and an attached stable for the household's animals. Jesus in the manger better fits with the attached stable.

"She brought forth her firstborn son." If Jesus was Mary's firstborn, then obviously, He must have had half-brothers and half-sisters who came along later.

Now the shepherds: "An angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them." The shepherds are out in the country watching their sheep, possibly appreciating the stars and maybe the moon. All is quiet. This angel suddenly appears in what may be a blinding light called the "glory of the Lord." Panic palace time! "Do not be afraid."

"For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." The angel clearly identifies who this new baby is. He is the promised Savior or Deliverer. He is Christ, which is a title and not a name. This title is also known to the Jews as the Messiah or the Anointed One. And He is Lord, meaning He will be the future Ruler or King of Israel. All of this rang bells with the shepherds because these titles refer to prophecies that are sprinkled throughout the Old Testament. The shepherds knew the Old Testament well as did the rest of the Jewish people. I need to learn the entire Bible in preparation for the day when Jesus returns for His Church.

The next verses in Luke tell us that they did what you would expect them to do. Forgetting the sheep, they made a fast dash to town and found Mary, Joseph and the newborn baby. They also did another natural thing. Verse 17 says, "They made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child." This was too good to keep secret. I expect they took their time getting back to the fields where they had left the sheep. They would have sought out their family and friends and told them what they had seen and heard. They probably stopped everyone whom they passed on the street to tell them. I need to consider their example and be ready to share the good news about Jesus Christ with the same enthusiasm I am sure the shepherds had.

Luke 4:5-8. Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for *this* has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. "Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours." And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

The gospel writers report three temptations that Satan tried on Jesus. There could very well have been more. How did Jesus handle the three temptations that we know about? In each case Jesus quoted a passage of Scripture from the Old Testament. The application for me is that I need to know from God's word, the Bible, what God wants me to do. The more I know about God's word, the better I should be in being able to deal with the challenges and tests I face.

Here is what Satan says in this temptation: "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish." John 16:8-11 says that when Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to believers after His ascension that the Holy Spirit would "convict the world ... of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged." Satan is the "ruler of this world." He could offer Jesus this authority until God executes the judgment on Satan. In the future Satan will deliver this authority to the Antichrist. Rev. 19:20 tells us what will happen to the Antichrist ("the beast") and his false prophet: "These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone."

Jesus answers Satan by referencing Deut. 6:13, "You shall fear the LORD your God, and serve Him." Satan was offering Jesus a shortcut to ruling the world. If Jesus did it Satan's way, He would not have to suffer the brutal death on the cross. He could become ruler immediately, and not have to wait a couple more years to see if the Jews would receive Him as their king.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee points out that there are only two rulers. We will either serve the Lord Jesus Christ, or we will be serving Satan. Dr. McGee then pointed to Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 2:2, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

Why would God even allow Jesus to be tempted by Satan? Jesus in His deity was "not able to sin." But in His humanity, He was "able not to sin." By allowing Satan to tempt Jesus, God was demonstrating the sinlessness of Jesus. Adam was created without sin, but chose to disobey God and therefore sin. Jesus was born without sin. Jesus demonstrated His sinlessness when He overcame Satan's temptation. Jesus remained sinless, not succumbing to Satan's temptations.

God has a purpose in allowing temptations, trials and sufferings. In the same way we face similar situations. Heb. 5:8 says of Jesus: "though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered."

Luke 2:52 refers to the maturation process that Jesus went through in His life. "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men." Temptations, trials, and sufferings serve the purpose of maturing believers spiritually.

James 1:2-4 says, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." When I apply God's word to each situation that I face in this life, I am learning to trust and depend on God. This is the way God has designed for me to grow spiritually. When I fail to obey God, I am stunting my spiritual growth and may even lose ground. I need to know God's word, and I need to do it.

Luke 9:23-26. Then He said to *them* all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His *own* glory, and *in His* Father's, and of the holy angels.

I first memorized verse 23 (the first sentence above) when I was a teenager. I memorized it out of context, not fully appreciating what Jesus was telling His disciples. In verse 22, Jesus had told His disciples about His death and resurrection. "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day."

So what is Jesus offering His disciples now in today's verses? "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Jesus is inviting them to martyrdom! "Take up his cross" is not any ordinary burden. The Romans typically had the criminals they were going to crucify carry the crossbar of the cross. This is what happened with Jesus. How far am I willing to go to follow Jesus?

Jesus is not speaking of a requirement for eternal salvation. Martyrdom is not a requirement for eternal life. As the Philippian jailer asked Paul in Acts 16:30-31, "What must I do to be saved." The answer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." So how should we understand Luke 9:24, "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it." The best answer I have heard is that Jesus is talking about the quality of our life in eternity.

As Jesus said in John 10:10: "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." Having life in this verse is eternal life which a person obtains by entering through the door (Jesus Christ is the door, see John 10:9). Having life more abundantly is a higher quality of life that believers who faithfully live their lives in obedience to God will enjoy. This is particularly true of believers who die as a result of their faith.

"What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?" What are my priorities? What are the few years of my life in this world compared to eternity with God. Again it is not eternal life that is to be lost. For if eternal life could be lost, it is not eternal. Once a person believes and God gives him eternal life, that eternal life cannot be lost.

As Jesus said in John 10:27-29. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand." So what is destroyed or lost is future rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. These future rewards will determine the quality of our lives in eternity.

"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels." Jesus promises His future return in glory to usher us into eternity. Jesus wants to award each believer with an eternal life of abundance. But those who have sought to build themselves up during their lives and have not taken their relationship with Jesus Christ seriously, will enter eternity like a perpetual tenderfoot Boy Scout. Now is the time to avail myself of the opportunities God has given me to serve Him.

Gal. 1:6-9. I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

Paul does not begin this letter to the Galatians with his typical statement of praise for his readers. Instead, he hits them immediately with a strong reprimand expressing shock and amazement. "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel." This is the earliest New Testament letter that Paul wrote. He probably wrote it before the time of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 according to comments on the date of the letter in the *Nelson Study Bible*.

Paul refers to the gospel as the "gospel of Christ." He was emphasizing the correctness of the gospel Paul had taught the Galatians. But he also informs us how Paul first heard the gospel, from Jesus Christ Himself on the road to Damascus. False teachers in Galatia had come to the new believers after Paul moved on to the next city. Paul says of these false teachers, "there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ."

In the introduction to this letter in Gal. 1:3-5, Paul states the basis for the gospel. "Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father." In Gal. 2:16, Paul tells the Galatians how to avail themselves of this deliverance (salvation). "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified." The false teachers in Galatia were telling the new believers that they still had to follow the law, including circumcision and all the rest of it. Simply believing was not enough.

What does Paul add in Gal. 1:8-9. "Even if we or, an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you ..." "If anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received (from us), let him be accursed." What does Paul mean when he writes, "let them be accursed." Some interpret this as saying they should be eternally condemned. It cannot mean that a person could lose his salvation because the Bible is clear that once saved, we are always saved. The word translated "accursed" is used elsewhere of judgment or discipline in time. Rom. 9:3 Paul wrote, "For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh." Paul was exaggerating by saying that if discipline coming to him would cause his fellow Jews to believe, then he wished it would happen.

Most of the gospel presentations and tracts we see today add an element of works to the gospel. John wrote in John 20:30-31. "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

By believing in Jesus Christ, we are accepting His gift of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Christ did all the work needed for my eternal salvation when He died in my place. When I believed, God saved me. I was born again through God's omnipotent power and Jesus' perfect righteousness was given to me. Now God wants me to walk as it says in Eph. 4:1-3, "Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Gal. 2:16. "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Galatians was the first epistle that Paul wrote. The early church was still primarily made up of Jews who had grown up under the Law that God gave to Moses which included the requirement that every man had to be circumcised. They were still trying to sort out whether circumcision and keeping the law were still required. In Acts 15 the Jerusalem council clarified the issue for those who were still hanging on to the old traditions. As a Pharisee Paul was an expert on the Old Testament Scriptures. After his conversion he spent three years (Gal. 1:18) in Arabia. Gal. 2:1 indicates that it was fourteen years from his conversion until he went back to Jerusalem. During this time Paul certainly would have re-studied all the Scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Throughout this letter to the Galatians Paul tells in clear language that today we are not under any part of the Old Testament law.

"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ." Justification or being justified is a legal term. In the past I have heard people oversimplify the word saying that it means "just as if you had never sinned." That is what having my sins forgiven means. Jesus paid the penalty for my sins when He died on the cross. But my eternal salvation requires a lot more. I still do not have enough good works to qualify me to live in eternity with God. Justification solves that problem because it is the imputation of Jesus' perfect righteousness. 2 Cor. 5:21. "For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." When Jesus died on the cross, my sins were imputed to Him. When I believed in Jesus Christ, His perfect righteousness was imputed to me. The was also true for Abraham: "He believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6).

So today, what do we have? We have some churches that teach that baptism replaced circumcision as the necessary initiation ritual for salvation. As I was taught in the Baptist church you have to repent of your sins and make a public confession of faith. The idea of repentance is a hangover from Jerome who mistranslated the Greek word meaning a "change of mind" using the Latin word for doing penance. This is works, as is the idea of a public confession.

Others understand correctly that we are saved through faith; but if a person truly believes, his life will show it by the good works he does. If a person does not have enough good works or the right kind of good works, he didn't have the right kind of faith, and is not saved.

Then there was a Pentecostal friend of mine in college who said that you could lose your salvation if at some future time you decided to unbelieve. All of these are works that are not a requirement for our eternal salvation.

These all involve works that I, as a believer, should do in my walk with God. But God saved me when I decided to believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of my sins and eternal life. Salvation is a gift from God, not of works.

Much of the Bible is written to tell us how we, as believers, should live. Tit. 3:8 says, "This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men." My old Baptist pastor used to say, "We are saved to serve." I didn't think much of it when he said it. But he has a point. God expects good works in our lives. We may expect that our good works will be profitable to others today and will result in profitable rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.



Gal. 2:17-19. "But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, *is* Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! "For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. "For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God.

Earlier in Gal. 2:11-15, Paul had accused Peter of hypocrisy. Peter had learned from his experience with Cornelius in Acts 10 that as a believer in Jesus Christ, he was not under the law's prohibition of eating with Gentiles. Gentiles were called "sinners" because they did not keep the law. Peter has been associating closely with Gentiles. But when representatives from James in Jerusalem came to visit, Peter reverted back to the law and turned away from Gentiles who were not keeping the law. Paul accuses Peter of hypocrisy.

"But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ." The sense of the "if" statement is that it is true, Peter, Paul, and other believers have been justified. They are not under the Old Testament law. So, in the sense that they may eat with Gentiles and otherwise associate with them, they are sinners because they are not keeping the law. Which brings up the rhetorical question that requires a "No" answer, which he states emphatically. "*Is* Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not!"

"For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor." If Paul were to backslide and start keeping the law again for his eternal salvation, he would be showing that he was a transgressor of that law during the time that he had not been following it.

"For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God." The law included sacrifices for Israel's failures to keep the law. The purpose of the law was to demonstrate that each person is a sinner and that no one can keep the law. As Paul wrote in Rom. 7:7, "What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law." Israel could not even keep the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exo. 20:3). Exo. 15:31 confirms that the people of Israel who left Egypt in the Exodus were believers. The verse reads "Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses." But they did not always obey God. While Moses was still on the mountain they made a golden calf out of the gold they brought out of Egypt!

So when Paul believed in Jesus Christ, he says that he "died to the law that I might live to God." Dying to the law does not mean that we can live anyway we want to live. God still expects us to obey Him. Notice also that Paul does not say "I died to the law that I **WILL** live to God." He said, "that I **might** live to God" (bold emphasis added). When I believed in Jesus Christ does not mean that I will lead a changed life honoring to God. Paul wrote further in Romans 7 about his own struggle as a believer with sin. Rom. 7:15-19. "For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that *it is* good. But now, *it is* no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will *not to do*, that I practice." I have choices in my life. Will I learn God's word so that I will know how I should live, and then will I apply God's word in each situation I face?



Southern Dogface, butterfly, Houston, Texas

Gal. 2:20-21. "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain."

This is a popular memory verse which I first learned as a teenager. Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ." As Dr. J. Vernon McGee points out, a person cannot crucify himself. If you nail one hand to the cross, you don't have a means of nailing the other hand. Paul states that he was "crucified with Christ" in the past, when Christ was crucified. Paul also wrote in Rom. 6:6, "knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." He did not say that every believer in Jesus Christ would absolutely no longer be a slave of sin. He said, "that we should no longer be slaves of sin." This is the way I should live my life, but It is up to me to use the word of God to shape my thinking as to how I should live. Then when I have conformed my thinking to God's word (Rom. 12:2), then I can reckon myself to be dead indeed to sin as I obey God rather than my old man of sin. Rom. 6:11 says, "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

"It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." While it is true that we are indwelt by all three members of the Godhead, including Jesus Christ, this is looking more toward our ongoing relationship with Christ. "The *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God." I was saved through faith, now I need to walk by faith. I learn God's word and apply it by faith as I obey God. As Jesus said in John 15:6, "I am the vine and you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." This is my ongoing fellowship relationship with Jesus Christ as I obey His word.

"I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain." Paul is still talking about the hypocrisy of Peter and Barnabas that he mentioned earlier in this chapter (Gal. 2:13-15). They reverted back to an adherence to the law when certain men came from James. If it had been possible for people to be saved by keeping the law, then it would not have been necessary for Christ to have died on the cross. But in Gal. 2:20 Paul had said, "the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God." By this Paul was saying that even though he was not living under the law any longer, how he lived his life was important. He still should be obeying God's word. So as he walked by "faith in the Son of God," his life would exhibit righteousness. We also have God's word and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and Christ that enable us to live righteously.

Of course,, we also received the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ when we believed in Him. 2 Cor. 5:21 says, "For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Being saved by grace without any requirement of having to do certain works, does not give me a license to sin.

Paul wrote in Col. 2:6, "As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving." I received Christ by faith, now I should walk by faith. I need to be taught, so I can send down roots in my faith and build up my faith in strength as I obey God's word.

Gal. 3:1-4. O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed *it was* in vain?

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth. Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?” Paul continues to speak harshly to the Galatians. In Gal. 1:6, he accused them of “turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel.” In Gal. 1:8-9, Paul said of each false teacher who was preaching this different gospel, “Let him be accursed.”

The word “bewitched” carries the idea of casting a spell over the Galatians. The false teachers were leading the Galatians away from the grace of God by which God had saved them back to the legalistic rituals of the Old Testament Law.

But it wasn't only the rituals. Some people have counted the number of commandments in the law that Moses wrote and come up with 613 of them. James 2:10 warns us that “whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all.” God does not give a choice as to which commandments to obey and which to ignore. Under the law, Israel was required to not only obey the Ten Commandments, and the other moral commandments, but also the dietary commandments, the rituals, the celebration of the feasts in Jerusalem, the sacrifices, and all the rest. The New Testament does tell us how God expects me to live now, but not as a condition for salvation.

Paul asks four rhetorical questions, the answers to which show that God has saved us through our faith. “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” Paul confirms, first of all, that the Galatians were believers. Even though the Galatians had been “bewitched” by the false teachers and were coming under the spell of the false teachers, they had not lost their salvation or had believed with the wrong kind of faith. They had also seen the Holy Spirit work among them.

“Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” The ministry of the Holy Spirit is a major difference for believers in the Church Age that was not available prior to Jesus' ascension. In John 16:7 Jesus promised, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.” It is through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (the Helper) that we can learn God's word and know how we are to live. The power of the Holy Spirit through His indwelling allows us to say “No” to our old man. It is in this sense that we can be made perfect in the flesh when we allow it to happen.

“Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed *it was* in vain?” Paul had taught the Galatians on his first missionary journey saying in Acts 14:22, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” The Galatians had already experienced persecution. As John wrote in 2 John 7, “Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we have worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward.” By returning to the law the Galatians were risking the loss of the full rewards that should come to them for the sufferings they had endured.

I grew up in a Baptist church and heard a lot of “Thou shalt nots” that had no Biblical basis. Then I went to college up east and heard some different “Thou shalt nots.” Even today many gospel presentations include an element of works. I thank God that He saved me when I believed in Jesus Christ. My works had nothing to do with my salvation.

Gal. 3:5-9. Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, *does He do it* by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? — just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, *saying*, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

"Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, *does He do it* by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" In Galatia, Paul not only brought the gospel with him, but he authenticated his message by performing miracles. Acts 14:3, "Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands." Then Acts 14:8-10 adds, "And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked. This man heard Paul speaking. Paul observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, 'Stand up straight on your feet!' And he leaped and walked." It was by Paul's faith that this cripple was healed, not the cripple's faith. When Paul healed him, if the cripple did not think he could be healed, he might have scoffed at Paul's offer to "Stand up." He would have been healed, but would have continued to lay around like a cripple.

Now the false teachers who were misleading the Galatians kept emphasizing the importance of keeping the law which included circumcision. God gave the law to Moses in 1446 BC. Paul ratchets the time frame back 500 or so years to Abraham, a time even before Abraham had been circumcised. He quotes Gen. 15:6 which says that when Abraham had believed God, that his faith was accounted to him for righteousness. God's perfect righteousness was imputed to Abraham long before the law and before Abraham was circumcised. So the grace message Paul was bringing of faith alone in Christ alone was not really a new idea. God even saved Adam and Eve when they believed.

"*Only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham." Paul is using the term "sons of" in the sense of "having the characteristics of," rather than being a physical descendant of or having been born as a physical son of. When we talk about Jesus being the Son of Man, we are saying that He is fully human. He is not the natural born son of Joseph. Also we can say that Jesus is the Son of God, not because at some point God the Father gave birth to a divine son like the Mormons teach. But Jesus from all eternity past has possessed the total attributes of God, including never having a beginning. So Paul wrote in Rom. 9:6-7, "For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel, nor *are they* all children because they are the seed of Abraham."

In Matt. 3:9 John the Baptist accused the Pharisees of thinking, "We have Abraham as *our* father." The Pharisees thought they were saved because they kept the law which they were doing including the sacrifices for sin, and because they were descendants of Abraham. But they lacked faith in God. So John's message was to "Repent (change your mind and trust in God) for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2).

In Gal. 3:8-9, Paul reminds the Galatians of God's promise to Abraham in Gen. 12:3 and Gen. 22:18. The latter verse says, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." Jesus Christ is the seed of Abraham through whom all the nations are blessed. Everyone in this world may choose to believe God and receive eternal salvation. Tit. 3:5, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit." We are saved by God when we are born again (regeneration) and by the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. These are both works of God and not anything that we can do.

Gal. 3:10-12. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "*Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.*" But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "*the just shall live by faith.*" Yet the law is not of faith, but "*the man who does them shall live by them.*"

Paul quotes three Old Testament verses to demonstrate that keeping the law God gave through Moses does not save or justify anyone. The Old Testament is a part of God's revelation to people. We cannot completely understand the New Testament unless we also know the Old Testament.

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "*Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.*" Living under the Mosaic Law did not bring blessing, but a curse. Paul quotes Deut. 27:26, "*Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of the law.*" The law required a perfect obedience to the law. If you failed in one point, you were guilty of all. Gal. 5:3 says, "And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law." When a person disobeyed, there was punishment and discipline. God gave the law to Israel, not to believers in the Church Age.

The New Testament gives us new commands. Sometimes in long "vice lists" like Rom. 1:29-31 and Gal. 5:19-21. Some of these repeat Old Testament prohibitions. The New Testament lists include: coveting, envy, jealousy, murder, anger, gossip, pride, disobeying parents, failure to forgive or to show mercy, lying and not keeping promises, adultery, sexual immorality, idolatry, drug use, and drunkenness. Some Old Testament laws are not included in the New Testament, such as tithing and keeping the Sabbath. The Old Testament Law given through Moses included a broad provision for divorce. The New Testament is more restrictive bringing believers back to God's original design for marriage. Jesus answered the Pharisees question about marriage and divorce in Matt. 19:8 saying, "From the beginning it was not so." The Old Testament included the promise that if Israel kept the law, God would bless them with material prosperity. But if they disobeyed, there were increasing stages of discipline and cursing (Lev. 26).

"But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for '*the just shall live by faith.*'" Since no one could keep the Old Testament law perfectly, there was no way under the law to obtain complete righteousness. But just as Abraham was declared righteous when He believed God's promises, so we as believers in Jesus Christ have Jesus' perfect righteousness imputed to us. Now that we have received eternal life, how does God want us to live? Paul wrote to the Colossians in Col. 2:5-7, "For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your *good* order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught." I received Christ as my Savior through faith, Now I need to walk by faith.

"Yet the law is not of faith, but "*the man who does them shall live by them.*" The Old Testament law was not a matter of faith. Israel was to do the commandments and God would prosper them. If they disobeyed, they would be cursed. The challenge is that there was faith in the Old Testament that even as Abraham "believed in the LORD and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6), so the people of Israel could believe God's promises and receive eternal life. But the keeping of the law was for material prosperity during their lives on earth. Their obedience to the law and God's blessing was to demonstrate to the world that Israel's God was different from their false gods. Today the unbelievers around me need to hear the gospel from me. Col. 4:3, "Praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ."

Gal. 3:13-15. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though *it is* only a man's covenant, yet *if it is* confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it.

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*"). In the previous verses Paul told what the "curse of the law" was. Col. 3:10 said, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "*Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.*" Since no one could completely fulfill all the requirements of the law, everyone operating under the law is cursed. So why should the Galatians accept the ideas of the false teachers that they also had to keep the law? But Christ redeemed us from this curse.

The Bible uses multiple words for redemption. I have heard a teacher say that in 2 Pet. 2:1 when it looks like Jesus' death also redeemed unbelievers, that Peter was using a different word for "redeem" than Paul uses here. Yes, one word has a prefix meaning "out of" and the other does not have the prefix. The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* says that the word Paul uses here means "to buy out of the market," while Peter's word means "to buy in the market." To me it sounds like either way Jesus' death on the cross redeemed all of mankind from the curse of sin. But each person needs to accept this gift by faith.

Paul also continues to support his argument by quoting the Old Testament. He quotes Deut. 21:23, "for he who is hanged (on a tree) *is* accursed of God." The curse Christ bore on the cross was for my sin.

"That the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." We have two promises fulfilled in this verse. "The blessing of Abraham" is the same imputation of righteousness that Abraham received when he believed, Gen. 15:6. Christ promised us the gift of the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room Discourse in John 14-16, and then just before His ascension in Acts 1:8. "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

"Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though *it is* only a man's covenant, yet *if it is* confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it." By calling the Galatians "Brethren," Paul is addressing them as believers. He does not say that if they turn from their faith and try to be saved by the law, that they could lose their salvation. Our salvation is eternally secure. God gave it to us when we believe, and there is no way we can lose it. Apparently, some of the false teachers, sometimes called "Judaizers," were suggesting that the Law coming through Moses 500 years or so after Abraham replaced the promise God made to Abraham. Paul reminds us that a covenant or a contract, once all parties have agreed to it, is a done deal. This works even when the covenant is "in the manner of men." It certainly works when God was a party to the covenant as He was with Abraham.

I hear many false teachers today. Some say the Church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people and God will fulfill the promises He gave to Israel, by giving them to the Church. Others say that we must follow parts of the law like the Ten Commandments, tithing, and baptism which replaces circumcision. But we don't have to sacrifice animals. I am happy Paul wrote Galatians to correct this.

Gal. 3:16-18. Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. And this I say, *that* the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance *is* of the law, *it is* no longer of promise; but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise.

Dr. Constable's *Notes* seems to give the best explanation of the questions these verses raise. "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds.'" In Gal. 3:17 Paul defines what he means by "Seed," when he wrote, "who is Christ." But in Gal. 3:29, Paul says "If you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." The word "seed" can be understood as a collective noun. We have a few collective nouns in English like "sheep" or "deer." I have visited state parks that had many deer. We would not say the parks had many deers!

So in Gal. 3:16, Paul refers to Christ as the promised Seed descending from Abraham. But later in Gal. 3:29 he writes about a select portion of Abraham's seed which includes all believers who are being blessed through Abraham. Compare this with what Paul wrote in Rom. 9:6, "For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel." Not all of Abraham's descendants share in the blessings God is giving to Abraham's seed. Gal. 3:9 said, "Those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham."

"The law which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God." God made a promise of blessing to Abraham and confirmed it to Isaac and Jacob. God is not going to come along later and change the rules because He came up with a better idea.

When Paul writes 430 years, he is referring to Exo. 12:40. "Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt *was* four hundred and thirty years." About 400 years ago James Ussher wrote a Bible chronology. It was a great contribution to the Christian world. But there are a few places where he seems to have gone astray. He shows the sojourn in Egypt as lasting about 200 years. But God had told Abram in Gen. 15:13, "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is* not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years." Dr. Constable and *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* in a reasonable explanation suggest that the 430 years began with God confirming the promise to Jacob and the actual time in Egypt was 400 years.

"For if the inheritance *is* of the law, *it is* no longer of promise; but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise." *The Grace New Testament Commentary* in discussing this verse differentiates between two inheritances that we are promised. The first mentioned here is called a "passive inheritance." That is the possession of all believers in Jesus Christ. It includes "eternal life, the guarantee of entrance into the kingdom of God, justification, sonship, and much more." The second inheritance is an "active inheritance" which only faithful believers will have. This includes "rulership with Christ and the privileges that go with it."

Gal. 5:19-21 refer to the "works of the flesh" and "those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." These verses list fifteen to seventeen sins "and the like." Now if we are honest with ourselves, every believer is guilty of some of these sins at some time. How often do I have to commit even a couple of these sins before I prove that I am not a true believer in Jesus Christ? If that is what Paul means by this "vice list," then I can never be assured of my salvation. Actually, this is a reference to the loss of potential rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ for those who do not faithfully walk with the Lord. This is our "active inheritance."

Gal. 4:4-5. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

"But when the fullness of time had come." God's timing is perfect. Dan. 9:25-26 gave God's timetable for the coming of Jesus, Israel's Messiah. He would come 483 years after the "command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem." This command came in the second chapter of Nehemiah. Now many teachers point out the geo-political situation in Jesus' time. The relative peace throughout the Roman Empire; the Roman system of roads aiding the spread of the gospel; the widespread use of the Greek language. Also during these 483 years the Jews had not pursued the worship of idols and had kept the Law better than they had in the 1,000 years before Nehemiah. Of course, they did not keep the Law perfectly, and they thought they were saved because they were descendants of Abraham. Many of them were not trusting in God, but in the observance of the Law and their Abrahamic ancestry.

"God sent forth His Son." The Greek word for "sent forth" is interesting. It is the word transliterated into English as "apostle" with a prefix "ex," meaning "out from." Jesus was sent forth out from God the Father as an apostle. The basic idea of an "apostle" is one sent out for a purpose. The Bible, in places, refers to "apostles as a specific group of men whom Jesus sent forth to initially lead the Church and to carry the gospel throughout the world. This group included Jesus' eleven disciples, Paul, and based on Acts 1:26, also Mathias. These men had to have been taught personally by Jesus and also to have been eye witnesses of Jesus after His resurrection. "His Son" confirms Jesus' deity. Usually the Bible does not use the phrase "son of" to be someone fathered by another, but for a person being exactly like the person identified as the father. Jesus, in His deity, is also eternal. None of the three members of the Godhead ever had a beginning. The deity of Christ was not born as some cults teach.

"Born of a woman, born under the law." Jesus' humanity was born. Jesus is fully God and fully human at the same time. Phil. 2:6-8 says of Jesus: "who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross." Jesus, in His deity, could not die. But because He also was fully human He could die as a substitute for our sins. Actually, the word translated in most of our translations as "born" is a common word used most of the time in a different sense as "became" or "made."

"Born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law." Kenneth Wuest in his *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament* says Jesus "was born under the law, lived under the law, and died under the penalty of the law which we broke." Jesus died as our substitute. The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* says that He died to "redeem us from slavery to the entire Mosaic system." Jesus said in Matt. 5:17, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." Jesus kept the Law perfectly which no one else has ever done. Therefore, God saved me, just as He saved Abraham: "And he believed in the LORD" (Gen. 15:6).



Yellow Warbler, Sabine Woods Sanctuary, Texas



Gal. 4:5-7. to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

"To redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." Gal. 4:1 begins, "Now I say *that* the heir, as long as he is a child, ..." Kenneth Wuest in his *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament* explains the word for "child" as "one that does not speak. The word refers to an immature person, intellectually and morally." The text in Gal. 4:2 goes on to say that this child "is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by his father." In Gal. 4:5, Paul says we are redeemed "that we might receive the adoption as sons." Being a child "that does not speak" is like the people of Israel who were under the Law. Wuest describes the word for "sons" as "adult sons." Since we have been redeemed from being "under the law," we are now "adult sons under grace." In the Greek, the English phrase "adoption of sons" is one word which Wuest describes "in order that we might receive the adult son-placing." This is a different use of the word "adoption" from today's usage. Paul is saying that the father of the child now adopts his natural son as his adult son who now possesses his inheritance. In the culture of the day, adoption occurred when the father of a child recognized the son as being old enough and mature enough to be his heir. It also could be used when a person adopted another man's natural son who would become the possessor of the adopting father's inheritance. The adopted son now possesses the inheritance. When I believed, I was adopted and received eternal life. As I mature in my Christian life, there is a potential for a future reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Paul speaks of this as an inheritance that could be lost in Gal. 5:19-21.

So Paul writes in Gal. 5:7, "Therefore you are no longer a slave (under the Law) but a(n adult) son, and if a(n adult) son, then an heir of God through Christ. When I believed in Jesus Christ, I was born again by God and became an heir of eternal life. This is a gift of the grace of God. But now, even though I am not under the law, God expects me to act like an adult. I am supposed to act like God's adult son. I am not to run off and do things my own way like a rebellious teenager. I remember running away from home twice when I was growing up. The first time, I was seven or eight years old. I didn't make it any further than the end of the block! The second time, I was like a typical rebellious teenager and I spent the night on the ground in a park a mile or so from home. That is not the way God wants us to act, as His sons running away from Him and living as slaves to our sin natures.

Not only do we become adult sons of God when we believe and are born again, but look what else Paul says God does for us. "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" All three persons of the Godhead are mentioned in these verses: God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The address, "Abba, Father!" is used two other times in the New Testament. The night before His crucifixion Jesus prayed, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will but what You *will*." "Abba" is an Aramaic word, which was the day to day language spoken by the Jews at the time. So Mark uses this word in Mark 14:36 as Peter had related this event to him. Mark also translates it for his Greek speaking audience. The translation in the English is "Father," but the Greek precedes the word "Father" with the article pointing to the specific Father whom Jesus was addressing. The second time is in Rom. 8:15, "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" All three times the word "Father" is preceded in the Greek by the article. Because I have now been adopted as God's adult son, I have the privilege of addressing Him as "Father" when I pray.

Gal. 5:1-4. Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." When the Galatians had believed in Jesus Christ, they came under grace and were not subject to the Old Testament Law. God has given us the Holy Spirit to enable us to live our lives according to a higher standard. A few verses later in Gal. 5:13, Paul wrote, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." So, even though we are under grace, and have liberty, the "stand fast" command is repeated several times in Paul's letters. "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13). "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27).

"If you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing." The Judaizers were teaching that circumcision and keeping the Law were necessary for salvation. Paul had taught the Galatians otherwise, Gal. 1:9. "As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed." The Galatians couldn't lose their salvation if they were circumcised, but circumcision would not be of any spiritual benefit to them.

Paul also reminds the Galatians, "To every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law." Anyone trying to keep any part of the Old Testament Law is obligated to obey all 613 commandments. You can't slice and dice the Law into the moral, civil, and ceremonial and throw out the civil and ceremonial. The Bible does not make distinctions between these parts. Those who try to separate the parts come up with differing divisions.

In Gal. 6:2 Paul refers to a different law for believers in the Church Age, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Jesus told His disciples what the overriding principle in the law of Christ was in John 13:34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

Does my driving reflect love for the other drivers on the road? Do I always treat my wife in love and seek the best for her? When I became exasperated with my children, did I become angry and yell at them, or did I treat them in love? "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged" (Col. 3:21). How about my business associates and friends, and the strangers I meet daily?

Then Paul boldly speaks to the Galatians, "You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." Growing up, my next door neighbors were Methodists. Somewhere I heard that Methodists thought when a person fell "from grace," that they lost their salvation. That is not what Paul is saying. He is talking about our relationship with Christ. Am I walking with Christ in my life, trying to obey His law, to "love one another"?

If the Galatians, after believing in Jesus Christ, decide to attempt to be justified by keeping the Law, then they are no longer living by grace. They would be grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit's ministry in their lives. They could lose any potential profit they may receive in the form of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Love is the way I am to think, not simply a mechanistic keeping of a set of rules.

Gal. 5:13-15. For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

Paul is turning to practical applications in my life. In Gal. 5:1 we are to "stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made us free." When God saved me, He freed me from slavery to my sin nature through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. But it is up to me to use the divine resources God has given me. Now he tells me, "Do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh."

How do I do that? "Through love serve one another." We have a Hollywoodized version of love today. We look on love from a viewpoint of sentimentality, We think of love as an emotion. But love is an inner attribute driven by how we think. As Paul wrote to the Philippians in Phil. 1:9, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment." He is not talking about love as an emotion, but that it is grounded in knowledge and discernment. Discernment is the wisdom that applies our knowledge.

1 Cor. 13 tells us more about love than we will find anywhere else. Look at 1 Cor. 13:4 for starters. "Love suffers long *and* is kind." What do we do when someone does us wrong, or does not treat us right or provokes us in some way." Typical reactions are anger, or we may cut them off and turn our backs on them, or try to get even. We may complain about them to others and try to justify ourselves and our actions. All of these reactions are sin and show a lack of love.

Consider Col. 3:12-15. "Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts." How do we show love for another person? By "tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness (Not 'You can't do that to me. I will show you!'), longsuffering (even when someone you love injures you!), ... bearing with one another, and forgiving one another." "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts." This "peace of God" has to be both inward and it has to be outward. Inward because you do not let yourself be upset by the actions of the other person, even when that person is wrong. But also outward, when you continue to love that person and act and to speak in a manner that is helpful and beneficial to that person.

So when I have "a complaint against another," what do I do? "If you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!" Like Prov. 15:1 says, "A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up *anger*."

Jesus gave us the love standard for all believers today when He spoke to His disciples in John 13:34. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." How far did Jesus go in His love? He died for us on the cross. While He was hanging there, He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). I need to evaluate every thought, action and word to see if they show love for others.



**American Bittern, Brazos Bend State Park, Texas**

Gal. 5:16-18. I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

In these verses Paul summarizes how we, as believers, should live our lives. But when the Bible starts talking about the Holy Spirit, all sorts of ideas pop up. Paul commands us to "walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." The command is "to walk," and to keep on walking. Commands in Scripture are given to our volition. We have a choice to obey or not. Some would say that if we do not obey and our life reflects a life fulfilling "the lust of the flesh," we do not have saving faith in Jesus Christ or we can lose our salvation. Both these teachings make works a condition for salvation. Gal. 5:13 says we "have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty an opportunity for the flesh."

Paul describes a battle that is going on in us. "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another." There are people who spend a good bit of effort to keep the moral commandments of the Law, but ignore the ministry of the Spirit in their lives. This verse sets up a dichotomy. We are either walking in the Spirit or fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. How does the Holy Spirit work in our lives?

John 16:13 tells us one way. "When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come." Jesus addressed this to His disciples. They were taught by the Holy Spirit after Jesus' ascension, so that they could give us in the Bible the truth of God's word.

Now we have spiritual gifts through which every believer can be taught the word. But we have a proliferation of interpretations of the word the disciples were taught by the Holy Spirit. 1 John 4:1 commands us to "test the spirits (teachers), whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world." We can easily be taken in by false teachers with persuasive words. When we walk in faith, following the leading of the Holy Spirit and not that of the lusts of the flesh, we can discern the truth.

The Holy Spirit also serves as a counter-balance to the lusts of the flesh. When we choose to walk in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit will point us to the correct application of God's word. That means we have to say "No" to the lusts of the flesh. We have to confess our sins regularly to God when we fall into the lust of flesh. Under the Old Testament Law the people of Israel did not have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

"If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." Paul wrote a similar verse in Rom. 8:14, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God." The word for "sons" in this verse describes adult sons. These are not baby believers that spend a lot of time following the lusts of the flesh. To be led by the Spirit does not mean that the Holy Spirit will tell you whom you should marry, or where you should go to college, or what tie you should wear to a job interview. These are all wisdom decisions.

The Holy Spirit leads us by taking the correct teaching of God's word we have heard and believed, and lets us apply it. God has equipped all believers today so we can walk in a manner pleasing to Him. Under the Law Israel did not have this gift from God.

Gal. 5:19-21. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

This is one of the "vice lists" found in the New Testament. There are two primary ways these lists are interpreted and understood among people who hold to eternal security (once saved, always saved). "That those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." The most common view is that these sins describe the way unbelievers live, but does not describe how a believer will live his life. How many times does a person have to commit these sins to show that he is an unbeliever destined to the Lake of Fire? With this understanding there can be no assurance of salvation.

The second way to interpret these vice lists is to recognize that the Bible speaks of two different inheritances that a believer may receive. One is based on faith, believing on Jesus Christ. This inheritance is our eternal life. We will be a part of God's promise of the kingdom to Israel. In contrast to the inheritance we receive by faith, there is also an inheritance that we earn by our works. Believers can and do commit all of these sins, but when they do, they risk the loss of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Eight of these seventeen sins arise directly out of the worship in the idol temples of the day. The first six sins: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, and sorcery (drug use) were common worship practices in the heathen temples by unbelieving Gentiles throughout the world at this time. Drunkenness and revelries describe the typical worship of Dionysus or Bacchus, the ancient god of wine. Today people don't do these sins in the worship of idols, but the sins still are common. The other nine sins cover a lot of ground, and Paul adds the catch-all phrase "and the like." This list of sins is not exhaustive.

I will comment on "heresies" which is a transliteration of a Greek word. It is variously rendered in other translations as "divisions," "factions," and "sects." Commentaries explain it as "divisions over issues or personalities" or "sects formed by men with self-willed opinions." The Greek word is used nine times in the New Testament. Most of the time it is translated "sects." The Sadducees, Pharisees, and the Nazarenes are all called sects of Judaism. Also in Acts 24:14, Christianity is called "the Way which they call a sect." These factions and sects are just like our church denominations today. Our denominations represent various ways of understanding God's word, not all of which can be correct.

Paul's message in Galatians is significant. Gal. 5:13, "For you brethren, have been called to liberty, only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." We are no longer under the law which is impossible for any person to keep. But we now have a new standard, which Paul summarizes when he wrote, "Through love serve one another." We are to "walk by the Spirit ... and not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).

God has given me the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to teach me how to live. The "vice list" in Rom. 1:29-31 lists 23 sins. 1 Cor. 6:9-10 has ten sins listed. None of these lists cover every sin of which I might be guilty. Jesus gave His disciples the new rule for the Church Age in John 13:34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." I still have a lot to learn about what it means to love others.

Gal. 5:22-23. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

In Gal. 5:19-21 Paul has listed the works (plural word) of the flesh. Any one of these sins shows a believer who is living his life under the control of his sin nature. In contrast is the fruit (singular word) of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is a package deal. They are a unity. As Paul wrote in Gal. 5:16, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." As believers we are either living under the power of the Holy Spirit or we are submitting to the slavery of our flesh. Rom. 6:6, "knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." This is not automatic in the Christian life. God does not turn us into robots. Just as He allows each person to decide on his own to believe in Jesus Christ, so it is up to every believer whether he will obey God. Every time I sin, I show that I have said "No" to the Holy Spirit and "Yes" to my flesh or sin nature.

The "fruit of the Spirit" can be divided into three groups of three or triads. The first three are mental attitudes. "Love" comes first and is the most important. Christ is the example for the love that God wants from us and which the Holy Spirit can produce in our lives. Rom. 5:8, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." As one commentator said, "self-sacrifice for the benefit of the one loved." How far am I going to go in putting up with someone who mistreats me? "

"Joy" is a spiritually based mental attitude. It is a deep and abiding inner rejoicing which Jesus promised to those who abide in Him by keeping His commandments. John 15:11, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full."

"Peace" is an inner repose and tranquility even in the face of adverse circumstances. Phil. 4:7, "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." These mental attitudes only come when I walk by means of the Spirit in obeying God's word.

The second triad is my relationship with others. "Longsuffering" is a patient endurance when faced with provocation by those who wrong me, without anger or thought of revenge.

"Kindness." As Col. 3:12-13 says "As *the* elect of God, ... put on ... kindness, ... bearing with one another, and forgiving one another."

"Goodness" is reflecting the goodness of God in our relationship with others. 2 Thess. 1:11, "We also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of *His* goodness and work of faith with power."

The third triad relates to the general conduct that should characterize a believer's life. "Faithfulness" is what a believer does when he keeps his word. Do I keep my promises? Even if someone lied to me or broke promises that he made, do I still keep my promises? Look at the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. He died for me. I believed and God saved me. Now even if I commit all the works of the flesh in Gal. 5:19-21, Christ remains faithful and I am still saved.

Col. 4:6 expresses "Gentleness" well. "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how to answer each one."

"Self-control" is the idea of self-mastery. Does my sin nature get the best of me, or do I allow the Holy Spirit to guide my thoughts, words, and actions?

"Against such there is no law." Paul said a lot in this epistle about the law. The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* calls this a litotes, an understatement. The Holy Spirit's ministry is better than the law.

Gal. 5:24-26. And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

I have a background in working with numbers, both from my engineering education and my study of finance. Then I spent 60 years working in finance. I don't relate well with abstract ideas, like being crucified. So how can I make sense out of this abstract statement? "Those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Previously, in Gal. 2:20 Paul wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

I take it according to this verse that when I believed in Jesus Christ, I received the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. From God's standpoint, my flesh, my sinful nature is dead and Christ now lives in me. This is true of all believers in Jesus Christ. But I still have my human body which has a very active sinful nature. So Paul adds in Gal. 2:20 how he chooses to live now. "The *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God." I have been saved by faith, but now I must learn to walk by faith. When I walk by faith, I am crucifying my flesh with all its sinful passions and desires. Every believer will at times fail to live his or her life by faith.

Therefore Paul adds in Gal. 5:25, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." Since all believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit at the moment they believe in Jesus Christ, God expects us to walk in the Spirit. Paul also wrote in Gal. 5:16, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

When we read this in English, it sounds like Paul is making similar statements. But the two words for "walk" are different in the Greek. The word in verse 16 is used more than 100 times in the New Testament. This is the way we normally walk one step at a time every time as we follow the regular routine of our lives. The Greek word for "walk" in verse 25 appears only a half dozen times. It means to walk in a straight line. I see it as following the straight and narrow.

"Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another." Gal. 5:26 appears more practical, but why is it here? I think Paul is still looking at what is going on among the Galatians. The Judaizers are teaching that Christians have to keep the law. The *New American Standard Bible* translates the first clause as "Let us not become boastful," as if some of them were saying, "I have been circumcised," and bragged about how spiritual they were.

"Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another." The Judaizers were trying to provoke others who were exercising their liberty from the law, to be circumcised and keep the law. Paul warns those living under the liberty God has provided under grace, not to envy those braggarts.

"Walking by means of the Spirit" seems kind of abstract to me. Can I make it practical? Jesus told His disciples in John 15:10, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love." "Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh." These are the believers who keep His commandments. As Jesus said in John 15:5, "He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit."

To keep Christ's commandments, we must know them. We must know what God wants us to think, to speak and to do. 2 Tim. 2:15, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Believers receive from the Holy Spirit spiritual gifts to minister to others. One of these ministries is the teaching of God's word. Then the Holy Spirit empowers us to say "No" to the flesh, if we will do so.

Gal. 6:1-2. Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

"If a man is overtaken in any trespass." The way this is written, it is like when Peter denied our Lord three times during Jesus' trials. He did it without even thinking, but responded without thinking when he was asked questions. It also sounds similar to Eph. 4:26, "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath." In Peter's case, his denials were sin. In the case of the Ephesian command to "Be angry," the Greek is saying that we all at times will face situations which result in a feeling of anger, but the second command says that we are to stop the anger in its tracks before it becomes sin.

Back in Galatians, "a man is overtaken in any trespass," is a person who lets the situation continue and become sin rather than stopping it immediately. This does not appear to apply to a person engaged in an ongoing sinful practice. Based on the contextual warnings about the false teachers who are saying that you must continue to obey the Old Testament law, this would appear to be the trespass Paul has in mind. Some Galatian believers were taken in by the false teachers

"You who are spiritual." Paul has defined a couple of times in chapter 5 what he means by being spiritual. Gal. 5:16, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." Gal. 5:18, "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." Gal. 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, ..." Gal. 5:25, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." Spiritual believers are those who live their lives utilizing the divine resources God provides under the power of the Holy Spirit. They are not living under the lust of the flesh. As Gal. 5:26, says, They are not conceited or boastful. They do not provoke others and they are not envious.

"Restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness." "Gentleness is a part of the fruit of the Spirit as set forth in Gal. 5:22-23. Col. 4:6 put it this way, "Let your speech always *be* with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one."

"Considering yourself lest you also be tempted." When trying to help another believer overtaken in any trespass, don't be swayed by their persuasive arguments that their way is the better way. Specifically, keeping the Old Testament law, is not a better way of living the Christian life, than walking by the Holy Spirit.

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." The burdens that are to be shared among believers are different from the load" mentioned in Gal. 6:5 where it says, "For each one shall bear his own load." This latter load is the routine load of issues we each face every day. But sometimes we are hit with situations that seem just too heavy to handle. That is what Paul has in mind with the shared burdens in Gal. 6:2. While we are not under the Old Testament law, we still have Jesus' commandment in John 13:34, to "love one another," and restated in Gal. 5:13-14. "Through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this; 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" The Old Testament law provided no support to Israel as to how to keep the law. Under the grace provision we have today, through the indwelling of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, we have God's power to enable us to fulfill the law of Christ.



**Indigo Bunting & Ovenbird, Quintana Neotropical Preserve, Texas**

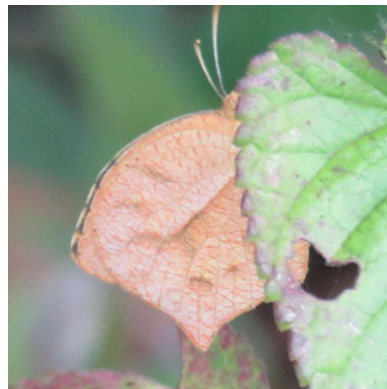


Gal. 6:3-5. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load.

"For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself." The key to understanding the Bible is context. Each verse in the Bible is a part of the chapter in which it appears, and each chapter is a part of a book. On its own this verse states a true principle. Paul warned in Rom. 12:3, "To everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." Col. 3:12 commands us to put on among other things "humility." What is going on in the context of Galatians? False teachers were saying these new believers had to keep the Old Testament law. Arrogance often results when believers focus on all the righteous deeds they do in their lives. We look down on others who live lives that are not quite as good as the lives we think we live. So in Gal. 5:26 Paul had to command the Galatians, "Let us not become conceited (boastful)." In Gal. 6:1, believers have been led astray into trying to keep the law, and so have been overtaken in a trespass. So Paul is warning the Galatians not to be deceived into thinking they are such hot stuff in their Christian lives.

What should a believer do? "But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another." How does my life match up with the "law of Christ" mentioned in Gal. 6:2? Remember Gal. 5:14, "All the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Jesus Christ is the standard by which I should examine my life, not how well or how poorly someone else does. In 2 Cor. 13:5 Paul told the Corinthians to "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you are disqualified" (from receiving a reward). He is saying the same thing that each believer should "examine his own work" to see if he is being led by the Spirit and fulfilling the law of Christ. We are not to go around as fruit inspectors determining if other believers are living the right kind of lives. In 1 Cor. 4:3-5 when the Corinthians were accusing Paul of being out of line. "It is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. ... Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts." This statement of Paul's is looking at the future rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. None of us can know if our motives and actions will qualify us for rewards. We aren't the judge. But we certainly should examine our own lives on a frequent basis, confessing sin, and obeying God.

"Then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load." The rejoicing is not the same sense of the conceit or boasting mentioned in Gal. 5:26. It carries a sense of satisfaction, that I handled the situation in the best way I could given the circumstances. Yes, I could have done better. But I was trying to show love for God and others. "Each one shall bear his own load." I have full responsibility for everything I do. I need to examine each of my thoughts, my words, and my actions to see if they line up with God's word. If I have failed, I need to confess that sin, and move on.



Tailed Orange, butterfly, Beeville, Texas

Gal. 6:7-10. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

"Do not be deceived." Wuest's *Expanded Translation of the New Testament* translates this command, "Stop leading yourselves astray." The false teachers, who were telling the Galatians that they had to keep the law, were doing just that. They were leading the new believers in Galatia away from Jesus Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. "God is not mocked" or as the *NET Bible* puts it, "God will not be made a fool." This is part of a tough warning. "Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." Believers face eternal consequences when they buy into false teaching. Bible teachers still superimpose many of the commands of the Old Testament law into Christianity: Sabbath worship, tithing, replacing circumcision with infant baptism for starters. Feeling sorrow for sins is attached to believing in Jesus Christ as a requirement for salvation and then you also have to have the right kind of good works after you believe or you didn't really have the right kind of faith to be saved.

"For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life." Paul continues the agricultural metaphor from the prior verse. The illustration pictures our works, how we live our lives. So this cannot be referring to eternal condemnation in the Lake of Fire versus the gift of eternal life God gives to believers. Paul is also writing to believers throughout this letter. Paul had previously written in Gal. 5:19-21 that "the works of the flesh are evident, ... those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." The moment anyone believes in Jesus Christ, he receives everlasting life, but some will enjoy a higher quality of that life based on how they fulfill the "law of Christ." As Jesus said in John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." All who believe receive eternal life, but some will enjoy it "more abundantly." The more abundant life comes through rewards received at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Gal. 6:9-10 encourages us "Let us not grow weary while doing good" and "let us do good to all." In the context "doing good" would be fulfilling the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2), "love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal. 5:14), and "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). "For in due season we shall reap." Bearing fruit for believers in Jesus Christ is not automatic. Just as plant seedlings do not bear fruit, so baby believers need to grow to the point where they are mature enough to bear fruit. Then in "due season we shall reap." "Due season" refers to God's timing. Fruit is produced through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life. God also has set the time for our future evaluation at the Judgment Seat of Christ.



**Wood Thrush, Quintana Neo-Tropical Sanctuary, Texas**

Gal. 6:11-18. See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand! As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these *would* compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God. From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit. Amen.

"See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand." How can a simple statement like this one be controversial? This statement is usually understood to refer to these concluding verses in Galatians? Then I read Kenneth Wuest's *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*. He pointed out that the verb "have written" is a past tense verb in the Greek, although some translations render it "am writing." It was common practice for the author of a letter to dictate the letter to a professional scribe and then at the end the author would write a few closing remarks. If Paul did indeed write the entire letter himself, rather than dictating to a scribe, he was showing the Galatians how important this subject matter is.

The Judaizer false teachers themselves were under pressure from other Jews to keep the law and circumcision even after they had believed in Jesus Christ. They were concerned about persecution from the Jews who had not believed in Christ. As it says, "that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ." Then there was the harsh reality of the Old Testament law, "Not even those who are circumcised keep the law." The Law was there to point Israel to their need for a Savior.

"That they may boast in your flesh." The false teachers wanted to show the unbelieving Jews that they were being successful in having these new believers in Jesus Christ circumcised. But God has not placed me here to make a good showing to the unbelieving world. Note Paul's testimony: "God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." Paul endured persecution and suffering because of his teaching about Jesus Christ. Death on a cross was not a subject for polite conversation in Paul's day.

"In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything but a new creation." Circumcision has no eternal value, but being born again does. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit." We are not under the law. Paul prays that we should live by grace through our new creation.

"And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God." The rule that Paul discusses in this letter is, that we as born again believers, do not have to keep the Old Testament law. This is true not only for Gentile believers, but also for the people of Israel who also believe. Both the pronoun "them" and "the Israel of God" refer to two different groups of people. Both are preceded by the preposition translated "upon" showing that "them" and "the Israel of God" are not synonyms. God still has a plan for Israel. God has not substituted the Church in His plan for Israel.

Eph. 1:1-2. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

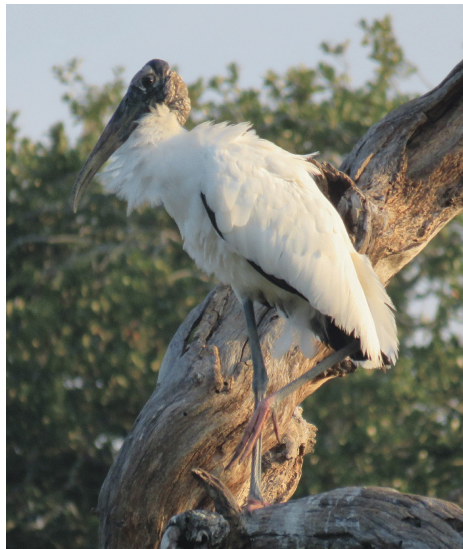
Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." The word "apostle" has a general meaning as well as a special meaning. In general, an "apostle" is one sent on a commission to accomplish a purpose for the one on whose behalf the person was sent. In the New Testament several people like Barnabas and Titus were said to be apostles as they were sent out by a local church with the gospel message. But Eph. 4:12 refers to the spiritual gift of apostleship. These were men who had seen the resurrected Jesus and had also been taught by Him. They were responsible for leading the early church following Jesus' ascension. They also either wrote or oversaw the writing of the books of the New Testament. Paul received the spiritual gift of apostleship by the will of God. The spiritual gift of apostleship came from God. The apostles were not chosen or appointed by people.

"To the saints who are in Ephesus." The term "saint" came out of pagan Greek religions. A saint was a person dedicated to the service of one of the ancient Greek idol gods. Every believer in Jesus Christ is a saint in the sense that God has set us aside for dedicated service to Him. Will I fulfill this responsibility that God has given me?

"And faithful in Christ Jesus." We become saints when we believed in Jesus Christ. Will I continue to walk by faith? Paul asks us in Eph. 4:1, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." All believers are not always faithful in their walk with Jesus Christ. 2 Tim. 2:13, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself." "In Christ Jesus" is our position we have in Christ. But Jesus taught His disciples that if we keep His commandments, we will abide in Him. John 15:10, "If you keep My commandment, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." When Paul wrote in this verse, "faithful in Christ Jesus, he was not talking about our position in Christ, but about our walk.

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Grace is God's unmerited favor to us. We don't deserve it. Rom. 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." When I believed in Jesus Christ, God broke down the sin barrier between us and I now can have peace with God. Col. 1:20, "and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." This peace we experience as a part of the fruit of the Spirit of Gal. 5:22-23 that comes when we walk my means of the Holy Spirit.

"From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul links the names of these two members of the Godhead together showing that the two are co-equal as members of the Godhead.



Wood Stork, Eagle Lake, Texas

Eph. 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 should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

Paul packs a whole lot of theology into the opening verses of this letter. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." He opens with the idea that God is to be praised. We are to speak good things of God. Why? Because of what Paul writes next. "Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ." As Paul proceeds through this letter, he will explain what these spiritual blessings are. These blessings are spiritual. They are not material blessings for which we should ask God. These blessings are not on earth, but are in the "heavenly *places*" or "heavenly *realms*." They are ours because of our position "in Christ." We were placed in this position "in Christ," at the moment that we believed in Jesus Christ.

"Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." I have heard Bible teachers talk about a time in eternity past when the three members of the Godhead determined all things that would happen in this created world in a "council of divine decrees." While this may help us to understand this statement "before the foundation of the world," it is an over-simplification. In reality God in His omniscience has always known what He was going to do. As it says in Gen. 1:1, at the beginning of the time that God created, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." God must have previously created the angels since Job 38:4,7 says that when God "laid the foundations of the earth" ... that "all the sons of God shouted for joy." So God has already determined what spiritual blessings each of us will receive and they are waiting for us in the "heavenly *places*."

Does that mean that I do not have any choice in the matter? That is an erroneous idea that Augustine imported into Christianity when he converted from ten years following the fatalistic eastern religion known as Manichaeism. This teaching focuses on the sovereignty of God and demeans God's other attributes to be of a lesser importance. In God's omnipotence He created people in His own image. As a part of God's image, we have the ability to choose to obey God. In God's omniscience He knew who would obey and those who would not. All of God's divine attributes are always active. They are infinite. One is not more important than the others. God in His omnipotence will complete His plan as He determined that it would be completed. That includes providing for every believer "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places*" that He has determined to give us.

So Paul makes a true statement: "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, ." God chose us, but at the same time allows me the ability to choose to believe in Jesus Christ. Man's free will and volition exist alongside the fulfillment of God's sovereign plan for this world. Both co-exist and are complementary, not contradictory.

"That we should be holy and without blame before Him." Now theologians can't agree whether the next phrase "in love" refers to our being "holy and without blame before Him in love" or whether it refers to God "in love having predestined us." Paul wrote "that we should be holy and without blame." He is looking at how I should live my life. I should set aside my life ("be holy") to live for God. When I do this then I will be blameless in the sight of God. I am not a puppet with God pulling the strings.

Eph. 1:5-6. having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.

"Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself." As used in the New Testament, the word "adoption" is different from the way we use "adoption" today. Every believer is a child of God by virtue of being born again. As John wrote in John 1:12, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." As used by John, this is a child born into a family, including young children. As a born again child of God I received an inheritance which included eternal life. I will receive a resurrection body. I will spend eternity with God in the new heaven and the new earth of Rev. 21:1. 2 Tim. 2:11 says, "*This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him (all believers have died with Christ), We shall also live with Him.*" This is the inheritance of every believer and by the promise of God, our current possession.

Here is what Warren Wiersbe wrote in his *Expository Outlines on the New Testament*. "Adoption' in the New Testament refers to the official act of a father who bestows the status of full adulthood on a son of minor status. It is not the taking in of an outsider; it is the placing of a family member into the privileges and blessings of adulthood." So I take it that we should not think of every believer as being adopted into God's family in the sense of our contemporary usage of the word adoption, since we have already been born again as a child of God. The Greek word translated "adoption" is a compound word made up of the word for an adult child (son) being placed in position as a full adult, specifically as now being an heir of the family.

God has predestined some believers to grow spiritually and to qualify for an additional inheritance to be received at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Looking at 2 Tim. 2:12, "If we endure, We shall also reign with Him." Not every believer will endure in their spiritual life, so not all believers will reign with Christ. In Eph. 1:4, God "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him." Paul didn't write that we WILL be "holy and without blame," but that is the way I am supposed to live. For those who do live "holy and without blame," God has predestined us to adoption as (adult) sons by Jesus Christ."

"According to the good pleasure of His will." God did not have to provide us with "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). But He did so through the "good pleasure of His will." He has also provided divine resources so we can live our lives "holy and without blame." He has provided men with the spiritual gift of pastor-teacher to teach us His word. We have the indwelling of all three members of the Godhead. We have the ministry of the Holy Spirit so we can understand God's word when it is taught. The Holy Spirit works in our lives so we can obey God's word.

"To the praise of the glory of His grace." As Eph. 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." God is worthy of our praise. He has provided all this and more to us in His grace. God has accepted us because of our position in the Beloved, in Christ.



**Wedgling Moth, Houston, Texas**



Eph. 1:7-10. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." Redemption is the payment of a price. As Jesus said in Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." Peter wrote in 1 Pet. 1:18-19, "Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." Christ paid the penalty for our sins as our substitute. Psa. 103:12 describes the removal of the guilt of our sins: "As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us." God has forgiven our sins "according to the riches of His grace."

"Which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will." We can know nothing about God and what He has done for us unless He reveals it to us. This is what He has done through His word.

"Mystery" is a teaching of God's word that is revealed in the New Testament, but was completely unknown previously. The Jews knew from the Old Testament that God had promised a Messiah. He was to be their king, but there was also Isa. 53 which told of the Messiah's suffering, death, and resurrection. The Church was totally unknown until Jesus told Peter and the other disciples in Matt. 16:18, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church." So the "mystery" is new information God has revealed to us through Paul.

God is working out His purpose and plan for this world and for all mankind. He is doing it "according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself." God's plan and will is being revealed day by day in this world. God is working all things toward this end, "that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth."

The word "dispensation" refers to the administration of the affairs of a household or of some particular property. Paul uses it here for the way God is planning to fulfill His purposes in the future he calls "the fullness of the times." This is when God will fulfill His promises to Israel and also to all of us as believers during the Church Age. Theologians have borrowed the term "dispensation" as a way of describing the different ways God has allowed His plan to unfold at various times throughout the history of the world.

In the "dispensation of the fullness of the times," Christ will take His place as the ruler of the world. He is not now sitting on His throne as king, but is sitting at God's right hand on God's throne. Satan is the current ruler of the world.

In Eph. 1:3-5 Paul talked about what God the Father did for us and He is worthy of praise. "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."

Now in Eph. 1:7-12 he focuses on Christ and His redemption. When he gets to Eph. 1:13ff, he will talk about the Holy Spirit. All three members of the Godhead have a part in working out God's plan for which He has predestined my life and that of all believers.

Eph. 1:11-14. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

"In Him also we have obtained an inheritance." The *NET Bible* translation renders this phrase closer to how all the commentators I read understood it. "In Christ we too have been claimed as God's own possession." We think of an inheritance as something we receive from the last will and testament of someone who has died. But the Bible uses the word more in the sense of what we have already received and is a current possession. Paul was not writing about our inheritance or possession, but that we are God's possession. Jesus Christ has redeemed us and we are His possession.

"Being predestined." Prior to Augustine's conversion to the Roman church, he spent ten years following the fatalistic eastern religion of Manichaeism. With his conversion, Augustine superimposed eastern fatalism onto the Bible's teaching on election and predestination. This understanding elevates God's attribute of sovereignty above all of God's other attributes. All of God's attributes are infinite. They all exist as a package. One is not more important than the others.

Yes, we are "predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will." God established His plan for this world and he is executing it as we live out His plan. As far as God is concerned His plan has already been completed. God is eternal. He is not subject to time which is a part of His creation of this world. Yes, He established the plan in His sovereignty. But the plan also involved His omniscience (God knew what He was doing), His omnipotence (He has the power to complete the plan even with mankind having free will and volition).

From the beginning God's plan included everything in the history of the world: the universal Flood and Noah's ark; God's calling of Abraham and the people of Israel; Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension; the Church; and future prophetic events of the Tribulation, the Millennial kingdom, and the new heaven and new earth. God's plan included creating people in God's own image with free will and volition.

God's purpose for doing all this was not so that He could save some and leave the rest in just retribution. As Paul says multiple times in these early verses in Ephesians, His plan is for "the praise of His glory." As Eph. 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." We are here to glorify God. God is being glorified as His plan unfolds.

"We who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory." God's purpose in calling Abraham and the people of Israel as His people was for His glory.

Then Paul says "you also *trusted*." That is Gentiles who are also "to the praise of His glory." "After you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed." We hear the truth of the gospel, but it is up to us to believe. Each person who believes in Jesus Christ, immediately receives the gift of the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our salvation. "Until the redemption of the purchased possession." This redemption for us is yet future when we will receive a resurrection body completely without sin.



Eph. 1:15-19. Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power"

Paul prayed often for the believers to whom he ministered. He mentions his prayers for them in many of his letters. Where appropriate Paul also spoke well of the recipients of his letters. "After I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints." Paul has been writing to the Ephesians in words that tell us they were believers in Jesus Christ. So when he writes here "of your faith in the Lord Jesus" he is not looking back at the time of their salvation when they believed in Jesus Christ, but of their walk by faith as believers. The Ephesians had an ongoing faith in their Christian lives which produced "love for all the saints." His prayer included thanksgiving to God for the faithful walk of the Ephesians.

"May give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." Some of our translations capitalize the word for "spirit" and some do not. As believers, the Ephesians already are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and we are all commanded to be "filled by means of the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). While the ministry of the Holy Spirit is involved in fulfilling this prayer request of Paul that the Ephesians would have "wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him," it sounds like Paul's request is for an open mind or spirit in these believers for the teaching of God's word.

"The eyes of your understanding being enlightened." The oldest Bible manuscripts as well as the majority of manuscripts do not have the word "understanding," but have the word "heart." This refers to our whole being and in particular to the way we think. I need to be open to the teaching of God's word as well as to make it a priority in my Christian life.

What is it that God wants me to learn? "That you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power." "The hope of His calling" is the total assurance (not a whimsical, "I hope so" wish) of the promises (prophecies) God has given to us for our future with Him.

In 1 Thess. 1:10 Paul wrote that we would be delivered from the future time of Tribulation that will come to this world. "And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." In John 14:3 Jesus promised that we would be with Him when He comes for us in the Rapture: "I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also."

"What are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." We are Christ's possession or inheritance. The extent to which we may share in that inheritance will be determined by our rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. How I live my life today has eternal consequences which is why Paul prayed for the Ephesians that they would have "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." Finally, I may have "the exceeding greatness of His (Christ's) power" working in my life, if I am obedient to Him.

Eph. 1:20-23. which 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 principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Paul finished Eph. 1:19 saying "according to the working of His (God's) mighty power." Now he gives us three descriptions that illustrate God's mighty power. First is Jesus' resurrection. "Which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead." Everything in this world is dying. This is the result of Adam's fall in Gen. 3. The world itself is also dying away. That is what the scientific laws related to thermodynamics show us. If energy and matter had always existed, then this world would be a gray mass at a temperature of absolute zero. Without God the Big Bang is the best explanation with which science can come up. But God created this world, Adam sinned and the result is that death is now a reality. God's power raised Jesus from the dead. We know that each of us will receive resurrection bodies when Jesus returns for the Church in the Rapture.

In Jesus' resurrection and at His ascension God "seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come." The words "principality and power and might and dominion" refer to angels. "Every name that is named" includes all people as well as everything else in God's creation.

Second, God "put all *things* under His (Christ's) feet." But as Heb. 2:8 says, "You have put all things in subjection under his feet.' For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing *that is* not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him." So now Christ is at the right hand of God and positionally over all things, Satan is still allowed to rule this world. We know that because Christ is in the position of having "all *things* put under His feet," that time is running out for Satan. I should not let myself be taken in by the thinking of the world so as to think like Satan.

Third, God "gave Him (Jesus) *to be* head over all *things* to the church, which is His body." When Adam disobeyed God, he lost the rulership of the world to Satan. Now Christ is the head of the Church which is comprised of both the Jews and Gentiles in the Church Age, everyone who believes in Jesus Christ. In the future Millennium, Satan will be removed from his rulership and Christ will reign as ruler of the world. Today, I need to be obeying God's word and keeping His commandments.

The final description Paul writes here says of Christ, "the fullness of Him who fills all in all." Christ has filled the Church with great blessings, not only for this life, but also for all eternity. He has given us the Holy Spirit to teach us God's word and to empower our lives. He has given us His word in the Bible. As 2 Pet. 1:3 says, 'As His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue." Now we are commanded in 2 Pet. 1:5, "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love." These things I must do to please God.

Eph. 2:1-3. And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

These three verses describe our situation before we believed in Jesus Christ. This is what we were when we were unsaved. Today, we who have believed in Jesus Christ, have received God's gift of eternal salvation. Now we have a choice. Will I continue to live as I did in the past, or will I choose to obey God. God has provided me with the resources I need to live a life pleasing to Him.

"And you *He made alive*." The *New King James Version* picked up the phrase "*He made alive*" from Eph. 2:4 to help us understand what Paul was saying when he wrote these verses. Before we believed in Jesus Christ, we "were dead in trespasses and sins." We were spiritually dead. We are separated from God and unable to have fellowship or any relationship with Him because of our sin.

Col. 2:13 says, "And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses." Trespasses and sins are our deliberate acts of rebellion against God and His righteousness and our failure to live as we should. God has forgiven my sins, now I need to walk in a manner that pleases God.

How did we act when we were unbelievers? I don't want to continue to repeat the same deliberate acts against God and His righteousness. "In which you once walked according to the course of this world." The Bible can give us a totally different way of thinking than the world has. As Paul wrote in Rom. 12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." I need to know God's word, so I can know how to think as God wants me to think. In that way I can walk in my Christian life as God would have me walk, and not walk according to the world's way.

"According to the prince of the power of the air." This describes Satan and the influence he exercises in the world. Our courts let criminals go free. Then when they use a gun to kill others, our politicians want to take guns away. Removing guns from law abiding people will not stop criminals from killing people.

Growing up and attending public schools, I had some teachers who were believers in Jesus Christ. Prayer and the Bible were allowed in the schools at that time. What are the moral principles that are taught in our schools today where prayer and the Bible are off limits? This reflects the thinking of Satan and the world.

"The spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience." The "sons of disobedience" refers to unbelievers which is how we all began our lives or more specifically to people whose lives are characterized by disobedience to God. "The spirit" is the thinking of the world and of unbelievers that is inspired by Satan.

Paul warned Timothy in 1 Tim. 4:1-2, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron." I am surrounded today by multiple sources of disinformation: on the internet, on the radio, in newspapers, and television. I need to immerse myself in what God teaches in His word.

Eph. 2:4-7. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

In Eph. 2:1-3 Paul wrote about how lost unbelievers are. Before we believed in Jesus Christ we “were dead in trespasses.” Now he looks at what God has done for us. “God, who is rich in mercy.” God’s mercy toward us is inexhaustible. “Because of His great love with which He loved us.” Rom. 5:8 tells us that “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This is also the message of John 3:16, “For God in this way loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Eph. 2:5-6 mentions three things that God did for us the moment we believed in Jesus Christ. First, He “made us alive together with Christ.” In John 3:2 Jesus told Nicodemus, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” In Tit. 3:5 Paul calls being “born again,” “regeneration.” “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.” It is God who saves us. We don’t save ourselves by believing or by any works of righteousness which we may do. I believed, and God saved me as He promised. Now I possess eternal life since God “Made us alive together with Christ.” Then Paul adds parenthetically which he will explain more in Eph. 2:8-9, “by grace you have been saved.” In God’s grace He decided to save those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Second, He “raised *us* up together.” Positionally, we are spiritually united with Jesus Christ. Col. 3:1-2 says, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” Am I focused on Christ and my promised future with Him? Or am I involved in the things of this world?

Paul expressed it this way in Phil. 3:18-20. “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross, whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is their* belly, and whose glory *is* in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul is speaking of believers when he says, “For many walk.” Let me not be one of them.

Third, God “made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus.” Jesus Christ is in the place of honor at God’s right hand. He is waiting for the time when He will take His place as the ruler of the world and then in the new heaven and new earth. God has given us these spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. We are waiting for the reality of these spiritual blessings to be fulfilled in the future.

“That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Paul previously mentioned “the riches of His grace” in Eph. 1:7, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” “The ages to come” look forward to the time following the Second Advent of Christ when He will take His place as the ruler of this world in the Millennial Kingdom. This will be followed by an even more glorious time lasting forever when we will be with Him in the new heaven and new earth.

Eph. 2:8-10. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

This is a significant passage of Scripture that every believer should have memorized. Paul picks up on his parenthetical statement in Eph. 2:5 and explains it more. "For by grace you have been saved." Grace is not an attribute of God, but what God decides to do in His sovereign will.

"And that not of yourselves." What is not of ourselves? When we read this in English, it appears that either faith or perhaps grace is not of ourselves. But pronouns, nouns and adjectives in the Greek have gender and the gender of a pronoun must match that of its antecedent. In this case, "that" is a neuter pronoun, but both grace and faith are feminine nouns. "That" cannot be referring to either grace or faith. "By grace you have been saved" is a repetition of what Paul wrote in Eph. 2: 5 where it parenthetically says "made us alive together with Christ." This is the work of God in saving believers. Who are born again spiritually by God when they believe in Jesus Christ. It is our salvation that is not of ourselves. I believed, and then God saved me. So Paul adds, "*It is* the gift of God."

Paul also wrote in Eph. 2:5 and Eph. 2:8, "You have been saved." Since I believed at a time in the past, that is when God saved me. I continue to be saved because my salvation was completed by God and there is no way that I can lose it. Even if I decide later that I no longer believe, I am still saved.

Some people read Matt. 24:13 and take it out of its context to say that people have to continue to believe until the end of their life, or they were not saved. The verse says, "But he who endures to the end shall be saved." In the context "the end" is defined by the disciples' question in Matt. 24:3. They asked Jesus, "And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" The "end of the age" is related to Jesus' Second Coming. Jesus answers their question in the rest of Matt. 24 and on into Matt. 25. He describes the time of the Tribulation, relating it to Daniel's seventieth week of Dan. 9:24-27.

As part of Jesus' answer to the disciples, He tells them in Matt. 24:14 when the end of the age will come. This is another verse which is often taken out of context by many missionaries since it does not refer to the spread of the gospel during the Church Age. "And the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." The book of Revelation describes the spread of the gospel during the Tribulation through the martyrs mentioned in the Fifth Seal of Rev. 6, the Two Witnesses of Rev. 11, and the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel in Rev. 14.

"Lest anyone should boast." Too often, I have passed over this statement, not recognizing its significance. Grace glorifies God because He does all the work of our salvation. If man could save himself by his works, then man is glorified. But God is glorified by my salvation because it is He who saved me.

"For we are His workmanship." Model railroading has been a hobby of mine for many years. In the past I have entered models in a contest and won a few awards. Some of these earned what is called a "merit award," as the models received more than 87.5 points out of the 125 point scoring system. The word "workmanship" is like a "masterpiece" or a "work of art" by God. We have been created by God for the purpose of "good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." It is up to me to complete these good works that God has prepared that I should walk in them. Some believers will do so and will receive their own merit award at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Eph. 2:11-13. Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

“Therefore, remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh.” Paul addresses the Ephesians as Gentiles. He will go on to describe how lost they were with their worship of idols and false gods. “Who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands.” The Jews spoke of Gentiles disparagingly. The story of Peter and the centurion Cornelius in Acts 10 shows us the barrier that existed between Jews and Gentiles. Peter explained it in Acts 10:28, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.” The idea of races is not a Biblical idea. Darwin in his book on Evolution and the Origin of Species wrote that some races are superior to others. But all people are members of the human race and God created all in the image of God.

In Eph. 2:14-15 Paul writes that both Jews and Gentiles are one before God in the Church. “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandment *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace.”

Paul goes on in Eph. 2:12 to show the extent of the barrier that in the past separated the unbelieving Gentiles from God. First, they were without Christ. They had no promise of a Messiah (the meaning of the title, Christ). The Old Testament promises of the Messiah not only included His future rule of peace over Israel, but also the forgiveness of sins and that all would know Jehovah. Jer. 31:34 says, “No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

“Second, they were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,” and third, they were strangers from the covenants of promise.” God had made promises to Israel through Abraham and David. God’s promises included what I quoted above from Jeremiah. Fourth and fifth, “having no hope and without God in the world.” They had no hope for themselves of anything beyond this life. This is true of unbelievers today.

Catholics can look forward to purgatory. Islam offers no promise that a person will please their moon god they call Allah. The eastern religions with their idea of reincarnation cannot tell a person if he will return as a flea or some higher form of life. The carved idols of wood or stone which the ancients worshiped were nothing more than chunks of wood or stone.

“Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” Christ died in our place, paying the penalty for our sins. Now I will have a part in the promises that God made to Israel when God fulfills those promises.

I really like what Paul wrote to the Philippians in Phil. 3:10-11, “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” Whether Jesus returns before I die, or if I die first, I will spend eternity with Him.

Eph. 3:16-19. that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height—— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

These verses are another prayer of Paul for believers. Paul is not praying about things that every believer possesses. These are blessings that any believer may experience and enjoy if he is walking in fellowship with God. Also all three members of the Godhead are mentioned in Paul's prayer. Paul addresses the prayer in Eph. 3:14, "to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." In Eph. 3:16 he mentions the Holy Spirit and in Eph. 3:19 he again mentions Christ.

First request is that we should "be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man." Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 4:16, "Therefore we do not lose heart, Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day." God has given believers the Holy Spirit to enable us to overcome the drives and pull of our old man, our sinful nature.

The challenge for us is to utilize the divine resources God is giving us through His word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. As Paul encourages us in Eph. 4:1, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called."

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." As the *Bible Knowledge Commentary* says, "That Christ may be at home in your hearts through faith." While it is true that Christ indwells every believer from the moment of salvation, this statement is looking toward those believers who abide in Him. This requires that I keep His commandments. John 15:5,10 say "He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit for without Me you can do nothing. ... If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." This is our walk by faith. While we are saved by faith, our lives are also experientially sanctified by faith.

"That you being rooted and grounded in love." It is the work of the Holy Spirit that produces love for others in a believer's life. Gal. 5:22, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, ..." We "may be able to comprehend (understand) with all the saints" (other believers) the immensity of Christ's love for us. Christ's love is without limit. It is actually beyond our full comprehension. The translation here, "passes knowledge" is an understatement. Others translate it as "surpasses knowledge." But Paul's prayer asks that we may learn more about Christ's love. This comes from knowing God's word and applying it in my life.

"That you may be filled with all the fullness of God." The *NET Bible* translates this as "filled up to all the fullness of God." This is a work of progress in our spiritual lives. There is no way that we can ever reach the point of being totally "filled up to all the fullness of God."

My spiritual life is to be one of growth. I want to grow day by day to be more like Christ as He always completely obeyed the commandments and the will of God the Father. I want to know as much as possible of what God has told me about Himself in His word. As believers grow more spiritually mature, they are being "filled up to all the fullness of God." I like to think of it this way, the ministry of the Holy Spirit allows for an ever expanding capacity for being filled up to the fullness of God if I will let Him do so.

Eph. 3:20-21. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

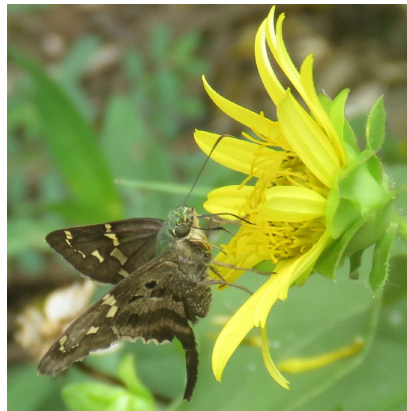
Paul ends this prayer begun in Eph. 3:14 with a doxology and benediction. This also completes the first half of Ephesians which is heavy with theology. In the second half of Ephesians, Paul will tell us more about how we should live. These two verses were also in one of The Navigators' memory packs which I memorized when I was a teenager.

"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us." God is omnipotent, all powerful. Like God's love mentioned in Eph. 3:19, all of God's attributes far exceed our ability to understand. They are infinite. However, it is up to each one of us to open up the floodgates of God's power in our lives. Rom. 6:12-13 says, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." God has provided great divine resources through the Holy Spirit and God's word by which we can live our lives for Him. This is the process of spiritual growth and sanctification that God expects of us.

"To Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." God did not create this world and the people in it so He could save us. He did this for His own glory. The Church exists for the purpose of glorifying God. God is glorified when He saves us since our salvation is totally the work of God. I believed in Jesus Christ, but there was no merit in my faith. God did the work. He gave me forgiveness of sins. He gave me eternal life when I was born again. God imputed Jesus' perfect righteousness to my account. Now He has also given the Holy Spirit and the completed canon of Scripture so I can live my life walking with Him. Moment by moment, I need to demonstrate faith by utilizing these provisions God has made for me.

In Eph. 2 Paul developed the idea that God has united both Jews and Gentiles together in the Church. In the Old Testament God chose the people of Israel to be a witness to the world about God. Israel thought they were special because God had chosen them. Yet when Jesus, their Messiah came, Israel rejected Him. Now the Church is composed of both Jews and Gentiles. One group does not have better privileges than the other. I have known several Jewish people who have trusted in Jesus Christ and are a part of the Church. My wife and I in our daily Bible reading together recently read the "dry bones" chapter (37) in Ezekiel which prophesies a time when the people of Israel will be saved.

In our contemporary world people agree that there should be equality among the various peoples in the world which are mistakenly called different races. God created us and we all descend from Adam and Noah. So we are actually all one race. Only through faith in Jesus Christ and learning to love one another as the Bible commands us, can we eliminate the intolerances and animosities between the so-called races.



**Long-tailed Skipper, butterfly, Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, Texas**



Eph. 4:1-3. I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

"Therefore." With this introductory word, Paul sets forth his conclusions as to what all that theology he wrote in the first three chapters means for the daily lives of believers. "I, ..., the prisoner of the Lord." Paul reminds his readers that he is writing this letter while he is in prison in Rome waiting to see if this is the time Caesar will decapitate him. "I ... beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." Just as Paul had heard the gospel on the Damascus Road and believed, so the Ephesians had heard the gospel and believed. Now he begs us to walk worthy of our calling.

My life should reflect these characteristics: (1) "Lowliness," better understood as humility. Phil. 2:3-4 says, "in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." Rom. 12:3 adds, "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." God has given different gifts to each believer. We have our own responsibility to fulfill in the body of Christ, His Church. A person's pride, however, will disrupt the unity among believers.

(2) "Gentleness." The best description I saw of this word is to have your emotions under control. Gal. 6:1. "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one is a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted."

(3) "Longsuffering." How do you handle a situation when another person provokes you? I must exercise patience, keeping my emotions under control.

(4) "Bearing with one another in love." The Bible many times mentions our relationship with "one another." Primarily, this refers to how we should work with other believers. Secondly, it can also apply to any person, believer or unbeliever. Jesus set a high hurdle for believers with respect to love when He told His disciples in John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." If I treated every person in love, the other characteristics would not be an issue. Here is the way our pastor defined Biblical love in a recent message:

"Love is a mental attitude toward others which desires the best for them according to the standards of God's integrity and acts toward them consistent with that desire and standard. Christian love is impossible apart from a walk by the Spirit and spiritual growth."

First, love is not an emotion, but a mental attitude. Paul wrote in Phil. 1:9 confirming that love is a mental attitude (My wife and I have the reference to this verse engraved on the inside of our wedding rings.): "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment." Love is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and is impossible without the Spirit.

"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Peace is also a fruit of the Spirit. None of this is possible in a believer's life unless he is walking by means of the Spirit.

Eph. 4:4-6. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Eph. 4:3 says, "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Now in today's verses Paul writes about seven unities which make all believers one in Christ. Jesus prayed in John 17:20-21, "I do not pray for these (His eleven disciples) alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."

"There is one body" which is identified in the context as the Church. Eph. 2:16, "That He might reconcile them both (Jews and Gentiles) to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity." "And one Spirit." This is the Holy Spirit who is mentioned in Eph. 4:3.

"Just as you were called in one hope of your calling." This is the confident assurance that we have through our salvation that God will fulfill His prophesied promises to us: Our eternal life; the future return of Jesus Christ for His Church in the Rapture; that we will always be with Christ after that; the promised kingdom for Israel; and the new heaven and new earth. God's word tells us what our future is. At the end of the great prophecy of the Rapture in 1 Thess. 4:13-18, Paul wrote, "Therefore comfort one another with these words." In the Baptist church where I grew up, the only prophecy I heard was that Jesus was coming again.

When I was twelve years old my parents gave me a *Scofield Reference Bible* and its notes outlined our future as believers. I attended a prophecy conference at the Baptist Church I joined when I was in college. Then in graduate school, Dr. Walvoord taught a conference at the church where I met my wife. Too many churches are like the Baptist church where I grew up and avoid prophecy or they twist what the Bible says by following Augustine's allegorization of prophecy. Then there are radio, television and internet evangelists that come up with their own strange ideas.

Eph. 4:5 is a short verse found on many Baptist church baptistries. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." Jesus Christ is our "one Lord." "One faith." There is only one way of salvation, by faith alone in Christ alone. Jesus told His disciples in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." I have been to too many funerals, oftentimes in Methodist churches, where they read John 14:1-5, and stop short of Jesus' invitation in verse 6. In this verse Jesus speaks, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

"One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." John 1:12 tells us that we, as believers, are all children of God. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." God is "above all," which is better understood as God is "Over all." God is sovereign. The *King James* and *New King James Versions* read that God is "in you all." The oldest manuscripts from which our other modern versions are translated read that God is "in all." While the majority of manuscripts read that God is "in us all." Since to say that God is "in you all" would appear to leave Paul, the author out, I take it that this is based on a copyist error. Whether you understand this as God is "in us all" or "in all," we learn that God indwells every believer. Some say this refers to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but the subject of the verb is "one God and Father of all." So it may be telling us that even God the Father indwells believers.

Eph. 4:7-10. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men." (Now this, "He ascended" —what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

If you are like me, you read through these verses quickly and then move on. At first reading, I am not that sure what Paul is writing about. The key is in the words "grace" and "gifts." In the first two clauses of Eph. 4:8 Paul quotes Psa. 68:18. Then in the third clause he reverses the giver and the donee. What are the gifts? Paul makes these clear in Eph. 4:11. "And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." In 1 Cor. 12:28 three of these gifts are specifically identified as spiritual gifts through which believers may serve others in the church.

A spiritual gift is a skill or empowerment by the Holy Spirit given to believers by which they may minister to other believers. As Peter said in 1 Pet. 4:10, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Peter tells us that, each of us, as believers, receive a spiritual gift. It is not necessary for each person to identify his gift. But we do have an obligation and a responsibility to minister to others in the church in such a way that God is glorified and believers are edified.

"According to the measure of Christ's gift." Some believers have small and insignificant ministries, but others appear as leaders.

"He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?" Various commentaries list more than one idea as to what Paul is saying. "He ascended." Is this Jesus' resurrection or is it His ascension after forty days of appearances or is it His spirit ascending into heaven following His death on the cross to present Himself as the substitutionary sacrifice for our sins?

He "descended into the lower parts of the earth" also has three suggested approaches. I asked a pastor one time what it meant and he said it referred to Jesus coming to live on the earth in His incarnation. Others think it refers to Jesus' resurrection from the grave into which He had descended. Others look at Jesus' promise to the other criminal being crucified in Luke 23:43, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will with Me in Paradise." So both of them died and Jesus descended into Paradise with the other criminal and then "He led captivity captive," by taking the Old Testament believers with Him into heaven.

An additional refinement of this third idea is from 1 Pet. 3:18-20, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, ... by whom He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water." According to this refinement Christ descended into Tartarus or wherever these "sons of God" (angels) of Gen. 6:2 are incarcerated and made a victorious proclamation to them. He did not preach the gospel to them because He did not die for them and there is no salvation offered to fallen angels.

This seems to be the preferred approach to understanding what Paul had in mind. The giving of spiritual gifts comes after Jesus' ascension into heaven, so the statement "He ascended" seems to fit best with Jesus' ascension. Descending into the lower parts of the earth would be Jesus' descent into Paradise to lead the Old Testament saints into heaven and also fits with the proclamation Jesus made to the "spirits in prison" of 1 Peter 3. Finally, Jesus ascended "that He might fill all things. Through the Holy Spirit Jesus fills believers with the spiritual gifts needed for the growth of the Church.

Eph. 4:11-13. And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

Paul now identifies some of the gifts he mentioned back in Eph. 4:8 when he said that Christ "gave gifts to men." In English we read five gifts, but the structure of the Greek links the last two, "pastors and teachers," together as one gift.

He then moves ahead to the purpose for which Christ gives these gifts. He writes in Eph. 4:13, "Till we all come to the Unity of the faith." He ties the purpose of the gifts back to the way, we as believers, should walk (Eph. 4:1), and as Eph. 4:3 says, "Endeavoring to the keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

While we think of these gifts as spiritual gifts given by Christ to men, Eph. 4:11 speaks of the gifts as being the gifted men whom He gave to the Church for the work of ministry. As believers we receive spiritual gifts with which we are to minister in our churches and to other believers. Christ gives gifted believers to the Church.

Acts 1:20-22 sets forth a requirement for being an apostle. These verses say in part: "Of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ... one of these must be a witness with us of His resurrection." They must have been eye witnesses of the resurrected Christ and to have been a part of Jesus' ministry during His life. Apostleship was a foundational gift God used during the initial formation of the Church. We do not have apostles today. The New Testament Scriptures were written by apostles or men closely associated with an apostle.

Similarly, prophets received direct revelation from God and passed it on to the Church. 1 Cor. 13:10-11 tells us that the spiritual gift of prophecy has ceased. "For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away." Today, we have the complete revelation of God in His word. He is not making new revelations through prophets. Prophecy was another foundational gift that is no longer needed.

The purpose of spiritual gifts is stated in Eph. 4:12-13 and can be summarized. The gifts are to enable believers to grow to spiritual maturity. Several years ago we planted a mulberry tree across the street from our house and then a couple of years after that our neighborhood planted a plum tree near it. It has taken a while, but each year now we have mulberries which the birds love and we ate a couple of plums last night for dinner. New believers are not going to bear fruit until they grow up in God's word and start to apply it. We need training and spiritual maturity to exercise our God given spiritual gifts to glorify God and edify other believers.

These two verses give the purpose of spiritual gifts to the church: "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (the Church), till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect (mature) man, to the measure of the stature of fullness of Christ."

In Eph. 4:1 Paul commanded us to "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." Then "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." I still have a long way to go in my spiritual life. Spiritual growth is an on-going and never-ending process for all believers.

Eph. 4:14-16. That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Paul is still talking about how spiritual gifts should work in the Church. "That we should no longer be children." The word for children here is for infants who have not even learned to talk yet. This is the way every person who believes in Christ begins his spiritual life. In human terms it can take twenty or more years for a child to grow to the point where he ventures out into life on his own.

For me, college was an important part of my maturing process. I was away from home, but my parents were a phone call or letter away. But they weren't there telling me to study or to go to bed or what time I should come home. I wanted to try a lot of things on my own. The Lord provided some new Christian friends. They pointed me to a couple of good churches, and I forgot my wacko idea about trying to visit different churches to see what they believed. I visited several fraternities during the Freshman rush. But I quickly saw that fraternity life would involve me with a lot of things I saw my unbelieving friends in high school doing and I didn't want to go in that direction. I had to manage my time on my own. I had to do a lot of growing up. Some people scoffed at me for going to college. Their point was that when I finished they would be four years ahead of me on their career path. College tuition was \$1,000 per year which was a lot of money then. Today it is \$58,600.

Paul's description of new believers doesn't sound much different than our situations today. "Tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine." People can't even agree on the most basic Bible teachings, like what it takes for a person to be saved. "By the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting."

This brings to my mind the strange story of Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8:9-25. He had supported himself by performing magical sorceries and his claims to greatness. In verse 13, it states that he believed in Jesus Christ. Then Simon saw the results of the Holy Spirit in Peter and perhaps others, and he tried to buy these same powers so he could enhance his sorcery tricks.

In Phil. 1:16 Paul wrote about some who preached Christ through false motives, "from selfish ambition, not sincerely, to add affliction to my chains." We still have people who are in ministry today for money.

"But speaking the truth in love." Those who teach God's word must do so through the work of the Holy Spirit. Their motive must be from love which is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). "May grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ." The purpose of spiritual gifts is for the edification (growth) of believers and for building up the Church.

In addition to the spiritual gifts Paul lists in Eph. 4:11, the Bible lists others. In Rom. 12:7-8 ministry, exhorting, giving, leading, and showing mercy are listed. 1 Cor. 12:8-11 speaks of gifts of "the word of wisdom," "the word of knowledge," and "faith." 1 Cor. 12:28 adds helps and administrations. 1 Pet. 4:9-11 adds hospitality and to "speak as the oracles of God." I don't think these lists are exhaustive.

God has prepared gifts for each believer to serve Him in the church. So Paul wrote in Eph. 4:16 where he refers to all believers as "every joint": "from whom the whole body (the Church), joined and knit together by what every joint (believer) supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes the growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."

Eph. 4:17-19. This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

Paul began this chapter in Eph. 4:1-3 telling the Ephesian believers how they should live, "Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Now he warns them not to follow the pattern of their old life before they believed. He writes, "That you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk." It seems to me that Paul would not have to write this if becoming a Christian automatically resulted in a person doing the right things. Paul also gives his authority for this statement, "Testify in the Lord."

This passage speaks of the way we should think. Note the words "mind," "understanding," "ignorance," and then in Eph. 4:20, "But you have not so learned Christ." In the previous verses Paul had written about the necessity of believers growing up in their spiritual lives. Eph. 4:13, "till we come to the unity of the faith and to the knowledge of Christ." Eph. 4:14, "that you should no longer be children." Eph. 4:15, "may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ."

"Futility of the mind." 1 Cor. 15:32 seems to express this well. "If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage *is it* to me? *If the dead do not rise*, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!'"

"Having their understanding darkened." The world tries to solve its problems without God. But Rom. 1:22 says, "Professing to be wise, they became fools."

2 Cor. 4:3-4, "But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them." Satan has instilled the world with ideas as to how to build a perfect world without God.

Eph. 4:20 mentions three sins in which the believers in Ephesus should no longer walk. These sins were the main attraction of the health and wealth gospel of the ancient world with their worship of idols. This false gospel preached that if you wanted to be prosperous then you needed to please the idols through sexual immorality in the idols' temples. Today our world does not disguise its immorality with religion. But this is the way the Ephesian believers lived before they trusted in Jesus Christ. Paul has to tell them that they should no longer "walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk."

Greed and covetousness are common motivating sins that underlie our thought patterns today. If a person wants the latest fashion or technological gadget, he can buy it and charge it on a credit card. If your neighbor gets a newer and fancier car than you have, maybe it is time to trade-in your older vehicle for something better.

In today's world, I need to learn as much as I can about the way God wants me to think. This comes from learning God's word and applying it. I want to think the way God wants me to think. I don't want to be led astray by the false solutions the world teaches.

Eph. 4:20-24. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

"You have not so learned Christ." The life that the Ephesian believers formerly lived as unbelievers is not the way they have been taught to live now. "That you put off ... the old man ... and that you put on the new man." The mood of these verbs "put off" and "put on" is not that of a command. They express what happened to us at the moment we believed in Jesus Christ. But the "old man" or flesh still exists in our nature. There is now a battle going on within ourselves. Paul wrote about this in Rom. 7:18-20: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me." So Paul is appealing to us as believers to say "No" to our flesh" and to obey the new man.

2 Cor. 5:17 says, "If anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new." God created the new man in us when we were born again. I have a choice in how I live. I can choose to learn God's word and follow it or I can continue to follow the corrupt and deceitful lusts of the flesh.

How do I "put on the new man"? This requires moment by moment decisions on my part. But Paul gives the underlying requirement in this text: "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." Paul told the Romans in Rom. 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Do you want to know what God's will for your life is? You will find it in God's word. God's word tells me not only how I should live, but it also tells me what I should think. This is an on-going, life-long activity that God expects of each of us. "That you should no longer be children" (Eph. 4:14).

We are to "put on the new man ... in true righteousness and holiness." If there is "true righteousness," then there must be a false righteousness. Isa. 64:6 agrees, "But we are all like an unclean *thing*, And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away." Psa. 14:1 which Paul quotes in Rom. 3:12, says "They have all turned aside, That have together become corrupt; *There is* none who does good, No, not one." My old man, my flesh, is inherently sinful. What good I do in the flesh is worthless before God. If nothing else, my motives are wrong. True righteousness is produced in the believer walking under the power of the Holy Spirit. "Holiness" has the idea of being set apart to the service of God. This is what Paul had in mind in Eph. 4:1, "Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." This is the believer who by the power of the Holy Spirit is putting on the new man in his life.



Wilson's Phalarope, near Presidio, Texas

Eph. 4:25. Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another.

The *English Standard Version* follows the Greek grammar better, "Therefore having put away falsehood." Kenneth Wuest in his *Expanded Translation of the New Testament*, translated it this way: "Therefore having put off the lie once for all. "So the Ephesians have quit lying or telling falsehoods, right? Then why does Paul command them to "speak truth"? By using both "lying" and "truth" in this verse, Paul is contrasting truth with lying.

So how does Paul use "truth" in Ephesians? Eph. 1:13, "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." In this verse Paul defines "truth" as "the gospel of your salvation."

Eph. 4:12. "If indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus." This sounds to me like "the truth that is in Jesus" is the gospel by which we are saved. Jesus said of the devil in John 8:44, "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it." The lie and falsehood that the Ephesian believers had already put away was Satan's viewpoint that we don't need God.

Here are some of the pithy sayings we hear from the world which do not come from God's word.

- > Listen to your heart.
- > Be true to yourself.
- > Trust your gut.
- > Feel good about who you are.
- > Happiness is the goal of life.
- > Just be a good person.

Paul now commands us to "speak truth to our neighbor." In the context our neighbor is our fellow believers. What are we to tell them? Again the context is a help. Eph. 4:14-15. "That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ."

Satan is a master at distorting the teaching of God's word. How many gospel messages do we hear that add something to faith alone in Christ alone? Like "the faith that saves is never alone." That may have come from 1 Beelzebub 3:16, but I haven't found it in the Bible. Others say you have to "believe and repent of your sins;" or "believe and be baptized" or "believe and make Christ Lord of your life" or believe and show that you really did believe by producing enough good works in your life." All of these add an element of works to salvation beyond simply believing in Jesus Christ.

How much of the Old Testament law am I supposed to keep as a Christian? James 2:10 says, "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all." As I understand that, if I am going to keep the law, I must obey all ten of the Ten Commandments, keeping the Sabbath plus paying three tithes, all the animal sacrifices, and worship in the no longer existing temple in Jerusalem. Does Israel's disobedience and rejection of Jesus Christ nullify God's unconditional promises to Israel and substitute the Church as the new recipient of Israel's promises? Paul tells me to stick to what God's word says.



Eph. 4:28-29. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

"Let him who stole steal no longer." This verse about stealing has always seemed strange to me. Were these believers actually stealing? Before they believed in Jesus Christ, they lived in a culture that was quite different from that of the Jews and from ours today. Stealing may have been a common practice. Paul gave Titus instructions for slaves and bondservants in Tit. 2:9-10. "*Exhort* bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all *things*, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things."

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in 2 Thess. 3:10-12 after reminding them of how he supported himself by his own labor when he ministered to them. He wrote, "For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread." Paul's point for each of us: "Let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good."

"That he may have something to give him who has need." Let me comment on the flip side of this statement. If someone wants to give something to you, be grateful. Do not let your pride get in the way. Graciously accept a gift when it is presented and thank God as well as the giver.

But God does expect us to give to others who are in need. We live in a world and under a government that has preempted charity from individuals. In former times people could use wisdom in whether to give to others who were in need. Now our government collects taxes, which first goes to pay a labor intensive bureaucracy and then doles out money to those the bureaucrats determine need it. This includes unemployment benefits, aid to dependent children, and even social security because people did not practice the Joseph principle and save for their own retirement. Under the Mosaic Law the people of Israel were to pay a tithe every third year for helping the poor, When the farmers harvested the crops they were to leave gleanings for the poor to help themselves. The tithes were handled by the Levites and the gleanings by individuals. They were not governmental functions. From the standpoint of God's word, supporting the poor is properly done by churches and individuals. The money our government doled out to individuals during Covid and massive infrastructure spending and other giveaways contributed to a rapid rise in inflation. The Federal Reserve pushed us toward an economic recession to solve inflation.

"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth." Paul is referring to more than just foul language or four letter words. James 4:11 says, "Do not speak evil of one another." Don't criticize other people. Don't tell others, who have no business to know, all the bad things that someone else has done to you. James 5:9, "Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned." Do not complain about other people.

We are to speak "what is good for necessary edification." As a member of the body of Christ, the Church, we should speak to others about things that will cause "growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:16). In the vice list of Rom. 1:29-32 the *Net Bible* includes these verbal sins: "deceit, malice, they are gossips, slanderers, ... and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, ..." I need to confess my verbal sins, just as I should confess any other sin.

Eph. 4:30-32. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

This is a powerful passage and covers a lot of ground. Eph. 4:30 begins with the word "And," connecting it with the previous verse. "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers." Paul is writing about a believer's mental attitude that is revealed in what he says. The verbal sins we speak, not only destroy our relationship with God, but also destroy our relationship with other people. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." We could phrase this command as "Stop grieving the Holy Spirit." A sinful mental attitude and verbal sins destroy the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Similarly, Paul commands the Thessalonians in 1 Thess. 5:19, "Do not quench the Spirit." But this comes with a series of fourteen commands he gives in machine gun fashion. The preceding verses, 1 Thess. 5:14-18 say, "Warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." These reflect our mental attitude as expressed verbally.

"By whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." This is a reference to the Rapture where every believer will receive a new body, called a resurrection body. Even though we may grieve or quench the Holy Spirit because of our mental attitudes and spoken words, our salvation is secure.

"Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor (One commentator calls this 'shouting, yelling, screaming'), and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice." This is not the way that a believer in Jesus Christ should behave. As Paul said in Eph. 4:1, we are to "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." I am sure we all have experienced attacks like these on ourselves by others. There is no excuse for a believer to act this way. It can even happen in families between people who love each other.

Later in Ephesians, Paul commands husbands to "love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Eph. 5:25). In Eph. 6:4 he wrote, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." There is a proper way to discipline children, not "wrath, anger, clamor."

In Eph. 4:32 Paul tells how believers should handle difficult situations, and especially situations where they are a victim of another person's "bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor and evil speaking," and even malice. First, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted." Prov. 15:1 says, "A soft answer turns away wrath." This is the best way to respond to an outburst of "wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking."

Then, "forgiving one another." This is not the usual word for "forgiving," This has the sense of showing grace to the other person. Christ is our example. He died for us when we were still sinners, and totally undeserving (Rom. 5:8). We are to forget the wrong done to us, just as God will never bring up our sins. I am not to hold a grudge. I am to treat the other person as if nothing happened. I am not to let someone else's mistreatment result in my bitterness and grudge holding. Jesus said in John 13:34-35, "Love one another, as I have loved you."

Eph. 5:1-2. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

"Therefore be imitators of God as dear children." The word "therefore" picks up the concept that Paul expressed at the end of the prior verse and expands on it. He wrote in Eph. 4:32, "forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you." Prior to that Paul told us not to steal, not to criticize others and tell others all the bad things another person has done to you, to put away all "bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor and evil speaking." Instead we are to "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another." Jesus Christ is the example I am to follow. Jesus came into this world and offered to establish the kingdom God had promised to Abraham. He performed many miracles to demonstrate that He was their promised Messiah. As John 1:11 says, "He came to His own (the Jews), and His own did not receive Him." In Matt. 12:24 the Pharisees accused Jesus of performing his miracles using Satan's power. Then they plotted how to get rid of Jesus and were successful in having Him crucified. If someone treated me in this way, I know what I would do if I had the power that Jesus had. I would annihilate my tormentors on the spot. But Christ continued on with God's plan. "Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma."

Now God commands us to follow Jesus' example. The command is to "walk in love" just as Christ did. How do I treat someone who blew up in anger against me, screamed and shouted at me? Paul describes in 1 Cor. 13:4-7 how I, as a believer in Jesus Christ, should respond to such mistreatment. Here is some of what Paul said, "Love suffers long *and* is kind; ... 'does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil, ... bears all things, ... endures all things." Paul uses the word "walk" many times describing how we should live our Christian lives. We walk one step at a time. Each step should be an application of God's word. Each step should be in obedience to God's commands. Sin in my life grieves the Holy Spirit and breaks my fellowship with God.

"Christ has "given Himself for us." The Greek preposition translated "for" means that Jesus died in my place. He died instead of me, as my substitute. He died to pay the penalty for the sin in which I was born. God offers this forgiveness to each person who believes in Jesus Christ. Eph. 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

To walk in love means to want the best for the person to whom I am to show love. How would I want to be treated if I were in the other person's position? If someone has wronged me, do I try to get even? Do I try to hurt them in return? Even if these are not my intentions, do my thoughts and actions result in the person who has wronged me being hurt? Eph. 4:31, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you? When someone does something to hurt me, this puts my Christian walk to the test.



**Yellow-rumped Warbler, Brazos Bend State Park, Texas**

Eph. 5:3-7. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them.

Paul expands the list of sins that believers should not commit. These verses include overt sins, a mental attitude sin and verbal sins. When I was growing up, I did not understand the words "adultery" and "fornication." When I asked an older person, it was explained to me that "adultery" was the committing of sexual sins by married persons with someone else other than a husband or wife. "Fornication" involved unmarried people. The modern understanding of "fornication" is engaging in sexual practice with anyone not your spouse, and is usually translated "sexual immorality."

"Fornication and all uncleanness." These two sins are related. "Uncleanness" is used here in a moral sense. Where does "covetousness" come in? Eph. 5:5 identifies these sinners as "idolaters." The predominant religion in Ephesus, which these Ephesian believers had formerly followed, was the fertility cult worship of the various Greek gods and goddesses. If you wanted to have prosperous crops, you needed to please the gods by engaging in sexual acts. So the sins of covetousness, fornication and uncleanness are linked in the worship of these idols. Paul warns the Ephesians in Eph. 5:6, "Let no one deceive you with empty words." The former friends of these believers were telling them not to abandon their former sinful idol worship if they wanted to be prosperous. This was the health and wealth gospel of the ancient world.

Eph. 5:4 is a part of the same sentence with the warning against "fornication, and all uncleanness or covetousness" adding, "neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting." I have often asked myself what is the connection between the sexual sins and covetousness with "vulgar speech, foolish talk, or coarse jesting" (*NetBible*)? Is this a reference to ancient Greek drama dating back to the sixth century B.C. which was performed in honor of the Greek god of wine, Dionysus? Later, the Romans copied Greek drama in developing their own forms. Many movies and entertainment venues today could easily fit the description of "filthiness," "foolish talking," and "coarse jesting," as well as featuring sexual immorality. My speech and actions should reflect God's glory and praise Him.

Paul would not have commanded the Ephesian believers against these sins, if they were not guilty of them. He warns them that believers guilty of any of these sins will not have "any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God" and "because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." As believers, they cannot lose their salvation, but they can lose their rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The "wrath of God" Paul mentions here is not eternal punishment of unbelievers in the Lake of Fire, but divine discipline of disobedient believers during their lives.

Further, Heb. 12:5-6 quotes Prov. 3:11-12 saying, "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD; Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." David committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband murdered. He then went through ten years of divine discipline because of it. Our world culture today is different from that of the Ephesians, but it still offers the same opportunities to disobey God's word. "Therefore do not be partakers with them."

Eph. 5:8-11. For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*.

“For you were once darkness.” Paul has previously used the word “darkness” in Eph. 4:17-18 as a description of unbelievers. “That you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles (unbelievers) walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, ...” Col. 1:12-13 contrasts the darkness of unbelievers with our light as believers. “Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the son of His love.” In earlier verses in Ephesians, Paul went through a litany of sins that the Ephesians had committed: Sins like anger, stealing, corrupt speech, bitterness, malice, sexual immorality, covetousness, idolatry. Now the Ephesians have believed in Jesus Christ, and he says they “*are* light in the Lord.” They are to stop these sins.

In Eph. 5:9 Paul inserts a parenthetical statement to explain how we are to “walk as children of light.” “For the fruit of the Spirit (or light) *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth.” Even believers cannot produce fruit in their lives without the ministry of the Holy Spirit. “Goodness is in the list of the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22-23. Rom. 8:4 says “that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” It is the Holy Spirit who teaches us the truth, God’s word, so that we can know how we should walk.

“Finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.” It is the truth of God’s word from which I learn what God’s will for my life is. Without the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the teaching of the truth of God’s word, I cannot live a life acceptable or pleasing to God.

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.” The Greek word translated here as “fellowship” is not the usual word for fellowship. The present word is used three times in the New Testament. The other two times it is translated with the word “share” or “shared.” Phil. 4:14, “Nevertheless you have done well to have shared in my distress.” Paul was persecuted and in need. The Philippians provided support to him in his distress. This sharing is not that inter-personal sharing we think of as fellowship. Rev. 18:4: “And I heard another voice from heaven saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.’”

So what Paul is commanding the Ephesians is to “Stop sharing the unfruitful works of darkness.” The *Holman Christian Standard Bible* translates this “Don’t participate in the fruitless works of darkness.” Dr. *Constable’s Notes* pointed me to this understanding of Eph. 5:11, He wrote “It is the deeds of unbelievers that Christians should shun, not the unbelievers who do them.” Whether it is the idolatrous worship of pagan gods that the Ephesian believers had done all their lives or just outright sexual immorality and covetousness (Eph. 5:3-5), Paul tells them to stop.

“But rather expose them.” The word “expose” is translated in other verses as “reprove” or “convict.” We can have a ministry with other believers in reprovng their sins. As Gal. 6:1 says, “If a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.” With an unbeliever the better approach is the gospel and not one of condemnation or correcting sin.

Eph. 5:12-14. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light."

"For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. "I like the way Dr. Constable's *Notes* approaches this verse. He writes, "Believers should not even discuss the secret dark deeds of people in normal conversation. Discussing these things will just draw attention to them and may make them attractive to the carnal-minded. It is better to keep what they do in the dark in the dark." James 4:11-12 commands us, "Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?" We are not to talk about the sins and failures of others, especially other believers. But we do have a responsibility to help such a believer. Here is the what James 5:19-20 says, "Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins." This is exactly what Paul is doing with his instructions to the Ephesian believers in the second half of this letter.

"But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light." Jesus said in Matt. 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." Our lives can be this light to other believers who wander from the truth and disobey God's word. We do this by the way we study and apply the word. John 3:21 links the truth with light. "He who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." This is what Psa. 119:105 says, "Your word *is* a lamp to my feet And a light to my path." As a believer who wants to walk in the light, I need to know God's word. I learn what is the will of God from His word.

"Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light." We are not sure what is the source of this statement Paul wrote. He may be piecing together some scattered verses from Isaiah which mention, "awake," "sleep," "dead," and "light." Another suggestion is that this came from a hymn Christians sang at the time. "Sleep" and "dead" suggest that believers who are actively engaging in various sinful practices are sleeping through their Christian lives and further that they have a dead spiritual life. As Paul wrote in Rom. 8:6, "To be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace." Then he adds in Rom. 8:13, "If you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Paul is presenting two alternatives between which believers need to choose in their Christian walk. I need to let the Holy Spirit direct my life in obedience to the commands of God's word.



**A mama Wild Turkey and her "turks" (chicks), Polk County, Texas**

Eph. 5:15-17. See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord *is*.

I always kind of liked that word "circumspectly," but I am not sure how well the word communicates to the average reader. Wuest's *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, says it means "exactly, accurately, carefully." Most translations use the word "careful" or "carefully." Are we to see or look carefully or should we be walking carefully or prudently? Dr. Constable's *Notes* prefers the latter which makes the most sense to me. My daily walk as a believer in Jesus Christ should precisely follow the commands of Scripture.

Believers should not walk "as fools, but as wise." Back when I was in graduate school, I had a test coming up and I was at a prayer time at church. Following James 1:5, I requested prayer for wisdom when I took the test. I was confusing knowledge with wisdom. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." James' context looks at the trials and tests of a believer's faith. Wisdom is taking what you know and applying it in the real life trials that we all face. But unless I know what God's word says, I will not be able to apply it wisely. Although people interpret Scripture in many ways, what the author wrote and intended his readers to understand is not multifaceted. My applications can take many forms depending on each situation. That is where I need wisdom to make the best application.

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Dr. Wuest explains "Redeeming the time" well. "Metaphorically, it means, 'to make a wise and sacred use of every opportunity for doing good.'" Paul wrote the same thing in Col. 4:5, "Walk in wisdom toward those *who are* outside (unbelievers), redeeming the time." In the context he is speaking about opportunities that we have to witness to unbelievers by giving them the gospel. At the Judgment Seat of Christ I will not receive rewards for the opportunities and times I did not redeem. "The days are evil." My old man, my sinful nature often wants me to pursue the lusts of the flesh. Are my thoughts attracted to the false ideas of the world that are in opposition to the truths of God's word?

"Do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord *is*." Much of what I heard about God's will when I was growing up, I now know was mysticism. It took fifty-five years before I heard a pastor clarify the issues for me. God's will for my life is what the Bible commands me to do. Where I should go to college. what job I should take, whom I should marry or what cell phone I should buy are all wisdom decisions.

Looking at the marriage decision, what the Bible tells me is that as a believer in Jesus Christ, I should only marry another believer. But that allows a lot of leeway, except that I am not to marry an unbeliever. But there are different kinds of believers. I grew up a Baptist, but I knew believers who were Episcopal, Methodist and other varieties. In my final year of grad school I started dating a young lady who was a member of the same Bible church I was. As I got to know her, I made what was probably a mental list. We enjoyed studying the Bible together, even listening to recorded Bible study tapes on some dates. Our families appeared to be typical middle class families. Politically, we thought alike. Personality wise, we both were kind of quiet. (That first date was tough trying to make conversation!) Other than going through this checklist. I probably prayed about it, but probably it was mostly that she would say, "Yes." I was using wisdom in making the decision to propose marriage although that was what my heart wanted me to do. Actually, God graced me out.

Eph. 5:18-21. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.

Paul contrasts being intoxicated with wine to being filled by means of the Holy Spirit. "Do not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit." A drunk person loses control over his thoughts, actions and what he says. Prov. 20:1 says, "Wine is a mocker, Strong drink is a brawler, And whoever is led astray by it is not wise." A believer filled by means of the Holy Spirit is not walking by the lusts and desires of his flesh, but has chosen to allow the Holy Spirit to direct his life through God's word.

Col. 3:16-17 is a parallel to today's passage, but from the standpoint of the word of God. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." These two parallel passages show that the filling of the Spirit and letting the word of Christ dwell in us produce the same results.

In Ephesians we speak to one another while in Colossians we teach and admonish one another "in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."

In Ephesians we sing and make "melody in your heart to the Lord" while in Colossians we sing with grace in our "hearts to the Lord."

In Ephesians we give "thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," while in Colossians we give "thanks to God the Father through Him" (Christ).

In Eph. 5:18 Paul commands us to "be filled by means of the Spirit." This is what we do when we choose to "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" (Eph. 4:1). We say "No" to our flesh, and choose to obey God's commands from His word. If we have committed sins, we need to confess them (1 John 1:9).

The filling of the Holy Spirit is not the same thing as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We are commanded to be filled by means of the Holy Spirit. But every person who believes in Jesus Christ is baptized by Jesus Christ into the Holy Spirit. 1 Cor. 12:13, "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (*Net Bible*). John 1:23 tells us that it is Jesus Christ who baptizes believers with the Holy Spirit where John writes of Jesus, "He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'" Even though our Bibles say baptize "with" water and "with" the Holy Spirit, the preposition is often understood as baptize "by means of" water and "by means of" the Holy Spirit. Matt. 3:11 also tells us that Jesus baptizes us by means of the Holy Spirit. "I indeed baptize you with water into repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with (by means of) the Holy Spirit and fire." As the 1 Corinthians passage says the baptism of the Holy Spirit places believers into the body of Christ, His Church.

We are also indwelt by the Holy Spirit as 1 Cor. 6:19 tells us. "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own."

Understanding what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit is difficult and these explanations only touch the surface of what we can learn about the Holy Spirit. With Christ's ascension He sent the Holy Spirit to teach us God's word and to give us power to keep the commands of Scripture. It is up to us to learn God's word and to choose to apply it.



Eph. 5:21-24. submitting to one another in the fear of God. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything.

"Submitting to one another in the fear of God." Everyone in the world is subject to others who rule over them. This verse is commanding us not to exalt ourselves over the position in which we find ourselves. Paul expresses the same idea using different words in Phil. 2:3, "*Let* nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself." "Submitting to one another" leads to the issue of marital relationships.

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." When Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians he did not give a single command in the theological half of the book, the first three chapters. Our pastor who is teaching through Ephesians pointed out recently that in the application half of Ephesians (Chapters four through six) there are thirty-five commands. This is the command to wives which he followed with a command to husbands. These two commands to husbands and wives are needed to provide for order in a marriage. Without these the two sin natures will sometimes be at odds against each other and may be unresolvable. This command for wives to "submit to their own husbands" runs contrary to the ways of the world. This command does not mean that the husband is in any way better than the wife. In God's eyes husband and wife, male and female are all equal. Husbands are not to be a tyrant forcing submission upon his wife. He is not a caveman with a club.

Paul added to this "submit" command, "as to the Lord." When I believed in Jesus Christ for my salvation, was it my faith or did God in His sovereignty force faith on me so that I could believe in Jesus Christ? Why did Paul have to command me in Eph. 4:1 to "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" if bearing fruit would be automatic in my life because I am now saved? God gives us commands in His word, but it is up to me to learn what those commands are and then to obey them. If a man and woman are discussing the possibility of marriage, if the woman is not willing to submit to her future husband, she is either looking at the wrong man, or maybe she should not get married. Without the God ordered marriage structure given here in Ephesians of the wife submitting to her husband and the husband loving his wife (Eph. 5:25), the two will only compound the conflicts and problems that any marriage of two sin natures inevitably produce.

Jesus Christ in His humanity, voluntarily submitted Himself to the will and plan of God. Phil. 2:6-7 says of Jesus, "Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation (He emptied Himself), taking the form of a bondservant (slave) ..." The functions of the three members of the Godhead are complementary to each other. Each fulfills a different role in the plan and purpose of God.

Marriage should also produce a complementary relationship. Husbands and wives should work together, each doing what he or she does best and complementing the work of the other. A good marriage is not made up of a husband and wife who are off doing their own things and then coming together for fun and games when the mood strikes them.

I have been in many business relationships since I resigned sixty years ago from my last job as a salaried employee. From experience 50/50 partnerships often break up because there is no ultimate decision maker. That is why God specified a submit/love relationship for marriage.

Eph. 5:25-29,32. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. ... let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife *see* that she respects *her* husband.

Sounds like Paul's command to the husband is less demanding than the command to the wife. The wife is to submit to her husband (Eph. 5:22), while the husband only has to love his wife. He wouldn't marry her unless he loved her? Right?

In the Greek there are three words for "love," of which two are used in the Bible. The one not used refers to sexual passion. Dr. Constable's *Notes* describes the second word as "family affection." This kind of love is called "brotherly love," and refers to love or feelings a person might have for another person. A love we may have for another person because of whom they are. But the word for "love" that Paul uses here is the same as the self-sacrificing love that Christ had for us when He died in our place. Paul wrote in Rom. 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." We are totally unworthy of this love. That is the way husbands should love their wives.

My take on how to apply these two commands in a marriage is this. Again, the two commands are: "Wives, submit to your own husbands"; and "husbands, love your wives." First of all, these two commands do not apply when either spouse wants something that violates God's word. But there will be many times in every marriage when the wife wants one thing and the husband wants something else. I am not giving a specific example because anyone that has been married for more than a day or two has run into differences of opinion. The wife wants things her way and the husband his way. The wife is failing to submit. The husband can play caveman and swing his proverbial club forcing his wife's submission or he can say something like this, "Yes, honey. I love you. Let's do it your way." The impasse is resolved.

This is the picture that Paul paints in this Ephesians passage when he writes, "just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." 1 Tim. 1:4 says of God, "who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Paul tells us what God wants. God is sovereign and omnipotent. So why aren't all people saved? All God has to do is to exercise a couple of His divine attributes and force everyone to believe in Him. But He gives us our own free will to choose to believe. The same goes for people who have believed. God gives us commands to obey Him. But He does not force us to obey. This is how the husband should treat his wife.

The husband's position in the family is one of responsibility which comes with his leadership role. Just as Paul wrote that Christ "might sanctify and cleanse her (the church) with the washing of water by the word," the husband has a responsibility for the spiritual well-being of his family, both his wife and his children. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, husbands can expect to be evaluated on their fulfillment of this responsibility of helping the family to grow spiritually.

The world's idea of marriage is very different from what the Bible describes in Eph. 5 and 1 Pet. 3. For the world marriage involves the first two Greek words for love as mentioned above, and leaves out the third Greek word for love, as well as, respect.

Eph. 6:10-13. Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

It has been said that believers face three enemies. First is their own sinful nature. As Paul said in Eph. 4:22, "And that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts." The "old man" being our sinful nature, sometimes called the "lusts of our flesh." We must learn to say "no" to our own sinful desires.

The second enemy is the world and the solutions it offers to the problems of life. Paul tells us in Rom. 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." I must learn God's word so that my thinking may conform to the will of God and not to the world's false solutions.

The third is what we have in these verses. Paul calls them "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*." These are not physical entities, "flesh and blood," but spiritual entities: Satan and his cadre of fallen angels. Dr. Constable's "Notes" suggests that these are not specific types of angels, but refer to their overall characteristics: "Rulers" refer to their authority and Satan is the current ruler of this world. They are stronger than we are and are called here "powers." "World forces of darkness" is their influence in the world. The "forces of wickedness" are their evil character.

We are to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." God has given us all the resources we need to be able to "resist the devil." James 4:7, "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Paul calls these resources "the whole armor of God," and describes the parts of our armor in Eph. 4:14-18. These include "truth," "righteousness," "the gospel of peace," "faith," "salvation," the "word of God, and "prayer."

With these resources we "may be able to withstand in the evil day." The evil day is not some particular future period of troubles. This is a day that we all experience as we "walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you were called" (Eph. 4:1). 2 Tim. 3:12 says, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

This is not our battle. It is the Lord's battle. So Paul finishes this paragraph, "having done all, to stand." It is the Lord's battle, but we need to put on all the armor that God has provided for us. I need to learn as much as I can of the truth of God's word. I need to say "No" to my old man and walk in righteousness. I need to speak the gospel of peace to those who need to hear it – unbelievers for salvation and peace for believers who are experiencing troubles. I need to apply God's word by faith. I need to stand still and watch the salvation, the deliverance of the Lord from the problems and difficulties I face. All this needs to be done through the word of God and prayer.

James 4:7, "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Submitting to God means to obey what God has told us to do in His word, not only in actions, but also in our thoughts and our words. When we do that we are resisting the devil.

Eph. 6:14-17. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

In using this armor metaphor, Paul draws on some verses in Isaiah. Isa. 11:5, "Righteousness shall be the belt of his loins, And faithfulness the belt of his waist." This is in a prophecy recording Israel's Messiah, called "a Rod" and "a Branch" in Isa. 11:1. In Isa. 49:2 he again writes about the Messiah, "And he has made my mouth like a sharp sword; In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me, And made Me a polished shaft; and in His quiver He has hidden Me."

Isa. 52:7 looks forward to the future when there will be great evangelism in Israel proclaiming peace. "How beautiful on the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace, Who brings glad tidings of good *things*, Who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" This will happen during the Tribulation and leads up to the Jesus' Second Coming.

Isa. 59:17 is in a passage with a similar prophecy. It says, "For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, And a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, And was clad with zeal as a cloak."

Others point out that Paul is in prison in Rome when he writes this. He is chained to a Roman soldier and he wrote these verses in Ephesians building this illustration from the soldier's armor.

So what does the passage say about how I should live? "Having girded your waist with truth." Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by Me." I have eternal salvation. Jesus prayed in John 17:7, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." I need to know God's word. When I say something, I need to speak truth. All three of these statements are correct.

"Having put on the breastplate of righteousness." While Christ's perfect righteousness was imputed to me when I believed in Jesus Christ, this probably is saying that in my daily walk, I should be living righteously.

"Having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace." As I move around in this world, I need to have prepared myself to present the gospel to others. Col. 4:3-4 speaks to this point. Paul wrote, "That God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak." Am I prepared to clearly present the gospel to unbelievers?

"Taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one." I see this as the faith I exercise when I apply what I have learned and know from God's word to the real life situations I encounter.

"Take the helmet of salvation." Since Paul was writing to believers, the salvation of which he is speaking has to be deliverance from the attacks of these "spiritual *hosts* of wickedness" mentioned in Eph. 5:12. We do this by using the "truth," "righteousness," "gospel of peace," and "faith" from Eph. 5:16.

"The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." The "word of God" here is not the "*logos*" of John 1:1, nor is it the written word of Scripture. The Greek word used is the spoken word. It is the "sword of the Spirit" because it is taught and understood through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Paul taught a lot more verbally than he wrote. We hear this word through our pastors and others who have taught us. I need to be careful of false teachers, who do not teach the truth.

Eph. 6:18-20. Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Paul has finished describing the “armor of God” from Eph. 6:13-17 and moves on to prayer. Prayer is necessary for us to fulfill the commands given regarding the “armor of God.” If we are to “take up the whole armor of God” and “take the helmet of salvation” through this armor, we need to pray. “Praying always.” As Paul wrote in 1 Thess. 5:17-18, “Pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks.” This is not talking about long prayers. As one pastor put it, “pray with the frequency of a hacking cough.” We should pray as often as necessary, and then some more. In my recent bout with Covid I had a couple of days where it seemed like I was coughing multiple times each minute. Can I make short, quick prayers a life’s habit?

“With all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.” Rom. 8:26-27 is an important passage on the involvement of the Holy Spirit in our prayers. “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will* of God.” Jude 20 says, “But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit.”

Psa. 66:18-19 warns us how not to have an effective prayer life. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear. *But* certainly God has heard *me*; He has attended to the voice of my prayer.” Solomon also warns us in Prov. 28:9, “One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer *is* an abomination.” Effective prayer requires us to walk in fellowship with God, with no unconfessed sins in our lives interfering with that fellowship. We must be utilizing the power of the Holy Spirit in our walk. As Solomon said, we must hear and apply the teaching of God’s word.

“Supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me.” Intercessory prayers for other believers should be part of my prayer life. Paul was in prison, so what is his prayer request? I participate in a weekly Bible study group. We have a prayer list for others we go through as we start. One of the recent requests was for a person who was in jail and you can guess what the request was for. For this person’s release? In Paul’s similar situation, he asks prayer for opportunities to witness.

Earlier in Eph. 2:11-3:11 Paul spent thirty-three verses explaining what the “mystery of the gospel” was. It was the reason he was in prison in Rome waiting to be tried before Nero. As Paul has explained in Ephesians that the mystery is the barrier between Jews and Gentiles that has been broken down and now we are all one in Christ. This offended the Jews and resulted in his arrest in Jerusalem and his present imprisonment in Rome. He asks for prayer that he might speak boldly to explain that the salvation that is available to both Jews and Gentiles through faith in Jesus Christ.

I need to learn to pray not only for physical and material matters but also for spiritually related issues. I think all the prayers Paul mentions in his letters are for spiritual issues. But when John prayed for Gaius in 3 John 2, He prayed, “I pray that you may prosper in all things, and be in health, just as your soul prospers.” 1 John 5:14 says, “If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” I learn the will of God through His word. Shouldn’t my prayers be centered around His word?

Phil. 1:3-6. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;

Paul is in prison. For what does he pray? Paul remembers the Philippians and the support they have provided to him during his ministry. He is thankful to God for that support. In his prayers Paul makes joyful requests for the Philippians. His prayers not only included thanksgiving, but also requests for the Philippians. "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy."

"For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." Today, we use the word "fellowship" in the sense of social interaction. The Bible uses the word as people working together for a common goal. It often is used in the sense of participation by financial support. Paul wrote Philippians as a thank you letter for the gift that Epaphroditus had brought to Paul from the Philippians. Paul wrote in Phil. 4:8, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity."

Then in Phil. 4:14-16,18 he summarizes the purpose of this letter. "Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent *aid* once and again for my necessities. ... I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God."

The generous gifts from the Philippians enabled Paul to continue his ministry of carrying the gospel to Greece, Asia Minor, and now to Rome. The Philippians' gifts allowed them to share in the spread of the gospel through Paul.

John discussed this idea of sharing the gospel in 3 John 5-8. "Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. *If* you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth."

"Being confident of this very thing." Paul had just stated that in his prayers he was "making request for you all" (the Philippians). He is able to pray with confidence because he knows the word of God and prays according to God's word and will. So he can pray that God who began the "good work" in the Philippians by enabling them to give for the work of the gospel, now "will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ." The day of Jesus Christ is the Rapture which is followed by the evaluation of believers' lives at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The completion of the Philippians' "good work" of their "fellowship in the gospel" will be rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. That is why Paul can say in Phil. 4:18 that this "fellowship in the gospel" is "a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God."

I see the prayer requests that Paul makes for the Philippians are for the rewards they will receive at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This understanding is not my own, but what I have heard from others. It differs from what most teach, who see the completion of the good work as believers persevering in the faith or finally receiving their salvation and forgiveness of sins which they already possess as believers. The interpretation I have written here better fits the purpose and context of the letter.

Phil. 1:9-11. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

My wife and I have the Bible reference "Phil. 1:9" engraved inside our wedding rings. True love is not the sentimental stuff that we hear about in the movies. Paul prays here for the Philippians that their "love would abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment." Love grows as we come to know more about the object of our love. Of course, Paul is thinking of the attribute of love that we as believers are supposed to exhibit as Jesus commanded in John 13:34 to "love one another."

Dr. Kenneth Wuest in his *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament* explains that the Greek word for "Knowledge" adds a prefix to the word for knowledge that intensifies the meaning indicating "full knowledge." This is knowledge that grows through application. When I was studying finance in graduate school, we were told that before we graduated we would have to pass an oral and written comprehensive examination on everything we had studied. One subject on which we would be tested was the "cost of money." I thought I understood. To me the idea was obvious. I failed the comps because although I knew the subject, I didn't know how to put it into practice. Fortunately, I was given another chance and passed the second time. Sixty years later the concepts of the "cost of money" still undergird my investment philosophy. We all know Jesus taught His disciples that they should "love one another." We should do the same thing. Driving a car sometimes provides the best example. But we face myriads of situations in life where we are called on to exhibit Biblical principles. If someone pulls in front of you on the road, do you speed up to keep them from getting in, honk your horn, speak an expletive, or do you simply back off and let them in? This is an every day occurrence I do not always handle well. But we all face a great variety of tests daily.

My love also needs to grow in "discernment" which means to apply love wisely. "That you may approve the things that are excellent." The first time I took the grad school comp exam I was not approved. I failed the test. That is the concept behind the word "approve." The "things that are excellent" are the way the Bible says we are to live. When I face the challenges and tests of life, do I react as God would have me do? Do my actions reflect love for others?

Paul's prayer in these verses is for the sanctification and spiritual growth of the Philippians. They need to learn God's word and then to apply it wisely. Some translations render the word "sincere" as "pure." We can put on a good front and do what appears to be the right thing, but our motives are wrong. When that happens, we failed the test. It is like opening the loaf of bread to make toast in the morning and finding it moldy or bringing home a bag of fruit from the store and finding most of the fruit hidden at the bottom of the bag are overripe.

Paul's prayer for the Philippians was that they would be "without offense" and "filled with the fruits of righteousness." Then when Christ returns on the "day of Christ" and our spiritual walk is evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ we will be found "to the glory and praise of God." This will happen only if we learn God's word and then apply it through the power of the Holy Spirit.



**Great Egret, South Padre Island, Texas**

Phil. 1:12-14. But I want you to know, brethren, that the things *which happened* to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

These verses speak of God's providence. Paul's enemies wanted to silence him and his teaching about Jesus Christ. Back in Jerusalem they stirred up the mob against Paul and caused his arrest. This opened the opportunity for Paul to speak to Governor Felix and King Agrippa and then eventually almost certainly to Caesar. Acts 24:24-25 tells us that Felix heard from Paul "concerning faith in Christ ... about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come." But Felix was more interested in money and wanted a bribe. God provided the opportunities for Paul to preach the gospel and he did so wherever he went. Paul writes to the Philippians, "the things *which happened* to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel." Paul used every opportunity that came along to teach about Jesus Christ.

Dr. Kenneth Wuest in *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament* comments on the italicized words "*which happens*," that they are not needed. Things don't just happen for believers. Quoting Dr. Wuest, "Things either come from God or they reach us from some other source by His permissive will." The *NET Bible* says "that my situation has actually turned out ..." The *New American Standard Bible* says, "that my circumstances have turned out ..." God provided Paul with these opportunities. Nothing ever happens in my life by chance or by luck.

The word translated "furtherance" is a military term. Before you can move an army from place A to place B, there has to be an appropriate route prepared. If the move was through a forest, the wood cutters had to go first and cut a path through the woods. Wuest describes the term as "pioneer wood cutters." They precede the army, cutting a road through an otherwise impenetrable forest. So the attempt by Paul's enemies to cut his ministry short has failed. Paul's ministry has expanded, even to Rome.

"To the whole palace guard." These guys were an elite group of soldiers who received double pay and special privileges. They are called the Praetorian Guard." Paul was living in his own rented house, but his wrist was chained to one of these guards twenty-four hours a day. The guards were changed out every six hours. Paul's chains were "in Christ." He was here because of his ministry. "And to all the rest." So not only these guards, but apparently Paul had many visitors during this imprisonment. Paul was open to teaching God's word to everyone he could.

"And most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." Remembering 1 Pet. 3:15, I need to be prepared to "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear."



Pine Warbler, Lake Livingston, Texas



Phil. 1:20-21. according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.

Paul is a prisoner in Rome, chained to guards day and night. He is waiting for his trial before Caesar. He does not know if he will be acquitted or executed. He knows that if he lives, he will be able to continue his ministry of teaching the gospel and assisting believers to grow in their spiritual lives.

I like Dr. Kenneth Wuest's description of the Greek word, "earnest expectation," in *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*. The word was apparently used by Homer of a watchman in one of his Greek classics describing the fall of Troy. The watchman was eagerly peering throughout the night toward Troy, waiting for the flash of a beacon or torch indicating that Troy had been captured. Paul was anticipating the opportunity his release would give him to continue telling the world about Jesus Christ. Paul had written in Rom. 15:24, that he wanted to go to Spain. "Whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your *company* for a while."

"That in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body." Paul has what we used to call a "one track mind." Everything he says or does is centered around Jesus Christ and making Him known. Twice before in this chapter Paul has mentioned "the day of Christ" and will mention it again in Phil. 2:16, "holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain." Paul does not want to appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ in "the day of Christ" and realize that he has missed an opportunity of boldly representing his Savior, Jesus Christ. John also mentioned the possibility of a believer being ashamed at the Rapture. 1 John 2:28, "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming."

Then the verse that everyone knows or should know. "For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain." The verse is short and simple and when I quote it or speak it, I tend to rattle it off like a presto movement of a Beethoven symphony. I forget about the commas. I need to take my time and do what the commas tell me to do, pause at each comma. "For to me \_\_\_ to live *is* Christ \_\_\_ and to die *is* gain." As long as Paul lived, Christ had first place in his life and ministry. Dying would be a promotion for him. He would now be face to face with Christ.

I live in a world that today makes many demands on me and on my time. These demands can include family, work, hobbies, sports, the need to exercise, and maybe church, or God(?). To Paul, the only thing that mattered was serving Jesus Christ.



**Tufted Titmouse, private ranch, Polk County, Texas**

Phil. 1:27-28. Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.

"Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ." The words Paul uses in this verse paint a vivid picture that the Philippians would have understood well. Philippi was a Roman colony and the citizens of the city enjoyed the privileges of Roman citizenship. We understand that the command to "let your conduct," refers to the way we should live our lives. Paul uses the same word in Phil. 3:20, "For our citizenship is in heaven." With the privileges of Roman citizenship, the Philippians were expected to follow high standards in their lives. They were Romans and should not live in a manner that brings disgrace to Rome. In a similar manner, all believers are citizens of heaven. I need to live my life as a citizen of heaven and as a member of God's family in a manner that brings honor to God.

"Whether I come and see you or am absent." Paul was not certain how his trial before Caesar would turn out. But he expresses confidence that he would be found innocent and be able to return to Philippi for ministry.

"That you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." Later in Phil. 4:1-2, Paul commands the Philippians and admonishes two ladies, to "stand fast in the Lord, beloved. I implore Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord." There appear to have been unsettled issues between these two.

"Striving together" is another word picture that Paul paints. We get our word "athlete" from this Greek word. As believers we are on God's team. On a sports team each player has an important role to play. For the team to be successful all the members need to do their part. As a member of God's team, I have a responsibility to work with other believers in taking the gospel to unbelievers and also for helping to edify and encourage others in the church.

"Not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which to them is a proof of perdition." "Terrified" is Paul's third word picture. This is the only time this Greek word is used in the Bible. In Classical Greek it is used of a horse startled by an object in its path. Like an old western movie where a horse spots a rattlesnake and rears up, throwing its rider to the ground. As Paul wrote in 2 Tim. 3:12, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." As believers walking with the Lord, we will face adversity and animosity for our faith. The Bible uses "perdition" in a variety of ways. Here it is used in the sense of the harassment and persecution by our opponents. As in 1 Cor. 2:14, what we believe is foolishness to unbelievers and they think our harassment is justified.

"But to you of salvation, and that from God." "Salvation" is a correct translation. In Phil. 1:19 the same Greek word is also correctly translated, but this time as "deliverance." We read "saved" or "salvation" in the Bible and automatically think of our eternal salvation. But the words have a variety of meanings referring to various aspects of deliverance. For us we can know that we can expect deliverance into heaven when Jesus comes for us at the Rapture. God delivered Paul from this imprisonment, but when imprisoned again, he was finally executed.

A couple commentaries suggest that the adversaries when they see that the Christians were not terrified, might understand the gospel. The same commentaries point out that the word "that" in "that from God" is a neuter word and cannot refer to "salvation," "perdition," or "faith," but the commentaries do not give an antecedent. I take it that our conduct "is from God," when I walk by means of the Spirit, so I can "stand fast."

Phil. 1:29-30. For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear *is* in me.

"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." I have understood the first part of this verse, "to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him ..." to mean that God has given us the privilege of believing in Jesus Christ. Christ is glorified when we choose to believe in Him. I have heard preachers say that God gives us the faith to believe. How does that glorify God? What about those folks to whom God does not give faith? If God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4), then all people should be saved, but all people aren't saved. When God created people, He gave us the ability to choose to believe. Even though Adam and Eve failed to obey God, and the earth and mankind were cursed, God still left us with the ability to choose to trust Him.

He also allows us to "suffer for His sake." Now no one enjoys suffering. So why would a loving God do that? Through suffering we learn to trust God more. As we overcome and endure suffering we grow spiritually. Think about our growing up physically. Going to school is a form of suffering. Wouldn't it be easier to be playing games and having fun? My parents started me out in nursery school when I was three years old. I have no memory of this except for a couple of photographs where I am all decked out for this long forgotten school. Twenty or so years later, I finished formal schooling and began supporting myself through working. The same thing goes for exercise and working out. "Bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable in all things" (1 Tim. 4:8). But I am still learning new stuff. God expects me to continue to learn and grow in my spiritual life.

Even Jesus "learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:8). James 1:3-4 teaches that we grow toward maturity through the testing of our faith. "The testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

"Having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear *is* in me." Paul recognizes that the Philippians are also suffering as believers. Paul wants the example of his suffering and the way he handles it, which he talks about in this letter, to encourage them. Each of us will at times face major difficulties and dilemmas in our lives. We can look to the world and try to solve them according to the ways of the world. Or we can do what James tells us when our faith is tested (James 1:5-6), "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind." But God does not give wisdom in a vacuum. To "ask in faith" means that we must have learned God's word and have faith in it. Not knowing what God's word says means that there is a vacuum in our mind and soul. The Lord has brought me through many major trials and I know there are more to come. May I remain faithful through His word.



Scott's Oriole, Langtry, Texas

Phil. 2:1-4. Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. *Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

While Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians as a thank you letter for their gift of support, he speaks in several places about the need for unity among the believers in the church. That is what he is doing in these four verses. The first verse makes four statements that are the basis for the unity that should exist among believers. These are written in the form of conditional statements, but each of these statements is true. We can think of the word "if" from the standpoint of "since."

Since "*there is* (we have) consolation in Christ." I should be encouraged by the fact of my position "in Christ." Since we have the "comfort of (Christ's) love. Since we have fellowship of the (Holy) Spirit." Fellowship is not so much social interaction as it is working together for a common goal. When we allow Him to do so, the Holy Spirit works in us toward the goal of teaching us God's word, applying it, and moving us in the direction of spiritual maturity. The Holy Spirit works in us in the direction of "affection and mercy" for the concern and love for other believers.

Given that these four statements are true, Paul commands us to complete his joy with four statements pointing toward the unity that I should have with other believers in working to bring the gospel to others and also for encouraging and edifying fellow believers. Heb. 10:24-25 speaks of this ministry among believers. ""Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

"Let nothing *be done* through selfish ambition." I had a Sunday School teacher back in the Baptist church that said having ambition is wrong. I didn't agree with him at the time. But this verse speaks of "selfish ambition." The word is sometimes translated "self-seeking." This is the drive to get ahead without regard for others. As long as I get what I want, I don't care if someone else gets hurt or what corners I have to cut to get there. "In lowliness of mind (humility) esteem others better than yourself." This leads us to what it says in the next verse, Phil. 2:4.

"Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." This does not say that I should forget about my own business and interests. To me this sounds like an application of what Jesus told His disciples in John 13:34-35 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." I have had several pastors who defined love as wanting the best for another person. That would be looking out "for the interests of others."



**Hackberry Emperor, butterfly, Caprock Canyon State Park, Texas**

Phil. 2:5-8. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross.

In Phil. 2:1-4 Paul discussed humility and that we as believers should be humble. He now moves to the ultimate example of humility, the Lord Jesus Christ. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." The word "mind" is the same word used in Phil. 2:2 as "mind" and "minded." "Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God." Even before His incarnation Jesus Christ possessed all the attributes of God. He possessed full deity. John 1:14 says of Jesus, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Col. 2:9 perhaps may be more succinct speaking of Jesus Christ, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

Jesus "did not consider it robbery to be equal with God." Since Christ already possessed full deity, He did not have to seek to grasp onto (other translations use this term) or grab hold of deity. Quite the opposite, Jesus "made Himself of no reputation." Some translations say He "emptied Himself," which can lead to a misunderstanding of exactly what Jesus did. What Jesus did was to voluntarily restrict the use of His divine attributes. He did not give up the attributes of deity. To put it another way, He "gave up the independent exercise of His divine attributes" (Constable's *Notes*) for His own benefit. Dr. John Walvoord wrote, "He restricted the benefits of His attributes as they pertained to His walk on earth and voluntarily chose not to use His powers to lift Himself above ordinary human limitations." Dr. Lewis S. Chafer in His *Systematic Theology* wrote, "The act of kenosis (emptied Himself) as stated in Philippians 2 may therefore be properly understood to mean that Christ surrendered no attribute of Deity, but that He did voluntarily restrict their independent use in keeping with His purpose of living among men and their limitations."

I have heard a preacher take this "emptied Himself" a step further and say that all of Jesus' miracles were done in the power of the Holy Spirit, not in His own power. But if the primary purpose of Jesus' miracles was to be a demonstration and a proof that Jesus was God, then they had to be done using His own divine attributes.

"And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross." No one can ever attain to this same level of humility that Jesus showed in dying in my place. I have a way to go to be able to "esteem others better than" myself (Phil. 2:3). Rom. 5:8, But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus commanded His disciples in John 13:34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." Phil. 2:7 speaks of Jesus' obedience as does Heb. 5:8, "Though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered."

God's attribute of omniscience says that God can never learn anything, yet in Jesus' humanity, he had to learn just like we have to learn. Jesus in His incarnation was completely human just as we are, yet He still possessed all the attributes of Deity.

Since I have memorized these verses, I review them in my mind every time I take communion.

Phil. 2:9-11. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

"Therefore." Paul is building on what he has just written about Christ. In His life Jesus "became obedient to *the point* of death, even the death of the cross." Jesus' entire life was lived to bring glory to God. "God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name." The humiliation that Jesus faced in His life is beyond anything that we will ever have to face. As John 1:11 tells us, "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him." In Matt. 12:20 He was accused of doing miracles in the power of Satan (Beelzebub). He was betrayed by Judas, one of His twelve disciples, His closest friends. Leading up to the crucifixion He went through six trials which we would call today, "kangaroo courts." He was brutally beaten, mocked, and scourged even before they brought Him outside to be crucified.

Satan, the religious leaders and the world did everything they could to destroy Jesus and His message and ministry. Before His betrayal and trials, Jesus told His disciples in John 16:33, "I have overcome the world." Jesus faithfully obeyed God and fulfilled God's plan and purpose for His life. Jesus glorified God in everything He did. He was qualified to die in my place.

Jesus died in His humanity, but His Deity did not die. Deity cannot die. This is why Jesus had to become true humanity. Jesus' humanity died on the cross. He told one of the two thieves crucified at the same time, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise." It was Jesus' Deity that would be in Paradise. As 1 Pet. 3:19 says, Jesus (in His Deity) "went and preached to the spirits (the sons of God, a group of the fallen angels of Gen. 6:2) in prison." Even though in His Deity Jesus had the power to restore His human life, 1 Cor. 6:14 tells us that God the Father "both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power." Knowing that Jesus was raised from the dead, I know I will be also.

"At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth." Those words, "in heaven," "on earth," and "under the earth" doesn't leave anything out. It is Jesus in His humanity that has "the name which is above every name," and it is every knee that bows to the resurrected Jesus in His humanity. "And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." As Lord, Christ will reign as the ruler of the world during the Millennial Kingdom and also in the new heaven and new earth throughout eternity.

For believers who faithfully walk with the Lord in obedience to God's word utilizing the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives there are future promises. 2 Tim. 2:11 "If we endure (suffering, see 2 Tim. 2:9-10) , We shall also reign with *Him*." Heb. 6:10,12 says "For God *is* not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, *in that* you have ministered to the saints and do minister. ... "imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." The word "promises" is plural. So it cannot be referring only to eternal life which all believers possess which would be a singular promise. The glory of God was Jesus' sole motivation in His life. He was not seeking His own aggrandizement. The world is always making demands on me, but I need to keep reminding myself that I am here for the purpose of God's glory.

Phil. 2:12-13. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

If we don't remember the context for these two verses we will not understand what Paul is telling us to do. "Therefore." Paul is drawing a conclusion or applying a principle based on the immediately preceding verses. Christ faithfully fulfilled God's plan for His life all the way to the cross. So the Philippians should also obey.

"As you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence." Paul is building on what he wrote in Phil. 1:27, "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I came and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." In Phil. 4:2 he will "implore Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord." Similarly in Phil. 2:2 he wrote, "Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind." The overall issue among the Philippians seems to be one of a lack of unity. The believers in the church were not getting along well.

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." What this statement is not saying is that we have to work for our eternal salvation for the forgiveness of our sins and to earn eternal life. The verb "work out" is also a command. So working out one's salvation is not a certainty in a believer's life. God expects me to work out my salvation, but I must choose to do so.

This is like my decision to believe in Jesus Christ. I believed, and then God saved me. Paul is telling the Philippians that just as they had obeyed in the past, they were to continue to obey by working out their salvation. In particular, they were to resolve the lack of unity and the discord within the church. Dr. Wuest in his *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament* explains the term "work out" as "to carry out to the goal, to carry to its ultimate conclusion." This is our fellowship relationship with God. Believers are to work together with God toward the mutually held goal stated here, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." The mutuality works this way. We choose to work toward the goal, and God through the Holy Spirit empowers us to do so.

Phil. 2:13 explains this mutual process. "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure." Who is the subject of the verbs "to will and to do"? The *Holman Christian Standard Bible* translates this verse in a more understandable way than most other translations. "For it is God who is working in you, enabling you both to desire and to work out His good purpose." Notice that this translation uses "working" and "to work" because the Greek has the same Greek word in both places. But these are different verbs than "work out" in Phil. 2:12. Dr. Wuest gives the meaning of "to work" in verse 13 as "to energize, to work effectively." That is why I say that it is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to "work out our own salvation."

In Eph. 4:1-3 Paul pleads with us "to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." I still must do my part, even when the other people do not reciprocate., i.e. "with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love."



Phil. 2:14-16. Do all things without complaining and disputing: That you may become blameless and harmless, children of God, without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world; Holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

Paul is getting more specific as to what is happening among the believers in Philippi that is producing a lack of unity and discord. They were complaining about each other and disputing or arguing with other believers in the church. So Paul commands them to stop doing these things. Now to me that doesn't sound like that big a deal. But if I think about it, it is nice to be around people who always have a good word to say and often speak well of others.

"That you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault." "Blameless and harmless" does not mean sinless perfection. I suggest that this is looking at our reputation before other people, both believers and unbelievers. James 4:11 commands us, "Do not speak evil of one another." Then in James 5:9 he adds, "Do not grumble against one another." Most people do a good job of covering up the overt "big sins" like disobeying the Ten Commandments, but what we say can paint a different picture.

"In the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." The world of unbelievers around us, which Paul describes as "crooked and perverse," is watching us. Are my words and actions different from those of unbelievers?

"Holding fast the word of life." Finally, Paul encourages the Philippians to "hold fast the word of life" that Paul had taught them. For us the message is that we should learn God's word so we can do the things that are pleasing to Him. Then we need to apply what we have learned.

When the Philippians do that then Paul says "that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain." The "day of Christ" begins when Jesus returns for believers in the Rapture. This is followed by the Judgment Seat of Christ. Paul and each of us, as believers in Jesus Christ, will have our lives evaluated as to how well we have utilized the divine resources God has provided for us through His word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Have I taken advantage of these resources to bring glory to God through how I live? Peter had not yet written his two letters, but Paul already knew the principle that Peter would write in 1 Pet. 5:2-4. "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, ... and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away." The "crown of glory" is one of the rewards the Bible promises to pastors and elders who faithfully teach God's word to their congregations.



**Purple Gallinule, Brazos Bend State Park, Texas**



Phil. 3:8-11. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Paul has just presented in Phil. 3:4-6 a resume of his accomplishments from a human viewpoint. Of these he now says, "Yet indeed I also count all things loss ... and count them as rubbish." All our human accomplishments are futile and worthless. They have no lasting value. They are the "wood, hay, straw" of 1 Cor. 3:12. As 1 Cor. 3:13 tells us they "will be revealed by fire." Paul contrasts his past accomplishments with "the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

Paul's life before his conversion on the Damascus Road had been filled with studying the Old Testament of God's word. He then spent three years in Arabia (Gal. 1:16-18). In some way God revealed to Paul all the great truths he has written to us. He may have received direct revelation from God during these three years in Arabia.

The commentaries point out that the wording here in Phil. 3:8, "the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" is an experiential knowledge learned from Paul's ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul gained this experiential knowledge as he applied God's word and saw God working in his life, solving the problems and persecutions and providing for his every need.

"That I may gain Christ." To me this suggests spiritual growth. As Paul grew spiritually, his life reflected the qualities of life that Jesus did. So Paul goes on to say, "To be found in Him," repeating the same idea in different words. He elaborates more about this in Phil. 3:10, but first he mentions parenthetically the imputation of Christ's perfect righteousness which every believer has received. "Not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith." The moment I believed in Jesus Christ, God credited to my account Christ's perfect righteousness. Paul also wrote about this in 2 Cor. 5:21, "For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

In Phil. 2:10 Paul explains more about what he meant "that I may gain Christ and be found in Him." He wrote, "That I may know Him (experientially), and the power of His resurrection." Jesus was raised from the dead by the omnipotent power of God. We have the Holy Spirit indwelling us to provide us with power to live our lives for God and not to give into the old man and its lust of the flesh. That I may know Him ... and the fellowship of His sufferings." Jesus "learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:8). By the persecutions and sufferings that Paul endured, he was sharing with Christ toward the common goal of glorifying God. "Being conformed to His death." Was Paul saying that he was willing even to die for his faith in Jesus Christ or was he referring to what he wrote in Rom. 6:5-6? That in believing in Jesus Christ "we have been united together in the likeness of His death, ... that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin."

"If, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." I have heard and read many fancy explanations of what Paul meant. But I am a simpleton. Paul told us what he meant in Phil. 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Means #1: Paul lives, and is caught up in the Rapture, receiving a new resurrection body. Means #2: Paul dies, and is caught up first (before the living) at the Rapture, and receives a new resurrection body.

Phil. 3:11-14. If, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Oftentimes, I find that our Bible translators follow the rule we learned in creative writing classes in grade school. That rule said to vary your vocabulary and word choices to make your writing more interesting. So our translators will translate the same Greek word in a verse or context with different words in the English. But when they do that, we, the readers, may fail to see the connection between the two words that were translated with different English words.

But in Phil. 2:11-12 our translators disregarded the basic creative writing rule. They have used the word "attain" in each verse. However, this time the Greek text has two different words. Phil. 2:11 reads, "If, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection ..." The Greek word translated "attain" in this verse appears fifteen times in the New Testament. Most of the time it is translated as "to come," "arrive," or "reach." If we read this verse as saying, "If by any means, I may come to the resurrection," it is easier to understand it in the light of Phil. 1:21, "For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die is gain." Paul looks forward to the Rapture. If Paul lived, and Jesus returned for the Church, Paul would be caught up to "the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:13). However, if his trial before Caesar resulted in his death, he would still be in the Rapture. But by means of his death, he would be caught up with the rest of the deceased believers first, before those who are alive.

Also in the immediately preceding clause Paul had written "being conformed to His (Christ's) death." That is another reason why I think Paul is saying that he will arrive at the resurrection from the dead (the Rapture) either by living or after he has died.

"Not that I have already attained." This Greek word translated "attained" is used close to 300 times in the New Testament. About half the time it is translated "received, as it is in John 1:12, But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." In Phil. 3:12 the translations are split between "attained" and "obtained." Next Paul tells us what he has not yet received, obtained, or attained. "Or am already perfected." Paul tells us that he had not yet reached the goal of full spiritual maturity. He adds, "I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me." I would say that this is a true statement for every believer. Christ intends that all of us advance to spiritual maturity. I have a long way to go.

Paul then turns to an athletic analogy. In a race a runner does not look behind, but keeps himself focused on the finish line. "I do not count myself to have apprehended." Paul is not finished yet. He continues to press on" in his advance to spiritual maturity. "Forgetting those things which are behind." When I finished graduate school, I thought I might go on to study law. But I was so happy to have finished school that I never did so. We can rest on our previous successes and fail to move ahead in our Christian lives.

One might say, "I am saved. Why do I need to keep learning God's word and improving my walk with God?" The bigger risk is probably looking at my past failures and thinking that spiritual maturity is beyond reach.

He continues to "press on" toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Paul sees "the prize" as the potential for reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ. "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize?" (1 Cor. 9:24).

Phil. 3:15-16. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to *the degree* that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

Paul is still encouraging the Philippians to live in unity with each other. For the third time the translators of the *New King James Version* have translated a Greek verb "attained." This is a different Greek vocabulary word than the prior two verbs in Phil. 3:10 and Phil. 3:12. As used here, it means to "arrive at" or "reach" (Dr. Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*). Linking the word "attained", "arrive at" or "reach" back to Phil. 3:15 which says, "as many as are mature," tells us that Paul is speaking to the Philippian believers who had reached a level of spiritual maturity.

"Therefore let us, as many as are mature." Paul is including himself as well as some of his readers. The word "mature" is the Greek noun form of the verb translated "perfected" in Phil. 3:12. In the earlier verse Paul says he has not yet reached perfection or spiritual maturity. Now in Phil. 3:15 he says that he has. In the earlier verse, Paul has to be saying he has not reached the pinnacle of absolute perfection (or maturity) in his life, but still has room to grow. Whereas, in Phil. 3:15, he is speaking of having reached a level of relative spiritual maturity. The translations that use the words "perfected" and "mature" are conveying this concept.

"Have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you." Maybe the Philippian readers understood what Paul was saying, but this isn't what I would call "plain English." I suggest that to "have this mind" is picking up on what Paul wrote in Phil. 3:12-14 where he wrote: "I press on" (in my spiritual life), that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ... forgetting those things which are behind, ... I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Paul is telling believers that no matter where we are in our spiritual lives, we still have more growing to do. I, for one, am nowhere near the point of being perfected as Paul calls it in Phil. 3:12. But then there also could have been those that thought they had already arrived. They know the Ten Commandments and live good moral lives. They are willing to coast on their laurels. They do not need to keep pressing on, learning and applying God's word. They already know everything that Paul had previously taught them.

"Let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind." Paul again uses two different words here and in Phil. 3:18 which many translations read as "walk." A couple translations render the word in verse 18 as "live." "Let us walk by the same rule" is to walk in line or to walk in step. Hence, as Paul is telling the Philippians we are to press on to spiritual maturity. We are to march in step with Paul. The second word which is sometimes rendered as "live" is my step by step walk with moment by moment decisions to walk by means of the Holy Spirit and not according to my sinful nature. To "be of the same mind" may be both a restatement of the "walk by the same rule" and also an encouragement for unity among the believers in Philippi.



**Eastern Whip-poor-will, Edith Moore Sanctuary, Houston, Texas**

Phil. 3:17-19. Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is their* belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.

“Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk.” When Paul wrote these things, Christianity was the new kid on the block. Even though there had been faithful followers of God throughout the history of the world and the Jews descended from Abraham had been around for 2,000 years, there were not that many godly men to serve as examples for believers. So Paul uses himself as the example, as well as others who may walk as he does. But Paul tells the Philippians to be selective as to whom they select as a peer model. Look for a person or persons who are following the word of God as Paul had taught them. The same applies to us. I need to choose my friends carefully. Are they walking with God? Are they growing spiritually, applying God's word?

Now Paul comes to a second group of people, beginning with the statement “For many walk.” Then he goes on to describe them. “Of whom I have told you often.” Paul had warned his readers about these people many times. “And now tell you even weeping.” Although Paul had a great concern for the unbelievers and idol worshipers he saw every day and was not afraid to tell them about Jesus Christ, I don't think he was speaking of them as being the ones for whom he was weeping. I think he was looking at some of the people whom he had led to the Lord and were being led astray by false teachers. The commentaries I checked were split with most of them thinking these people were believers, while others thought they were unbelievers. But even believers can live like unbelievers and often do. So for us, we should take this as a warning that this is not the way we should live.

“They are enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is their* belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. They are enemies of the cross of Christ because their lives do not reflect godly living. As Jesus told His disciples in John 13:35, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.” An unbeliever looking at the lives of these people, would think, “If that is what being a Christian is all about, I don't want to be part of it.” “Whose end *is* destruction.” They are facing divine discipline in their lives and eventually dying the sin unto death. Then at the Judgment Seat of Christ the “wood, hay, straw” of their lives will burn hotter than an Aggie bonfire. “Whose god *is their* belly.” The top priority of their lives is self-indulgence. “How can I have fun and more fun?” Spiritual matters are of no importance to them. “Who set their mind on earthly things.” They are all wrapped up in the world. Today there are people in our churches that fall for LGBT ideas, diversity, saving the planet, woke, freedom of choice, and you name it. This way of thinking is the essence of worldliness. I was taught in grade school how great the United Nations was. When I mentioned it to my parents, they had different ideas. Now I understand the U.N. is the world taking a step toward a one world government. The U.N. has failed to bring peace to the world. Peace will only come when Jesus returns to establish His promised kingdom.



Eastern Phoebe, Liverpool, Texas

Phil. 3:20-21. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

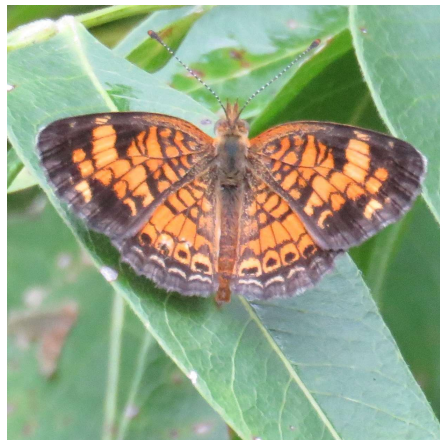
Paul moves from the last statement in the previous verse (Phil. 3:19), "who set their mind on earthly things," to declare that we, as believers have "our citizenship in heaven." In writing to the Philippians, this assertion had a special meaning to them. The people of Philippi were not just a conquered people, but were a Roman colony and they were citizens of Rome. Paul also was a citizen of Rome having been born in Tarsus. So Paul had a right to be tried before Caesar and other privileges which show up in the New Testament narratives. My years in this world are few, in comparison to an eternity with God. I should not let the thinking and the concerns of things on earth dominate my life, but should be focused on thinking and doing things God's way.

"From which (heaven) we eagerly await for the Savior." Several places in the New Testament believers are said to "eagerly wait" for our Lord's return. Heb. 9:28 says, "So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation." This latter verse along with 2 Tim. 4:8 contain a promise of future reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ for believers who live in anticipation of the Rapture of the Church to heaven. Peter wrote in 2 Pet. 3:11,14 that believers who expect that Jesus could return at any moment, should live their lives accordingly. "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of person* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness." "Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless." So why doesn't my life sometimes not reflect the holy conduct and godliness that God expects of me?

Phil. 3:21 is the promise of what our future body will be like at the resurrection. We call this our "resurrection body." "The Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body." After Jesus' resurrection and before His ascension, he would appear and disappear without warning even entering into a closed room by not passing through the door. He ate food. He was recognizable. Rev. 21:4 says we will have "no more death, sorrow, ... pain." I don't expect that these tell the full story of what our resurrection bodies will be like. 1 Cor. 15:51-52 tells us: "For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality." 1 John 3:2 confirms that our new bodies will be like Christ's. "Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

"According to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself." Jesus Christ, omnipotent God, who created this world in which we live, has the power to transform our present corruptible bodies into the magnificent promised resurrection bodies.



Pearl Crescent, butterfly, Bellville, Texas

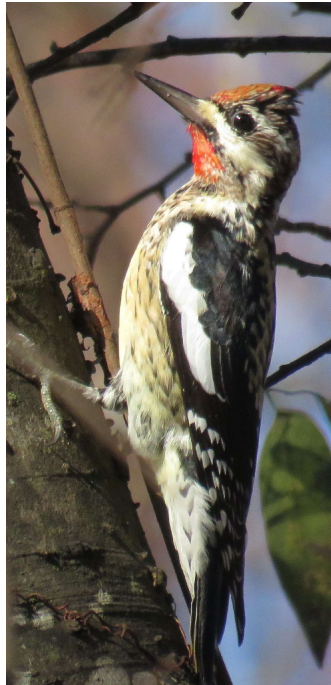
Phil. 4:6-7. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

This is not the first time that Paul has used this verb translated “anxious” in this letter to the Philippians. In Phil. 2:20, he said of Timothy whom he wanted to send to Philippi, “I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state.” The word translated “care” in this verse is the same word Paul uses in the command to “Be anxious for nothing.” Obviously, there are nuances to the meaning of this word where here it means worry or anxiety and earlier care or concern. The easy answer is that it comes down to the context. 1 Pet. 5:7 uses the noun form of this word, “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” For Timothy the care and concern he had for others was a reflection of the love he had for them. He would go there to help them in any way he could, including prayer.

But how do we handle issues and concerns in our own lives for which we can see no solution? We may have been praying all along. Jesus uses this same word translated worry, care, or anxious in the Sermon on the Mount in Luke 12:25, “Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to your stature?” This is in the middle of several verses warning against worry. The point is, there are times when we all face situations that exist, and we can’t change them. Kenneth Wuest in *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation*, rendered this command, “Stop worrying about even one thing.” If we are walking with the Lord, applying and obeying His word through the Holy Spirit, then we are also praying without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). Yes, I have spent my share of sleepless nights hashing over the issues of the day. Back to Phil. 4:6, “In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God.”

What Paul is telling me is that I can expect to face problems and difficulties in life for which there are no apparent solutions. These are tests of faith. How should I handle them? I can keep worrying and trying to find solutions. My prayers do not seem to be helping. Do I continue anxiously trying to find my own solution? As Dr. Wuest says, “Stop worrying about even one thing.” I have prayed about it, now let God do His thing. Paul pleaded with the Lord three times concerning his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor. 12:8). So it may be a “thorn in the flesh” with which I will have to live. Or God may be waiting with a solution that was not in my thinking. When I pray and trust God to know best how to handle the situation, then “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

James tells us in James 1:5-6, “If any of you lacks wisdom (how to resolve a tough issue), let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let his ask in faith, with no doubting.” I was saved through faith, now I must learn to walk by faith. Turning care and concern into worry and anxiety is not walking by faith.



**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, George Bush Park, Houston, Texas**



Phil. 4:8-9. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

These two verses contain two commands. In Phil. 4:8 we are told to “meditate on these things”; and in Phil. 4:9 we are told “these do.” Verse 9 tells us that we are to do these things based on “The things which you (the Philippians) learned and received and heard and saw in me” (Paul).

What is meditation and how do we do it? There is a form of meditation arising from some of the false eastern religions that says, first you empty your mind and thoughts, perhaps control your breathing or assume some particular type of posture or maybe walking aimlessly. You might stare at a flower and focus on it. Maybe these things will bring up a new thought or idea. This sort of stuff might work for relaxation or reducing stress, but that is not the Biblical view of meditation. The approach to meditation about which Paul is speaking is to think about what Paul has taught us in God’s word. These things are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. They are also worthy of praise and virtuous.

- > “True.” I would take this to be that which lines up with God’s word, in contrast to the ideas of the world.
- > “Noble.” Dignified, and worthy of respect.
- > “Just.” Conforming to God’s standards of what is right.
- > “Pure.” Morally pure and not unclean.
- > “Lovely.” Agreeable, pleasing, that which would promote peace and not conflict.
- > “Of good report.” Positive and constructive, rather than negative. When we listen to the news today it is too easy to become engrossed in how bad things are.

Paul is addressing my mental attitude and the way I should think. Both verbal and overt sins come out of what I think. What I think about, I will inevitably say or do. So my thinking needs to be built first on the truth of God’s word. Have I learned and applied God’s word to the point that I meet the standards the writer of Hebrews wrote in Heb. 5:14. “Those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

Memorizing Bible verses is a way to follow this instruction from Paul to meditate. When I memorize Scripture, I have to repeat the verse many times. I do it silently and sometimes will repeat the verse verbally, and even write it out. Each of these three approaches utilize a different part of my brain, helping to make the passage more unforgettable. But as I keep repeating a verse as I learn it, I can come to a better understanding of what it means. I have at times looked at what others have written or said about the passage to see if my thoughts have any merit or are just a brain warp!



Pyrrhuloxia, near Falls City, Texas

Phil. 4:10-13. But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

In the conclusion of this letter Paul returns to the subject which he introduced at the beginning. He again makes reference to the gift from the church in Philippi. He writes, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again." We don't know what the circumstances were that resulted in the lack of opportunity. It could have been distance as Paul traveled from place to place. It could have been a lack of a messenger or any number of other obstacles.

"Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content." Paul had experienced times in his life when he had everything he needed, and other times when his pockets were depleted. He may have grown up in a prosperous family in Tarsus, since he was able to go to Jerusalem to study under the leading teacher of the day, Gamaliel. We are told that on some of Paul's missionary journeys he worked as a tentmaker in order not to be a burden to the people to whom he was ministering. The Lord had taught Paul to be content, whatever his situation.

When I studied engineering in college, the professors would teach us the theories and concepts in class and we studied them in the textbooks. Then we went to a laboratory and actually put what we had read and heard into practice. We can read the Bible and our pastors can teach us about what the Bible says. But we actually have to put this learning into practice by applying it in the laboratory of the world to fully understand it. That is why Heb. 5:9 says of Christ, "He learned obedience by the things which He suffered." So Paul also had to learn to be content.

Now he can write, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." This is a ten word verse and easy to memorize. But on its own, without knowing what Paul was saying in context, it can be misunderstood. Paul is not saying, "all things are permissible for me." That would say he could disobey other Bible verses. It does not mean that just because Paul was unharmed when bitten by a venomous snake ("viper," Acts 28:3-5) in Malta, that he should become a snake handler and carry around a clutch of cobras. It doesn't mean that he can run a marathon in Athens and win first place. When considered in the light of the context, Paul is saying that through Christ's provision and strength, the all things he can do are to continue his ministry, whether in plenty or in destitute poverty.

What I have just written is what Paul meant when he wrote, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." When I am walking with the Lord, obeying His word in my life, I can know that God is there and able to carry me through any situation I may face.



Painted Lady, butterfly, Junction, Texas



Phil. 4:19-20. And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

The believers in Philippi had generously given to Paul, both previously when no other churches helped him, and now when he was in prison in Rome. Phil. 4:15, tells us of their past generosity. "Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia (where Philippi is located), no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only." Now Paul reminds them of what I am sure he had previously taught, "My God shall supply all your need."

I remember a camping trip to Florida with our young children. We also spent a couple of nights in a park in Florida with some of our children's cousins. I taught the promise this verse contains. The question for us to consider is what does this promise of supplying all our needs include? The Bible seems to refer to our needs as the basic necessities of life.

Look at what Jesus said in Matt. 6:25, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing." Jesus sums this up with the well-known Matt. 6:33, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." I should focus on my walk with the Lord and His righteousness.

Earlier in Phil. 4:12 Paul wrote "I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." The basic necessities of life would appear primarily to be food, drink, and clothing which we need for survival. I need to learn to be content with whatever my status in life is.

Did Jesus and His disciples possess anything else? When it came time for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem, He sent two of His disciples to bring a donkey and colt to them for Jesus to ride. Everywhere else Jesus went, it would appear that He walked. Now we know that Peter had a sword, because in Gethsemane when Jesus was being arrested, Peter used it to cut off the high priest's servant's ear. But the Bible does not make a mention of a sword as one of our needs.

Just as Paul wrote in Phil. 4:11, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content," Heb. 13:5 says, "*Let your* conduct be without covetousness; *be* content with such things as you have." In the world today, we would include a lot of other things as necessities beyond what we need for survival. Possessing vehicles, electronics like cell phones, televisions, computers, and other items is not wrong. We should use wisdom in how we spend our money. Out of every paycheck set aside money for savings and for giving to the Lord's work. Be careful in borrowing money. Be absolutely sure you can pay it back. But beyond that, realize that when you pay interest on a loan or credit card, you are increasing your expenses. Wouldn't it be better to save up to buy these items?

Paul finishes with a doxology, "Now to our God and Father *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

Col. 1:15-18. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

These verses coming early in this letter of Paul to the church at Colosse show us the emphasis of the entire book: "That in all things He may have the preeminence." Is Jesus Christ of first importance in my life? Do I seek to know Him better each day from my reading and studying of His word? Do I seek to please Him in all that I do by obeying what He has commanded me to do in His word?

These verses begin with a statement of Jesus' deity, "He is the image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation." The word firstborn can be confusing to us today. In ancient times the firstborn carried on the family as its leader and its principal heir. By calling Jesus "the firstborn over all creation," this emphasizes Christ's preeminence.

Firstborn does not refer to the birth of His humanity in a stable in Bethlehem or even that He was actually born in some prehistoric time. Jesus Christ, as God, has always existed. He is the Person of the Triune Godhead who did the work of creating the heavens and the earth in Gen. 1:1 and also the One who followed this with the six days of Gen. 1:3-31.

The thinking of the world has replaced the idea of God's creation with other ideas. The world's mythological thinking today is that it all started with a "big bang" or some extra-terrestrial being started everything up. God has nothing to do with it. There is no god. Life began by \_\_\_\_\_ (You fill in the blank. Then demonstrate that it happened by reproducing the formation of a new life.) The truth is that only an infinitely powerful God who has always existed could have created the world. God exists in three persons. All three persons of the Godhead have always existed. Each of them share the same attributes.

Back to the earlier questions: Is Jesus Christ of first importance in my life? Do I seek to know Him better each day from my reading and studying of His word? Do I seek to please Him in all that I do by obeying what He has commanded me to do in His word?

May Jesus Christ be glorified in all that I do.



Summer Tanager, Quintana Neotropical Preserve, Texas

Col. 2:4-7. Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding it in with thanksgiving.

How many times do we read the words of Scripture and the author corrects the false teaching that his readers have been hearing? It appears to me that almost all of the Bible was written for that purpose. Here the apostle Paul commends the Colossian believers for the steadfastness of their faith in Christ. In the verses following these quoted verses we find out that the false teachers were attacking the deity of Christ.

Today we don't have apostles who can correct the mis-teachings of fast-talking, persuasive preachers, and also: politicians, teachers and college professors and others. But God has left us with His revealed word in the Bible.

These Christians had received Christ Jesus the Lord (i.e. they were saved and had eternal life and the forgiveness of their sins), when they were taught the gospel. Now they are to continue to build that faith, what we would call today to grow spiritually, "being built up in Him and established in the faith." The basis of that spiritual growth is what Paul has already taught them, not the persuasive words of the false teachers.

Today, we don't have apostles to teach us, but we have the words of Scripture. We need to build our lives on what the Bible says. We need to be able to relate what we hear on television or read on the internet or hear the politicians say or anyone else, and to relate that to what the Bible says. How does it measure up?

For me, I am thankful for the years of solid Bible teaching I have heard from my pastors (all eight of them) and others that have blessed me by their teaching of God's word.



Common Mestra, butterfly, San Marcos (left) & Castroville (right), Texas

Col. 2:8-10. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit (deception), according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ, For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

Paul continues his discussion from the previous verses where he warned his readers about being deceived "with persuasive words" from other teachers. He calls their persuasive words "philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."

While Paul was answering a specific issue related to the deity of Christ as he explains in this passage, we are faced with a plethora of varying philosophies and ideas that can captivate our minds (better than the archaic "cheat" in the *New King James Version*) and lead us astray from our walk with the Lord. As one person erroneously commented to me "The Bible can be interpreted in many ways." The truth is that the Bible is interpreted in many ways, but not all those ways are correct.

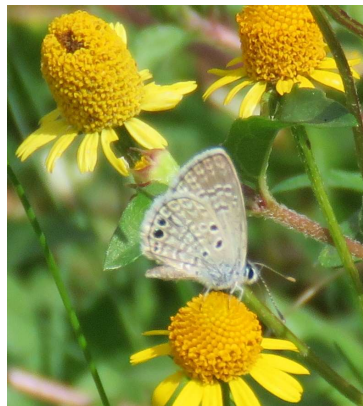
"The tradition of men" and "the basic principles of the world" both will take us away from what God has provided for us in His word, the Bible. God has blessed me throughout my life with parents and pastors and teachers who have faithfully taught me God's word.

The original of this devotional was emailed on Christmas day. This is the time we celebrate the birth of the humanity of Jesus Christ. Christ in His deity, as a member of the triune Godhead, is eternal. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, Christ did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ... taking the form of a slave, and coming in the likeness of men. ..." (Phil. 2:6-7).

"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Paul was answering specific false teachings of the day, some of which denied that Christ had a human body. Others taught that He was not truly God. As we know today, Jesus was both fully God and fully human in one person forever.

"And you are complete in Him." As a believer, Jesus' perfect righteousness has been credited to my account in heaven. A couple of the commentaries say that being "complete in Him" shows that He satisfies all our spiritual wants. Eph. 3:18-19 says that you "may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." While I have Jesus' perfect righteousness and He satisfies all my spiritual wants, do I still have spiritual wants that I would like to be satisfied? In the Ephesian passage Paul is writing about our spiritual growth. To grow spiritually, I need to be walking and abiding in Christ, obeying His commands and comprehending through God's word all that God has done and is doing for me. I may possess all the fullness of Christ in my life, but the realization of it is dependent on how I choose to live. Too many Christians are so deeply involved in the affairs of this life and of the world that their spiritual life is neglected.

Christ "is the head of all principality and power." While this could refer to human rulers and authority, these terms in the New Testament are usually associated with angels. I look forward to the fulfillment of Phil. 2:9-11 when every knee will bow to Him."



**Ceraunus Blue, butterfly, Pasadena, Texas**

Col. 3:1-4. If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, Sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

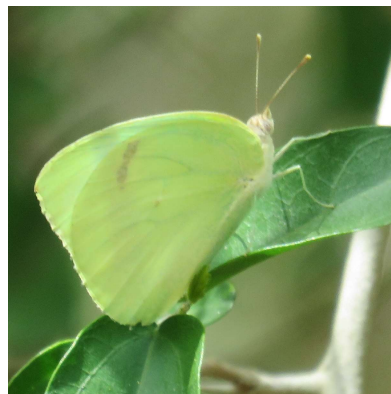
Yes, we have been "raised with Christ." This happened the moment we trusted in Him for the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. So now what are we to do? What are the things which are above, that we are to seek? God has given us eternal life and promised us that we will live with Him forever? Although Paul does not answer these questions in these three verses, he has already taught the Colossians that there is the potential for even greater rewards in eternity to those who faithfully live their Christian lives here in Time.

"Where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God." Christ is not yet sitting on His throne from which He will rule this world. He is sitting in a place of honor and glory, at the right hand of God the Father's throne. Rev. 3:21 repeats where Jesus is now sitting. "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." Jesus says that He will in the future sit on His own throne. Then believers who overcome in this life will receive the privilege of sitting with Christ on His throne. As Jesus overcame during His life on this earth, He is now sitting with the Father on His throne.

Every day we face new challenges, new problems, new issues. How do we handle them? Do we take them to God in prayer? Do we make decisions based on what God has told us in His word, or do we seek answers from the viewpoint of the world?

"For you died." Rom. 6:2 confirms that "we died to sin." "How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it." The reality of our death to sin will not be fully realized until Christ returns. So, now, I must make constant choices whether to obey what God has said in His word, or to give in to my sin nature. "And your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." This new life that I received when I believed in Jesus Christ is hidden away, as it were, in a heavenly safe deposit box. It will be revealed when Christ returns for His Church at the Rapture. At that time we will receive our promised resurrection bodies. Then we will be like Christ. 1 John 3:2-3, "Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." This final exhortation tells me that I must live my life as Paul says here in Colossians by setting my "mind on things above." When I fail by committing sin, John had previously written how I should cleanse myself and restore the purity of which he writes. 1 John 1:9. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Paul ends this paragraph with a reference to the future return of Jesus Christ which can happen at any moment. When Christ appears again, we will share in His glory. We will celebrate His victory with Him. But for us in the here and now, we have the example of Jesus' life and all that He suffered at the hands of other people in order to give us the gift of eternal life.



**Lyside Sulphur, butterfly, Santa Anna National Wildlife Refuge, Texas**

Col. 3:12-15. Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

These verses set a high standard for my personal relationship with others. Paul is addressing believers, as is evident by the introductory phrases: "elect of God, holy and beloved." As a believer in Jesus Christ, Paul commands me to put on – to exhibit these seven characteristics in my life.

- 1) Tender mercies: Am I sensitive to the sufferings and to the needs of others?
- 2) Kindness: can be demonstrated by a sweet disposition and thoughtfulness in my interpersonal dealings with others.
- 3) Humility: As Paul writes elsewhere, I am not to think more highly of myself than I ought to think. (Rom. 12:3).
- 4) Meekness: I am not to behave harshly, arrogantly, or self-assertively, but with consideration for others.
- 5) Longsuffering: I am not to be impatient with others. Paul expands on this in the next two characteristics. I must patiently endure wrongs other people commit against me.
- 6) Bearing with one another. Putting up with the foibles of others and enduring any discomfort (or harm) they may cause me.
- 7) Forgiving: I am not to hold a grudge or a grievance against another person.

Love is an all encompassing term including all that Paul has listed above. If I do them, this expresses love for others. As someone has said, love means doing what is best for the other person.

"If anyone has a complaint against another. Even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do." Paul does not add any qualifications to the complaints I have against others that I am to forgive. After all, why am I worthy to have received the forgiveness of my sins as a free gift from God? As Paul said in his Roman letter (Rom. 5:8): "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." I remember a time when I got upset with a business friend over a matter in which he was indirectly involved. I even changed the advertising agency I was using because of it. I eventually got over my upset with my friend. We subsequently continued to do business together profitably. The friendship lasted well after the business relationship.

Jesus Christ is my example. He paid the penalty for all my sins when I was totally unworthy and am still unworthy. Should I not also forgive others who do me wrong?

One of my pastors, Bruce Bumgardner, wrote a book on forgiveness, *God's Forgiveness*. In the book he mentions what can happen when I fail to obey God and do not forgive someone who has hurt me in some way. "To maintain an unforgiving spirit is to harm ourselves. It gives the Enemy a constant opening for attack and does nothing positive for our own spiritual life. You will find yourself consistently out of fellowship with God. One day it will hit you like a brick falling on your head that the person actually got to you twice. Once was their fault, once was yours. Their action kept you out of fellowship by *your* choice. It is a self inflicted wound. Life is too short for this."

Col. 3:16-17. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." This command along with the parallel command in Eph. 5:18, "Be filled with (by means of) the Spirit," form the foundational principle upon which I should live my Christian life. Without these, I will go nowhere in fulfilling God's plan and will for my life. I first heard this taught in a way that I could understand by my now-deceased former pastor, Dr. Harry Leafe. He published a small book entitled, *The Spirit-filled Life*. He observed that the results of being "filled by means of the Spirit" in Ephesians are the same as the results of letting "the word of Christ dwell in your richly." As Dr. Leafe pointed out, "two things equal to the same things, are in turn equal to each other." (I learned this in junior high algebra.) He stated in the book, "It is by means of the Word of God that the Holy Spirit controls the life of the believer. It is through studying God's word and applying it to your life that you allow God's Spirit to control you."

Dr. Harry Ironside wrote in his *Lectures on the Epistle to the Colossians*, "By comparing the Ephesian passage with this it will become evident that we have the same results from being filled with the Spirit there, and filled with the Word here. A Word-filled Christian is a Spirit-filled Christian; that is, a Christian who is so controlled by the Word of God that it dominates his entire life, and manifests that he is filled with the Holy Spirit." Other commentaries like Dr. Tom Constable's, *Expository Notes on the Bible*, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, and *The Grace New Testament Commentary* also draw similar parallels. Yet I have heard another preacher say that the passages are not related, but it was only a passing hipshot from the preacher with no explanation of his opinion.

One of the ministries of God the Holy Spirit in my life, is to teach me God's word. Dr. Tom Constable wrote, I need to let God's word "permeate my whole being so that I make all my decisions and plans in its light."

Dr. Warren Wiersbe in *The Bible Exposition Commentary* wrote: "There is a danger today, as there was in Paul's day, that local churches minimize the Word of God. There seems to be a lack of simple Bible teaching in Sunday School classes and pulpits. Far more interest is shown in movies, musical performances, and various entertainments than in God's Word. Many saved people cannot honestly say that God's word dwells in their hearts richly because they do not take time to read, study, and memorize it." Today, we can include videos along with the movies Dr. Wiersbe mentioned.

"Teaching and admonishing one another." Col. 3:16 also contains one of those frequent references in the Bible to "one another." God expects us to have a ministry among our fellow believers. I am to encourage other believers with what the Holy Spirit has taught me from God's word. When I do this, I am also worshiping God. The *New American Standard Bible* punctuates the verse differently from other translations. It attaches "in all wisdom" with the "teaching and admonishing one another." Do it tactfully and with gentleness.

"Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." In all that I do, I am a representative and an ambassador for Jesus Christ. My actions and words need to honor Him. In all things I am to praise Him with thanksgiving.



Col. 3:23-25. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

Paul wrote these verses sandwiched between two verses that speak to master-slave relationships. Bible verses must always be understood and interpreted from the standpoint of their context. Col. 3:22 reads, "Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God." In Col. 4:1 Paul speaks of the responsibility the masters have to their slaves. "Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you have a Master in heaven."

Dr. Warren Wiersbe points out with respect to these verses that "the purpose of the early church was to spread the Gospel and win souls, not to get involved in social action." Satan loves it when Christians become so involved in re-making the world that they ignore God and their own spiritual lives.

The master-slave relationship was built into the economic system of the ancient world. While slavery does exist in today's world, it is cloaked in different terminology. When people become dependent on governing authorities for their welfare and financial provision, they have, in essence, become slaves of the government.

Even though in the "free world" today we do not have slave-master relationships, we can make application of the principles Paul sets out to the employer-employee relations that do exist. As Paul commanded "bondservants" (slaves) to obey their masters in all things, employees also should obey their employers. They should not shirk their responsibilities when the boss is not looking. When possible they should do above and beyond what their employer expects.

The employers should pay their employees in a just and fair manner. The employers should not make unreasonable demands on their employees. They also should not ask or expect employees to violate God's commandments, nor the laws and regulations the world imposes on us.

As Paul writes, "whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men." As a believer in Jesus Christ, I serve a higher Master than the human employers for whom I have worked. Whatever job I am asked to do, either as an employee, or as a volunteer or on any other basis, God has placed me in that position as His representative. I need to fulfill those duties to the best of my ability and where possible do more than what is expected. I am to "do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men." I am not to do things grudgingly or reluctantly.

What is this "reward of the inheritance"? A reward is something a person receives in return for what he has done. Rewards are not gifts, but are earned or merited. But my salvation is by grace. God has saved me by grace, not because of anything that I have done.

Elsewhere the Bible speaks of my eternal life as an inheritance. God gives eternal life to everyone who believes in Him. But Col. 3:24 speaks of a "reward of the inheritance." This is a reward that is earned. It is not a gift. This is a reward some believers will receive at the Judgment Seat of Christ for a job well done.

Then Paul looks at the other side of my actions. "He who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done." There will be no penalties assessed at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The repayment for a job poorly done may be meted out by those to whom I am responsible or in the form of disapproval by people. There is also the possibility of divine discipline: Heb. 12:5-8, "For whom the LORD loves He chastens."



Col. 4:2-6. Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

This is my last memory verse card in Colossians. At the end of some of Paul's letters, he hits several subjects quickly and briefly. That seems to be the case here.

Paul's first challenge is prayer. In 1 Thess. 5:17 Paul wrote to "Pray without ceasing." Prayer is an expression of our faith toward God. James 4:3 says in reference to prayer, "You do not have, because you do not ask." I find it too easy to forget to pray. Dr. Constable's *Notes* makes an interesting observation: "When we pray we are calling on God to work, and we express our faith in Him. ... The Christian who does not pray is demonstrating independence from God." Jesus told His disciples in John 15:5, "I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in Him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." I charge ahead and do too many things without prayer. I am not talking about decisions about which believers pray to God, asking Him if it is His will for me to do what I am thinking of doing. I am thinking more of the mundane, routine stuff I do. My wife is good about praying for me when I take off in the car for an errand or to chase birds or whatever. She wants me to come back in one piece and not to be a victim of an errant driver. I need to do better at quick bullet prayers before everything I do. "Continue earnestly in prayer."

What to pray about? One thing Paul mentions here is thanksgiving of which he has written several times earlier in this letter. It is easy for me to thank God for the good things that happen. But what about the challenges and the trials? These challenges and trials are opportunities for applying God's word. I can be thankful for them also.

Paul also asked for prayer for himself and his companions. That God would "open to us a door ..." This is the only place in Scripture where this "open door" metaphor is used. Yet I hear it used often by Christians. I need to remember that I am living in the devil's world. Satan and his demons can open doors as well as God can. I need to apply wisdom learned from God's word and my practice of that word to decide if an open door opportunity is the right one to take.

The specific open door for which Paul is asking, is for opportunities to tell others about Christ. He wants to be able to speak clearly and with wisdom. He wants to use his time wisely. He also comments on the manner of his speaking. My speech should "always be with grace, seasoned with salt." When I witness to an unbeliever, my conversation needs to be interesting and attractive as well as accurate. It also should be edifying to the hearers. All of these are important points I need to consider.



**Redhead, Paradise Pond, Port Aransas, Texas**

1 Thess. 1:9-10. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

“For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” When I select only two verses of Scripture, they may include a reference to a statement in an earlier verse. This is true here. Who are “they themselves”? In 1 Thess. 1:7 Paul reminded the Thessalonians that they had received from Paul, “the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.” Paul had taught them about Jesus Christ. They had believed. Then in 1 Thess. 1:7-8 we learn that they “had become examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.” The Thessalonians had become witnesses to the truth Paul had taught them. Now word of the testimonies of the Thessalonians had come back to Paul.

Paul's focus in the Thessalonian letters is more on prophecy than on other subjects. These two verses begin with the gospel and end with a prophetic statement.

Paul's primary ministry was to Gentiles who were worshiping the ancient Roman and Greek gods we know today as mythologies. The appeal of these false religions was the same as the people of Israel faced with the worship of Baal and the Asherah in the Old Testament. Do you want to have a good crop this year and be prosperous? Then come worship these idols and (false) gods. You can do so in drunken orgies with lots of sex. The god(s) will bring you abundant flocks and crops.

So what was the gospel Paul brought to these unbelieving Gentiles? From his Mars Hill message in Acts we know that Paul started with creation. Our God is He who created the heavens and the earth. Paul also continued, as mentioned here, to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Paul also taught them that the resurrected Jesus Christ would return and deliver them from a future wrath. Since Paul has already taught them about this future deliverance from wrath, he does not need to explain it again here. Did Paul go to great prophetic depth when he was giving the gospel? Or was the message that by trusting in God's Son you received eternal life in contrast to eternal judgment in the Lake of Fire? Then after his listeners had believed, he could teach them the prophetic details.

My understanding is that Paul was writing these letters to those who were already believers in Jesus Christ. They have already been delivered from the condemnation at the final judgment and currently have eternal life. But Paul writes here that when Jesus Christ returns, they will be delivered from a wrath to come. This is the future time of Tribulation that is to come upon all the earth and as prophesied by Daniel and also by Jesus.

For me, Paul's approach to presenting the gospel message is significant. If matter and energy in this world have always existed and suddenly experienced a “big bang” forming our universe and then somehow life itself kind of happened and then evolved into what we have today, then there is no Creator and I don't have to worry about this non-existent Creator. Both logic and the proven laws of science tell us that matter and energy have not always existed. The Bible tells us there is a Creator. He has given us a record of what He has done and is doing in the Bible.

1 Thess. 3:12-13. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

In 1 Thess. 3:11, Paul began this prayer with a request that God would “direct our way to you.” Paul wanted to return to Thessalonica again for more ministry. In 1 Thess. 3:6 Paul had reported that Timothy had returned and “brought us good news of your faith and love.” Now Paul prays for the Thessalonians: “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all.” Paul similarly prayed for the Philippians in Phil. 1:9-10, “That your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense until the day of Christ.” Our love grows as we learn God’s word and apply it wisely to the many situations that confront us daily. That was Paul’s prayer.

Love is a much abused word today. We bandy the word about, but do we really practice love? Love is wanting the best for another person. Or is this our attitude: “That’s fine, as long as it does not get in the way with what I want or interfere with my comfort.” Paul is talking about the selfless love Jesus told His disciples that they should have for one another, not the selfish love that is the standard of today’s world. Jesus said in John 13:34, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you.” Paul prays for the Thessalonian believers that they would have this selfless love for one another and for all—everyone they meet, believer and unbeliever, friend or enemy.

The result of this selfless love abounding is that the Lord would establish their hearts blameless in holiness. He does not say sinless. None of us are sinless, but as Solomon wrote in Prov. 28:13, “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.” Both in the Philippian passage I mentioned above and in today’s passage, Paul is looking forward to the “day of Christ” when Jesus will return to bring all believers to be with Himself.

In 1 Thess. 4:16-17 Paul tells us that “the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them ....” But here in 1 Thess. 3:13 Paul speaks of “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.” The commentaries I usually check agree that here in 1 Thess. 3, Paul is referring to the Rapture of the Church and not to the Second Coming of Christ. They do so because the passage also says, “that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father” which is what happens at the Judgment Seat of Christ following the Rapture. The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* handles this issue by saying, that all His saints “accompanying Christ at His coming are probably the souls of the saints who have departed this life and gone to be with Christ, whose bodies will be resurrected when He comes. That is, they are Christians rather than angels.”

Following Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, the Bible is clear that there is no prophecy that needs to be fulfilled before Christ can return in the Rapture. If we understand that Jesus could return at any moment, we are told two things. One, that we should live our lives in obedience to God’s word, so that we may be established blameless in holiness. Second, the certainty of Jesus’ return should be a comfort to us as we go through the challenges of life, particularly as we have our eyes on Him and His return. When I stand before Him, will I be found blameless because I have confessed and forsaken my sins and shown selfless love for others? Let this also be my prayer today, Lord make me “increase and abound in love to one another and to all.”

1 Thess. 4:13-15. But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep." The verses at the end of this fourth chapter give us important details about Jesus' return for the Church. First, Paul says that he did not want his readers to be ignorant. Prophecy is an important topic in the Bible. Everywhere Paul went, he taught not only that Jesus died in our place, paying the penalty for our sins, He rose again from the dead, and then ascended into heaven. But Paul also taught that Jesus will return and that He could return at any time. Paul expected that Christ would return during his lifetime. The Thessalonian believers understood this. Then some of their brethren in the Lord died. They were trying to figure out how these deceased believers fit into the prophetic picture.

Grief at the loss of family and friends is natural and to be expected. On top of this normal grief, Paul's readers were experiencing additional sorrow because they thought that their family and friends who had died were going to miss out in the future blessings that God had promised. Paul says that believers who die do not miss out. Just as Jesus died and rose again, so all believers who die before Jesus' return will be resurrected.

"Lest you sorrow as others who have no hope." The words of Scripture give believers in Jesus Christ total assurance of our prophesied future. Unbelievers are afraid of death because for them that is the end. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again." 1 Cor. 15:6 tells us that there were over five hundred eye witnesses of Jesus after His resurrection. Then there are the futile cover-up lies the Jews concocted to deny His resurrection. The sense of the word "if" in "if we believe" is that of "since."

Paul was writing: Since we know "that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus." Paul is reiterating what he wrote in 1 Thess. 3:13 about Jesus' return "with all His saints." The souls of deceased believers will return with Jesus and will receive their resurrection bodies along with the living believers who are "caught up to meet the Lord in the air."

Too many churches avoid teaching prophecy. Others follow the false lead of Augustine and others who allegorize the interpretation of prophecy. Paul wrote in 2 Tim. 4:8 that there is the potential of a future reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ for those who love Jesus' appearing: "Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will give me on that day, and not to me only, but also to all who have loved His appearing."

The Bible gives us three reasons why we should know what God has promised us in prophecy.

- 1) Knowing what the future holds is a comfort when I face the day to day challenges of life. (1 Thess. 4:18; John 14:1).
- 2) Knowing that Jesus could return at any moment is a prod to me, to obey Him and not to be caught by surprise when He returns and catches me doing or saying what I shouldn't. (2 Pet. 3:11).
- 3) There is a promise of the "crown of righteousness" for those who "love His appearing."

1 Thess. 4:16-18. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Paul is continuing his answer to the Thessalonians regarding their question about family and friends who have died. He wrote in 1 Thess. 4:13, "I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope." Paul expected Jesus' return to happen at any moment. We call this event "the Rapture" from the Latin word Jerome used to translate the Greek word for "caught up." The word "Rapture" comes from the Latin Vulgate Bible.

The Rapture is announced with "a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God." This presents believers with an announcement or command that Jesus has returned for us. I don't think unbelievers will hear anything. It is the "dead in Christ" who "will rise first," immediately followed by living believers. The Rapture does not appear to include Old Testament believers.

Jesus was the first to describe the Rapture when He told His disciples in John 14:2-3. "In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also." Paul also wrote about it in 1 Cor. 15:51-52. "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." A "mystery" is a subject that was not previously revealed in the Old Testament.

These two New Testament references are in contrast to Jesus' return for Israel as prophesied by Zechariah in Zech. 14:4, "In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, ..." We can also compare the Rapture with the description of Jesus' Second Coming in Rev. 19:12-21.

<b>The Rapture</b>	<b>The Second Coming</b>
Can happen at any moment	Preceded by prophesied signs (Rev. 6-18)
Believers ascend to meet Christ	Believers return to earth with Jesus (Rev. 19:14)
We will be guests at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb	The wicked are vulture food at the Supper of the great God (Rev. 19:18-19)
Jesus brings us to the Father's home	Believers enter the Millennial Kingdom
Believers will be with the Lord forever	The wicked are cast into Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:15)

Paul wrote to Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Comparing prophetic passages and other Bible subjects can be a challenge. But God gave them to us so that we can know how great He is.

"Therefore comfort one another with these words." In the parallel passage in John 14:1, Jesus told His disciples "Let not your heart be troubled." No matter how bad things seem to be going in my life, and we all will go through some rough times and trials, I know what the final scoreboard will read: GOD WINS, and we share in that victory.

1 Thess. 5:16-22. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.

As he did at the end of Colossians and in other of his letters, Paul finished this letter with a series of bullet commands.

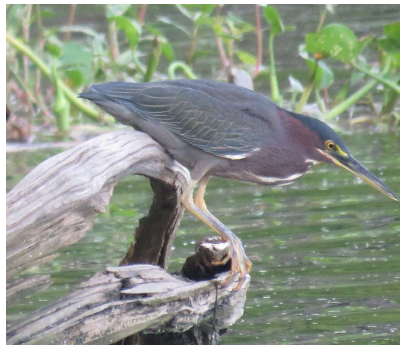
First, there are commands related to prayer. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing." To "pray without ceasing" is not saying that I should walk around all the time with my head bowed and eyes closed in prayer. But it does mean that I should pray frequently during each day about the people I see and meet, as well as, the things I say and do. The commentaries say this wording is like the repetitiveness of a hacking cough.

"In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" It is easy to thank God when good things happen. But do I also thank Him for difficulties and trials? These are true tests of faith. Will I remain faithful to God and what He has commanded? Will I wait on the Lord's solution? Or will I try to find my own work-around? These are not easy questions to answer. I must apply wisdom learned from God's word to know which way I should go in each specific situation. Prayer is very much a part of God's will for my life. 1 John 5:14-15 says, "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we asked of Him." God's will is that I should pray. Also the content of my prayer should reflect His revealed will from God's word.

"Do not quench the Spirit." I am sure that the Thessalonians understood exactly what Paul was saying here because of what Paul had previously taught them. Dr. Constable's *Notes* explains this command well. "Quenching the Spirit is a figurative expression used to illustrate the possibility of hindering the Spirit's work in and through the believer (cf. Eph. 4:30). The image is that of water thrown on a fire. ... The proper response is to follow the Spirit's direction and control without resistance." Gal. 5:16 says, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." Dr. Constable referenced Eph. 4:30 which is similar to 1 Thess. 5:19, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." The Holy Spirit is quenched in our lives when we fail to apply God's word when it has been correctly taught. When I sin, I am quenching the ministry of the Spirit in my life. That brings us to the next commands in 1 Thess. 5:19-21.

"Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil." When we neglect any part of Scripture we are short-changing our spiritual lives. Prophecy is a major part of the Bible. Paul's two letters to the Thessalonians have a lot to say about future events. When we hear prophecy taught, we should test it by what the Bible says. Is the teacher following the traditions of men and allegorizing what the Bible says? "Abstain from every form of evil."

Finally, evil comes in many forms. Sometimes evil can appear as soft as a woolly sheep, but it is like a mad dog hiding underneath. Paul has contrasted the good teaching of prophecy from God's word with evil (false teaching) by which I should not be misled.



**Green Heron, Armand Bayou Nature Center, Pasadena, Texas**

1 Thess. 5:23-25. Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. Brethren, pray for us.

Paul begins these three verses with a prayer for his readers, and ends with a request for prayer for himself and his co-workers. Let me not forget to pray for those who minister to me.

Paul describes God as a "God of peace." The idea of peace that we get from the world is very different from the peace that the Bible talks about. Gal. 5:22-23 tells us that peace is a part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Paul has just commanded his readers not to quench the Spirit. In Galatians the "fruit of the Spirit" is in contrast to a list of 17 or more sins listed in the immediately preceding verses. Sin in my life will quench or grieve the Holy Spirit. God's peace is an inner quietness and repose, even in the face of adverse circumstances. It is not the absence of war, difficulties and adversities. Today Satan is the ruler of this world and bad things are going to happen. I want to walk with the Lord and have this inner peace "which surpasses all understanding" (Phil. 4:6).

Paul also mentions our "whole spirit, soul and body." God created us not only with physical bodies, but with an immaterial part called our soul or our spirit. The traditional view was that the soul and spirit are separate, but in most of the Bible, references to the terms appear to be used interchangeably. So the current thinking of theologians, in a departure from the past, is that the words spirit and soul are synonyms, both describing the immaterial part of each person.

But this leaves several questions unanswered. God told Adam that when he ate of the fruit of the tree he would die immediately. So he ate and lived 900 years more! So how did Adam and Eve die as Gen. 2:17 tells us? "In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Dr. Constable's *Notes* defines the human spirit as "the part of us that enables us to communicate with God." When Adam and Eve ate the fruit, they tried to hide themselves from God. Their spirits had died. Their bodies had not yet died. Our souls are eternal.

Jesus talked to Nicodemus about being "born again" of water (physical birth) and spirit (spiritual birth). So was Jesus speaking figuratively or literally? If figuratively, then what else in the passage is figurative? In the same context He said that if we believe in Him we will have eternal life. Was He using believe and eternal life in their literal sense or figurative sense? I say that He was speaking literally,

"Be preserved blameless." "Blameless" does not mean "sinless." Luke 1:6 says of John the Baptist's parents: "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." Blameless believers will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ without reproach. They have grown in their Christian lives through learning God's word and applying it. When they sinned, they confessed those sins and God cleansed them of all unrighteousness. Paul prays that God would sanctify them completely.

The idea of sanctification is that believers in their lives are set apart for or dedicated to the service of God. Both being sanctified completely and preserved blameless express the function of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives. The mood of the two verbs Paul uses in this prayer is expressing a wish on Paul's part. Paul's readers need to allow the Holy Spirit to do His work to accomplish this sanctification and preservation.

2 Thess. 2:1-3. Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit, by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ (the Lord) had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that day will not come unless the departure comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition.

"The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him." Paul begins this chapter with another reference to the return of Jesus Christ (the Rapture of the Church) who gathers us together to Himself. He is addressing this issue because false teachers were contradicting what Paul had previously taught the Thessalonians. They had even done so with a forged letter, allegedly from Paul. The lesson for me from this is that I need to know the word of God so well that I can easily discern things I hear that are contrary to what God has said. This includes not only Bible teachers, but also politicians, school teachers and professors, news commentators, and friends and neighbors.

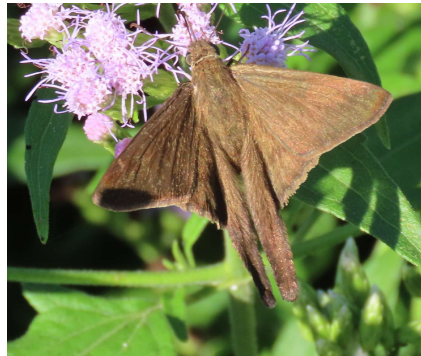
In real estate we are told that the three most important things about a property are "location, location, location." Some Bible teachers following this bit of doggerel say the three most important things about understanding a passage of Scripture is "context, context, context."

So what are the subjects in these three verses: 1) the return of Jesus Christ; 2) false teachers; 3) the day of Christ (the Lord); 4) something called variously as the falling away, the rebellion, the apostasy, the departure. The same Greek word is used in Acts and is correctly translated there as "apostasy" since it clearly refers to a "departure from the faith." Elsewhere in Greek literature the word means simply "departure" and the context needs to be understood to know what the departure is from. Some Bible translations chose not to translate this word from the Greek but to transliterate it and hence we see it transliterated as "apostasy." Dr. Kenneth Wuest, a former Greek professor at Moody Bible Institute in his, *An Expanded Translation of the New Testament*, translated it: "because that day shall not come except the aforementioned departure [of the church to heaven] comes first.

Apostasy and false teaching have always existed. Most of the books of the New Testament were written to address issues raised by false teachers. It is widespread today as we listen to the ideas of the world and even in churches. My aunt published a biography of my grandfather, a Presbyterian pastor, which included his efforts to offset the false teaching that was prevalent in his day a century ago.

The majority of Bible teachers hold that before Christ returns there will be a major apostasy in the church. The New Testament has abundant warnings against false teachers. So apostasy is something that was present then and is ongoing even today. We can find whatever false idea we want to find existing in some churches today. Paul did use the article before the word "apostasy" ("the departure"), so it was a subject with which his readers were familiar. The Bible is clear that there is no prophecy that needs to be fulfilled before Jesus can return for the Church and we are caught up to the clouds to meet Him in the air. (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

I pray that I would have discernment and be able to correctly understand God's word and what is being taught.



**Dorantes Longtail, butterfly, Brownsville, Texas**



2 Thess. 2:13-15. But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.

My eternal salvation is a work of God through the Holy Spirit. My responsibility is to believe in the truth of God's word, but my believing did not save me. God has commanded us to believe. When we obey Him (by believing), He saves us.

God called the Thessalonians when Paul and his co-workers taught the gospel to them. But God has revealed Himself to all people, just as we are told in Romans 1, "since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, even His eternal power and Godhead."

What I have just written is the standard approach to understanding 2 Thess. 2:13-14. However, *The Grace New Testament Commentary* presents what I will call a deeper understanding based on the context. This deeper understanding does not disagree with what I have summarized above. Dr. Constable's *Notes* mentions this deeper understanding in passing and did not dispute it.

Paul began this chapter with a warning against false teachers, "not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or word or letter, as if from us ... Let no one deceive you by any means." Because of the persecution believers were facing, the false teachers were claiming that the day of the Lord had already come and that the Church was now in the Tribulation. In the verses that follow, Paul continues to discuss the Antichrist who will appear in the Tribulation and that the Holy Spirit is still restraining this appearance through the Spirit's ministry among believers. Then in 2 Thess. 2:12 Paul says that those who do not believe in the truth will be condemned.

In today's passage we are told that "God from the beginning chose us for salvation." The Greek word for "chose" is unusual. It is not the usual word for "elect" or "chose." It is used two other times in the New Testament. In Phil. 1:22 Paul wrote, "But if I live in the flesh, that *will mean* fruit from *my* labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell." Paul's choice is between living to serve Christ, or to die and be with Christ.

The other time is in Heb. 11:25 where it spoke of Moses "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin." This deeper understanding suggests that the "salvation" for which God chose us is deliverance from the Tribulation that will occur when believers are Raptured at the return of Christ. Because I believed in Jesus Christ, I have assurance that I will be caught up to the clouds to meet Jesus in the air (1 Thess. 4:16-17) and will not be in the Tribulation.

Now Paul concludes this section with the warning and command, "stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle." He still has the false teachers from 2 Thess. 2:1-2 in view. He wants his Thessalonian believers to stick with what Paul has previously taught them about the Rapture and that they will not go through the Tribulation.

Even though we have not been taught personally by Paul and the other apostles, we have their teaching handed down to us in the Bible. I want to know the Bible so well that I can walk day by day, step by step knowing what God wants me to do. Of course, I also need to do what He has commanded. That is my choice, but sometimes, I don't get it right.

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