

God's Glorious Purpose to Create a New Society & Humanity

Reflections on Ephesians

Copyright 2019 © QUEK KOH CHOON
ISBN: 978-981-14-3176-0
Printed in Singapore

Permission is given to reproduce part or all of it for personal use
or distribution. Please distribute free of charge.

“Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE,
NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society.
Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.”

If you have any feedback, please direct to:
<http://www.livinginthelastdays.com>

God's Glorious Purpose to Create a New Society & Humanity

CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW	1
CHAPTER ONE	5
Ephesians 1:3-14	
Ephesians 1:15-23	
CHAPTER TWO	13
Ephesians 2:1-10	
Ephesians 2:11-22	
CHAPTER THREE	27
Ephesians 3:1-13	
Ephesians 3:14-21	
CHAPTER FOUR	33
Ephesians 4:1-16	
Ephesians 4:17-32	
CHAPTER FIVE & SIX	51
Ephesians 5:1-20	
Ephesians 5:21– 6:9	
Ephesians 6:10-24	
CONCLUDING REMARKS	63

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

In the epistle Ephesians, Paul the Apostle surveys the purpose of God from eternity to eternity; it leads us to look behind before creation and beyond into the infinite and the eternal, giving us the sense that this epistle is the most profound of them all.

Ephesians focuses on God's eternal purpose to create through Jesus Christ a new society and humanity; one characterized by life in place of death; unity and reconciliation instead of division and alienation; righteousness in place of corruption and wickedness; peace and love in place of strife and hatred; and by a continual conflict with evil and the evil one instead of a weak compromise with the evil one.

This vision and purpose of God stand in deep contrast to the realities of sin and lovelessness in so many of our churches; those who call themselves the churches in our contemporary society are often guilty of dishonoring Christ, contradicting the true nature of the church and depriving the Christian witness of integrity and truth.

The relevance of this epistle in our current contemporary context is pretty obvious. Man has striven through the years to form a new society; politicians with the ideology of "the new man and society" have campaigned for such a vision and dedicated themselves to its realization of a classless society. However, it is still not feasible, given people's selfish desires and the corruption of the hearts of men. Some pursue such a vision with a determined effort to achieve this with the solution in economic terms; others have called for revolution in society, whether it be a call for more democracy or more freedom or improved international relations, but all these are to no avail.

The human predicament is even deeper than the injustice in the world and the lack of equality and opportunities among various peoples. Ephesians presents a greater vision and a more

radical solution: a new creation! Through Jesus Christ God is recreating men and women ‘for good works’, creating a single new humanity in place of the old disastrous Jewish-Gentile division, including the present world with its decaying values and impending disaster, and recreating us in His own image “in true righteousness and holiness”. The new man and the new society are God’s creative work; it is beyond the capacity of human power and ingenuity. It depends on the power and work of the divine Creator alone.

The role of Christ takes on a cosmic dimension with the sphere of interest in the heavenly realms in which the principalities and powers operate. The epistle tells us how Christ shed His blood in a sacrificial death for sin, was then raised from death by the power of God and has been exalted above all to the supreme place in both the universe and the Church. We, the believers, who are in Christ, organically united to Him by faith, have ourselves shared in these great events.

We have been raised from spiritual death, exalted to heaven and seated with Him there. We have also been reconciled to God and to each other through Christ and in Him. We are nothing less than God’s new society, the single new humanity which He is creating, including Jews and Gentiles on equal terms. Hence, we are to live in a manner worthy of this new calling, demonstrating unity and diversity in our common life, purity and love in our daily behavior, mutual submissiveness and care in our relationships at home and at work, and stability and steadfastness in the fight against the principalities and power of evil. In the fullness of time, God’s purpose of unification will be brought to completion under the headship of Christ, and God will be all in all.

The whole epistle is a wonderful combination of Christian doctrine and Christian duty, what God has done through Christ and what we must be and do as those who have been placed in Christ.

The epistle was probably intended to be a circular letter to the

churches in the province of Asia, but traditionally believed to be directed specifically to Ephesus. Ephesus was a leading city in the first century A.D. of the Roman province of Asia. She was the proud possessor of the temple of Artemis (the Roman Diana), which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The active cult of Augustus in honor of the Emperor of Rome was closely related to the worship of Artemis. Additionally, the practice of magic was rampant in this city.

It is interesting to note that the impact of the gospel and the transforming power of God in Ephesus led to many who had practiced sorcery to burn their scrolls publicly, worth 50,000 drachmas (Acts 19:18-20). Also, the silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis saw his business declined drastically because of the impact of the gospel. So he instigated a riot against Apostle Paul and his co-workers (Acts 19:23-26). The message that gods made by human hands are no gods at all is significant in the proclamation of the gospel. We see that sorcery and idolatry are not just a recent phenomenon; today, they take different forms with the interest in magic and witches on television, in films, in books and also in practices focusing on spiritual encounters and the new age movement.

What is unique in this epistle is the expounding of the doctrines of election, predestination, redemption, adoption and the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit. The recurring phrase “to the praise of His glory” appears again and again. Also, the phrase “to the praise of His glorious grace” is seen in verse 6. One of Paul’s uplifting prayers, the first one recorded in this epistle, shares spiritual insight on the hope of His calling, the divine inheritance in the saints and the greatness of God’s power.

Ephesians deals with the glorious sovereignty of God on the one hand and human responsibility on the other. It also focuses on the work of the triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the creation of the new society and humanity, not as an after-thought, but established before the creation of the world, encompassing the renewal of creation itself in the new heaven and new earth.

CHAPTER ONE

Ephesians 1:3-14

The first twelve verses of chapter one constitute a single complex sentence in the original Greek. After the greetings of grace and peace from God comes forth from the mouth of Paul a continuous outpouring of praise unto God who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

We see the focus on the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. First, God the Father is the source of every blessing we receive and enjoy. It is He who has chosen us; it is He who predestined us...to be His sons; He is the one who freely gave us His grace and made known to us His will and purpose in Christ; He did all these according to His pleasure and will, and He is the one who has poured out His love and grace upon us in His Son. It is important to know that the Father loves us even before the creation of the world. We may wrongly conclude that He loves us because Christ died for us and somehow what Christ did made the Father love us. He loves us from the beginning and His love is demonstrated by sending His Son to die for us; Christ's dying for us, even when we were yet sinners, is the supreme demonstration of God's love for us in His Son.

Secondly, the sphere within which the blessing is given and received is the Lord Jesus Christ; the phrase 'in Christ' or 'in Him' occurs no less than eleven times in the epistle. In Adam, we belong to the old humanity but 'in Christ', we belong to the new redeemed humanity; 'in Him', God has chosen us in eternity, bestowed on us His abundant grace, redeemed us and forgave us, and also 'in Him', God presented His plan to unite all things, in heaven and on earth, under the headship of His Son.

Thirdly, we are told that the blessing God gave us is spiritual, not material as seen in the Old Testament, manifested in God's law

written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit in the new covenant. Paul qualified the term spiritual with the clause “in the heavenly realms”, indicating the unseen world of spiritual reality; it is the sphere in which the ‘principalities and powers’ operate and in which Christ reigns supreme and those who are His also reign with Him. The activity of the Holy Spirit is evident throughout the bestowing of God’s grace and life to His people and this would be elaborated in later chapters of the epistle. Here in chapter one, the Holy Spirit is described as God’s seal on the believers, a mark of ownership and authenticity; God puts His Holy Spirit within His people to mark them as His own. The Spirit is also God’s guarantee of bringing His people safely to their final destination and inheritance; now He is giving us a foretaste of what awaits us in the future, the Spirit being a down payment or a deposit of the future endowment that is in store for all the believers.

Notice in verse four that believers are chosen to be holy and blameless in His sight. This is the intention of God for His people; recognizing this would help us to realize that we cannot adhere to the teaching of Antinomianism which advocates the teaching, “All I have to do is believe in Christ and rely on the grace of God. I can then live any way I want, without any respect to the moral law of God.” This is a dangerous teaching; if anyone comes and tells you that as a Christian you do not have to be concerned about keeping commandments and obeying the moral law of God, he is speaking empty words, words that would deceive you. This is further elaborated in (Ephesians 4:5-6).

In verses 4-5 of chapter one, we are also told that God, in love, predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ. Adoption here is not the same as that practiced in our current context. In the days of Paul, adoption is declaring someone who has come of age as the legal son or daughter in a family. The one adopted is treated as belonging to the family, entitled to all privileges and inheritance of the family. We see the great privilege of being adopted into God’s family and being siblings to the Lord Jesus Himself, sharing in His privileges and inheritance, and also in His glory. The model for all true

fatherhood is rooted in the fatherhood of God. The God of all glory not only becomes our father, but wishes to assure His children that this is so. We see here the assurance of salvation and sonship; God would want His children to have the assurance that they are indeed His children and members of His family.

The beginning of verse four reads, “For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world...” We have noted the phrase ‘in Christ’, ‘in Him’, repeatedly used in this chapter; our being chosen by God should never be thought of apart from Christ. We who are chosen to be saved were never contemplated by the Father apart from Christ or apart from the work Christ was to do for us. No, we are chosen in Christ. Union with Christ is there from the outset, even in the plan of God. Here at the very beginning, all human merit is excluded. Union with Christ has its basis in Christ’s redemptive work; Christ came to earth to carry out this redemptive work for His people. It is only because Christ did all these things for His people that actual union between Christ and His own become possible. Through union with Christ we receive every spiritual blessing; Christ not only died for us on Calvary’s cross many years ago, He also lives in our hearts, now and forever. Union with Christ has its source in our election in Christ before the creation of the world and its goal in our glorification with Christ through eternity. Union with Christ was planned from eternity, and is destined to continue eternally. This union is what makes our life as Christians significant, happy, and victorious.

John Calvin puts it this way “We must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us and we are separated from Him, all that He has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us... All that Christ possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with Him.”

Only through the Holy Spirit can we become one with Christ and can Christ live in our hearts. We can only be saved when God makes us one with Christ. The role of the Holy Spirit is to bring us into union

with the Lord Jesus, to keep us in that union, and to see that union flourish in communion with Him. The hallmark of the Spirit's work is ongoing conformity to Christ crucified and raised, causing us to share His death in order to share His resurrection, to taste His suffering in order that we might also taste His glory. The Spirit implants the seed of this at the beginning of the Christian life and nourishes it to the end.

Paul in fact, in this first part of chapter one, is addressing the 'how' and the 'why' with respect to the salvation of His people. We become His people according to the good pleasure of His will (repeated in verses 6, 9 and 11). He made us His people for the praise of His glorious grace, to the praise of His glory. It begins in His will and ends in His glory; we shall see this more clearly in subsequent verses and chapters. This is where everything begins and ends.

Ephesians 1:15-23

This is the first recorded prayer of Paul for the Ephesians. Having heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for all of God's people, Paul constantly thanked God for them and remembered them in his prayers. He prayed for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation that they may know God better. God's word is the source of all wisdom and the Spirit inspired the Word. The Holy Spirit is the one who reveals the truth of God in the first instance and then illumines our minds in order that we may grasp and understand the Word better. Paul is not asking that believers may receive new revelations from God but that the Spirit may help them to understand the revelation God has already given in the Scriptures. "That you may know..." is the emphasis of Paul's prayer. Growth in knowledge is indispensable to growth in holiness and maturity; it is not just knowledge in understanding but knowledge in experience as well, and there is no greater knowledge than knowledge of God Himself.

The great puritan John Owen had a deep concern for Christian experience. To him, there is a great difference between the knowledge of

the truth and the knowledge of the power of the truth. Owen knew that it is the presence of the Spirit of God that transforms our bare knowledge of the truth into our experience of the power of the truth. He realized that if we could get revelation from God directly, it is psychologically inevitable that we would find less enthusiasm for serious Bible study. Here he affirmed that true knowledge of the power of the truth comes from illumination of the Word by the Spirit. We see therefore the great need to spend time studying, understanding and assimilating the Word of God in our lives, with dependence on God's Spirit for illumination, and the practice of communion with God and prayers to God for wisdom and spiritual life.

We need to recognize Paul's example of keeping praise and prayer together. Let us praise God that He has already blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing and let us keep praying that we may know the fullness of what He has given us.

Paul went on to pray that the eyes of the believers' hearts may be enlightened to know the hope to which God has called us, the riches of God's inheritance in His people, and the great power for us who believe. The whole Christian life involves an unfolding and enlarging of the heart's openness to the things of God. There will always be parts of us that need to be opened more and more to let the fullness of God's truth dwell in us.

What did God call us for, we may ask? His call is not random without purpose. It is a call to something and for something. God has certainly called us to belong to Jesus Christ and to enter into the fellowship with Him and all the saints who have been called throughout all generations. He who is holy has called us to be a holy people, freed from the bondage of sin and the judgment of God's law. It is a call to be a united people characterized by love, crossing all boundaries of race, class and gender, in Christ Jesus, who is the head of the body, and Lord of the new community. Besides the call into one body, we are called to enjoy the peace of Christ, to live a life worthy of this wonderful calling.

At the same time as we enjoy this peace, we should be aware of the opposition from the unbelieving world and the attacks of the evil one in various forms. In a nutshell, we are called to Christ and holiness, to freedom and peace, to suffering and glory.

Understanding and appreciating our call is a great impetus to persevere and to endure in the midst of persecution and pain, and to look beyond our sufferings and struggles to the glory which will one day be revealed. We need to pray with Paul to be enlightened by God to see with the eyes of our hearts the glorious hope of our calling in Christ Jesus, a hope initiated by God the Father before the creation of the world, accomplished and secured in Christ, and applied to us and in us by the Holy Spirit. It is not a call or a hope to us individually; it is a call to many to collectively form the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the temple of God, a new society, a new humanity now and in a new heaven and new earth.

With this in mind, we can now focus on the riches of His glorious inheritance in the believers. This “inheritance” points us to the end, to the final inheritance described as imperishable, undefiled and never fading away, kept in heaven for us, for which the Holy Spirit is our guarantee. We shall ‘see’ God and Christ Jesus, and worship Him and it will be a transforming vision, for when He appears, we shall be like Him, not only in body but in character. Furthermore, we shall enjoy perfect fellowship with one another in the midst of a vast multitude from every nation, tribe and tongues, before the throne of grace and before the ‘Lamb of God’.

What shall keep us from the beginning of our calling to the end of our inheritance? It is surely the power of God! It is definitely God’s power that can fulfil the expectation of the call and bring us safely to the riches of the glory of our inheritance in the end. The manifestation and demonstration of this power is seen in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. Two powers man cannot control in this fallen world are death and evil. Man cannot avoid death because

he is mortal; he cannot overcome evil because he is fallen. But God in Christ, in His divine power, has overcome both death and evil at the cross, and in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Therefore, He can rescue us from both these powers.

Believers sometimes look towards the power of healing, of miracles and wonders. However, they fail to realize that the greatest divine power is that which destroys death and evil. This power also raised Jesus, the perfect God-man, from the dead, and exalted Him above all principalities and powers, seating Him at the right hand of God in the heavenly realms. Those who believe in Christ are united with the Lord Jesus and experience this reality spiritually, and totally at the end of this age. Nothing is more powerful than God causing a man to be ‘born again’, delivered from his dreadful sinful ways and destiny in hell, to be transformed to be like His Son in body and character and to be placed with many others throughout all generations in the new heaven and new earth, where only those who are holy like the Lord Jesus can enter and dwell eternally. Only such a divine power can overcome the formidable power of the evil one and change the hearts of sinful men! It is sad but true that we often take this divine power for granted and live our lives not in a manner worthy of our high calling.

CHAPTER TWO

Ephesians 2:1-10

This passage in chapter 2 contains a devastating description of our human corruption and sinful nature. We need to see this clearly if we are to understand why mankind needs the gospel of Jesus Christ. Appreciating it deeply will also help us in our approach in evangelism and sharing the gospel.

The description here is the biblical diagnosis of fallen man in a fallen world and society. It explains why we need to depend totally upon the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing us to spiritual life in Christ. Unless fallen man is convicted of his sinful depraved condition and his helpless spiritual state, he will not cry out for mercy and deliverance from the hand of God. The sharing of the gospel, in dependence on God's Spirit, must necessarily bring him to realize his terrible spiritual state and his desperate need for a Saviour.

A self-improvement plan would not help him. Giving him the best education available and human wisdom could not solve his predicament. Even religious pursuits and spiritual activities would be of no avail.

Let us now focus on three major truths about the depraved state of unredeemed human beings.

1) Without God, we are dead in our transgressions and sins. 'Death' here (2:1) refers to a state of spiritual death, a state alienated from the life of God, lacking life. Such ones in this state have no desire or love for God, no sensitive awareness of His personal reality, no longing for fellowship with Him or His people. A life without God, even for a person who is physically fit and mentally alert, is a living death. And those who live it are dead even while they are living. The tragedy of human existence is that people who are created by God

and for God are now living without God. In the sphere which matters the most, the soul, such ones have no life. At this point, we need to note that men without God are spiritually dead; they are not just spiritually sick.

2) Without God, there is no true freedom; instead, there is a fearful bondage to forces over which we have no control. We are held captive to the world, the flesh and the devil.

a) We follow the ways of the world; we look to a whole social value system which is alien to God and His ways. These values dominate us, holding us in captivity and bondage. They lead us to political oppression, organized tyranny, materialism, various forms of discrimination, injustice and lawlessness. Culturally, our minds and values surrender to the pop-culture of television, films, social media, magazines and books. Although at times we realize the emptiness and ‘dead-ends’ of all these pursuits, we find ourselves unable to extricate ourselves from this bondage.

b) We follow the ways of the kingdom of the air, the spirit which is now at work in those who are disobedient. It is a clear reference to the devil, the prince of the power of the air, under whom the negative principalities and powers operate in the unseen world. He is the source of temptations to sin, to evil, rebellion and violence; he works continuously and tirelessly to oppose God and His people. He leads unbelievers to follow his agenda and to build his own kingdom, apart from God. Whether we like it or not, we are either under the rule of God or under the control of the devil. We might be under the impression that we are truly free to do what we like, without God, yet, in reality, the devil is leading us and prodding us along, with empty promises, deceptions and the lure of what the world can offer through him. We are in fact under his control; we are captives to this formidable foe; only divine

energy and power can rescue us from him.

- c) All of us live, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature, and following its desires. We are walking in the flesh. The flesh here refers to our fallen self-centered human nature, energized by the desires of the body and mind. We must first acknowledge that there is nothing wrong with natural bodily desires, whether it be for food, sleep or sex. God has made the human body this way. It is only when these desires are perverted into sinful desires which manifest as intellectual pride, false ambition, malicious thoughts, rejection of truth, gluttony and selfish pursuits that they become cravings of our sinful nature. Do not be fooled. These sinful desires may appear as respectable, even ‘spiritually acceptable’; they are, however, despicable in the sight of God.

3) Without God, we are spiritually dead and enslaved by the world, the flesh and the devil. What is more, we are also condemned for “like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath”. The wrath mentioned here is the wrath of God. It is a wrath that is neither an arbitrary reaction nor an impersonal process. It is God’s personal, righteous, constant hostility to evil, His definite refusal to compromise with it and His determination to condemn it. His wrath is not incompatible with His love. Both the wrath of God and His love are held together in His character. God always reacts to evil in the same unchanging and uncompromising way. Without God, we are under His dreadful judgment.

We need to address what we mean by the term “by nature”. It points to the origin of our condition as members of a fallen race. Paul is saying that our inherited human nature itself deserves God’s wrath and judgment. This is supported by Paul’s argument in Romans 5:12-14 that all men sinned in and with Adam. He is not saying that all men inherited a sinful nature which led them to sin and so to die. The Old Testament has a strong sense of the solidarity of the human race. It speaks of the

next generation as being already in the loins of the present generation, a truth which modern genetics may be said to underline. Therefore, it is in order to say that we sinned in Adam, and that in and with him we incurred guilt and died. It is in this sense that we may be described as “by nature” sinners and subject to God’s just judgment. “Nature” does not refer to human beings as originally created but refers to the fallen character of man.

Some have the idea that human beings are born into this world in a state of innocence, or born morally neutral, with no bias in their hearts towards either good or evil. It is as if every human being goes through his own probation. If every individual is born innocent with no inclination towards good or evil, we would expect that some of the people would remain innocent; we should expect to find pockets of society with sinless people. But in reality no such civilization can be found because we are not born morally neutral. We are in fact born fallen, and opposed to God. That is the reason we are under the wrath of God.

In summary, Adam was the first man, but he was also the father and representative head of the human race; his response to God’s command determined the status of the whole human race. Adam sinned and fell. In him, we also sinned. Since we share in his humanity, his sin spread to us all. The result is that in Adam, all have sinned and all die. In Adam, we are dominated by the old order. By nature, then, we belong to Adam’s family and are under the dominion of sin. We live within the sphere of rebellion against God.

To suggest that human beings are born in a state of moral and spiritual neutrality so that they do not need to be regenerated (made alive by God) but only to be properly trained and to be surrounded by good examples would result in the teaching of Pelagius. Pelagius, in the fourth century, taught the complete freedom of the individual, who is thus responsible for every action taken. Every sin is a result of individual choice and “We have within us a free will which is so

strong and steadfast to resist sin” Pelagius’ teaching was opposed by Augustine in particular and was rejected by the leaders of the early Church; his teaching was even branded as heretical.

What Pelagius advocated would contradict what Ephesians taught that we were dead in our sins and that we were under bondage to the world, the flesh and the devil. This is what Augustine calls “not able to not sin” (*non posse non peccare*) (*Enchiridion* 118). Our fallen state makes us only choose what is contrary to God and His ways. Only when God makes us alive in Christ, that is, when God regenerates us by His grace through faith and unites us with Christ, that we are enabled through the Holy Spirit to choose God and His ways. So we are able to not sin (*posse non peccare*).

Death, slavery and condemnation. These are the three truths which describe our human condition without God. Outside Christ, man is dead because of sins; enslaved by the world, the flesh and the devil; and condemned under the wrath of God. No part of the human person outside Christ is untainted by the fall. This is not saying that total depravity means that nobody is capable of any good. The image of God, in which human beings were originally created, has been damaged grievously but not entirely lost. Yet the condition of fallen man describes a radical problem that requires a radical solution, and that brings us to God’s solution outlined in the subsequent verses.

Let us now focus on the following verses:

“But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved” (verses 4-5).

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (verses 8-10).

Notice that we were made alive with Christ. We were dead, and dead men do not rise. It is God who has taken action to reverse our condition in sin. It is essential to hold this contrast together: what we are by nature and what we are by grace, the human condition and the divine compassion, God's wrath and God's love.

One of the most profound issues of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth Century was the relationship between grace and merit. Grace is something we receive. It is not because we earn it but because, out of God's mercy and benevolence, He gives it to us as a gift. Merit, on the other hand, is a reward that is owed to someone for doing some work. Notice that in verses 8-9, it is by grace we have been saved through faith. This is definitely not by works but it is a gift from God. There is no merit involved and therefore there is no room for boasting. The Reformation insists that salvation is by faith alone; there is no merit or works involved. Before the Reformation, the teaching of the Western church was that justification is accomplished through a mixture of faith plus works (which include sacraments, in particular the sacrament of penance, confession and "works of satisfaction").

Because "by grace we have been saved through faith" is a gift of God, the conclusion must be that faith itself is a gift of God. It is not an expression of human achievement, of human effort, or of human ability. We should be ever so grateful that every believer has received as a gift not only the salvation that comes through faith, but the gift of faith itself.

Faith is not the Christian's righteousness, but it is the instrument of his justification. Christ, with what He has done and suffered, is the meritorious cause of our justification. Faith does not earn anything from God by its own worthiness, but simply receives the gift of what Christ accomplished.

Teaching that human nature after the Fall is only partially depraved, not dead in sin but only sick, and therefore able to take the first step in regeneration, implies a Semi-Pelagian theology of salvation.

Likewise, teaching that people may lose their salvation after they have received it is Semi-Pelagian heresy. According to Semi-Pelagianism, the grace of God is necessary for salvation as medicine is to heal a dying man. But a type of co-operation must take place between the patient and the physician for the healing medicine to have its effect. What happens is that God brings the medicine to the dying man, but the dying man must cooperate by opening his mouth to receive it. This is the analogy often used. The teaching in Ephesians, and also the Reformed view, would be that man is not only critically ill, he is dead. The man does not even have the power to open his mouth to receive the healing medicine. Rather, the medicine has to be injected into him by the physician.

The problem is that even though we have the power to choose in human matters, we are dead to the things of God, and as a result have no desire for the things of God. Rather, we follow a different course. We follow it willfully. We follow it freely, in the sense of doing what we want to do. But with respect to spiritual things, we are dead.

We must understand that (1) God has chosen believers in Christ before the creation of the world, (2) we are saved by grace through faith, and (3) there is no place for boasting because we are not chosen based on merit. Understanding these three matters will help us tremendously in our approach to Christian living and evangelism. Knowing that it is God, through the Holy Spirit, who made us alive in Christ means that we have to prayerfully depend on God's Spirit to convict man of sin and to draw them to desire to respond in faith and repentance to the message of the gospel. We are reminded of what the Lord Jesus said in John 6:65, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them". It is therefore important that our approach is not to sway the will of the listener to the gospel through the use of worldly methods and human persuasion, through manipulation of the emotion through music, emotional presentations and visual effects. We are to present the message of the gospel accurately, not depending on charisma, as Apostle Paul reminded us in 1 Corinthians, but looking to God to preach the message of the cross and the need for man in his

depraved human condition to cry out to God for His mercy and grace. It does not mean that we do not take care to communicate clearly and as effectively, as we should, in presenting the gospel, but ultimately, whom or what do we depend upon to bring the message home? It is helpful to quote Charles Colson in his book “Loving God” at this point:

“But, the church is in almost as much trouble as the culture, for the church has bought into the same value system: fame, success, materialism and celebrity. We watch the leading churches and the leading Christians for our cues. We want to emulate the best-known preachers with the biggest sanctuaries and the grandest edifices. Preoccupation with these values has also perverted the church’s message. The assistant to one renowned media pastor, when asked the key to the man’s success, replied without hesitation, ‘We give the people what they want’.”

Some people say, “if the people want celebrity to draw them to the gospel, let us give it to them; if they want performance, music and multi-media presentations, let us oblige.” This seems to be the current focus of evangelism. Let there be no mistake about it; we do pray and organize prayer meetings but the Lord sees clearly whom and what we depend upon. Do we depend on wordly power or power from God?

Ponder what Charles Spurgeon communicated decades ago:

“Brethren, we shall not adjust our Bible to the age; but before we have done with it, by God’s grace, we shall adjust the age to the Bible... If any of you wish to preach a gospel that will be pleasing to the times, preach it in the power of the devil, and I have no doubt that he will willingly do his best for you... In reference to ministers, many church members are indifferent as to the personal piety of the preacher; what they want is talent or cleverness. What the man preaches does not matter now; he must draw a crowd, or please the elite, and that is enough. Cleverness is the main thing. Whether he preaches truth or error, the man is held in admiration as long as he can talk glibly, and keep up a

reputation as a speaker...We have a faith to preach, my brethren, and we are sent forth with a message from God. We are not left to fabricate the message as we go along. We are not sent by our Master with this kind of general commission – ‘As you shall think in your heart and invent in your head as you march on, so preach. Keep abreast of the times. Whatever the people want to hear, tell them that, and they shall be saved.’ Verily, we read not so. There is something definite in the Bible. It is not quite a lump of wax to be shaped at our will, or a roll of cloth to be cut according to the prevailing fashion... We must preach the gospel so distinctly that our people know what we are preaching... We have nowadays around us a class of men who preach Christ, and even preach the gospel, but then they preach a great deal else which is not true, and thus they destroy the good of all that they deliver, and lure men to error. They would be styled ‘evangelical’ and yet be of the school which is really anti-evangelical.”

What the prince of preachers, Charles Spurgeon, communicated decades ago still holds sway today; it is pertinent that we do God’s work in God’s way and not allow the spirit of the world, the desires of the flesh and the deception of the evil one compromise the truth and message of the gospel.

In sharing the gospel, it is pertinent that repentance and forgiveness of sin ought to be pressed on the attention of every man, woman and child throughout the world. All need to be told of the necessity of repentance, for all are by nature desperately wicked. It should be clear that without repentance and conversion none can enter the kingdom of God. We need to tell all that God is ready to forgive everyone who believes in Christ. Repentance and forgiveness are linked together. Our repentance itself cannot purchase our pardon, for forgiveness is the free gift of God to the believer in Christ. However, it is also true that a man who does not repent is a man who is unforgiven, for a forgiven believer will always show some fruit of repentance. It is therefore pertinent that in the sharing and preaching of the gospel, there must be the communication of the need for repentance and the

dreadful spiritual state of those who remain outside Christ. Intellectual assent, emotional response and the repetition of some prayer formula do not equal to true regeneration. This may lead to apparent increase of number of ‘conversions’ and response on paper but this does not result in true conversions to Christ. The Church is then inundated with tares rather than wheat; we have many who claim to be believers but who are not truly in Christ.

Verse 10 of chapter two which emphasizes that we are created for good works prepared by God again dismisses the antinomian teaching that ‘all I have to do is believe and I am not expected to perform good works’. Justification is indeed by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. It means that true faith will inevitably manifest itself in the performance of works of obedience to God. Here we have to be careful not to swing to the other extreme teaching of legalism, which suggests that we need to be careful to keep the laws of God in order to please God and to earn our salvation. We may end up in a keeping of rules and regulations to a point that we equate these rules with spirituality and we may measure our standing with God by the way we perform our spiritual disciplines. We are accepted in the Beloved, in Christ, solely through the merit of the Lord Jesus and not on the basis of our performance.

The reason why justifying faith must produce good works is that faith receives Christ, and so the believer is in union with Christ by the Holy Spirit. Christ then dwells in the believer’s heart by the Spirit, transforming the character of the soul and the activity of the body. The necessity of faith for sanctification reminds us that holiness is by grace.

As pointed out by Sinclair Ferguson in the book “The Whole Christ”, both legalism and antinomianism stem from a failure to grasp the goodness and graciousness of God’s character. The antinomian spirit cannot see the law as a wonderful gift of God and it dislocates God from His good law, finding ways to argue that God does not require obedience. On the other hand, the spirit of legalism sees the law

as a covenant of works rather than as a way to honor and give pleasure to the One who saved them by grace. It is only understanding and tasting union with Jesus Christ Himself that will lead us to a new love for and obedience to the law of God.

In other words, the remedy for both antinomianism and legalism is a fuller and more biblical understanding of grace and the character of God.

Ephesians 2:11-22

The passage here deals with alienation and reconciliation. We are first of all alienated from God our Creator because of the fall; we are also alienated from one another, our fellow human beings.

The Apostle here highlighted that Christ has reconciled us to God through the cross; He also reconciled us to one another by breaking down the wall of hostility between various races, bringing peace, and creating a new society, united in Him. In particular, in Paul's situation, the hostility between Jews and Gentiles was rather severe. The Jews had a great contempt for the Gentiles, considering them 'unclean'. In Christ Jesus, He had made both groups one by breaking down the wall of hostility and effected reconciliation, peace and unity.

To the Jews, the Gentiles were alienated from the nation of Israel and strangers to the covenant of promise God made with Israel. In this sense, the Gentiles were without hope and without God in this world. Socially, and religiously, they were separated from the Jews. The temple wall that separated the Court of the Gentiles from the temple proper was a symbol of the enmity between the Gentiles and the Jews.

The Gentiles who were far away from God had been brought near. They were separated from the people of God but now, in Christ, they have become citizens of heaven and members of God's family. More than that, in Christ, Jews, Gentiles and all who are His people

are together built into the temple of God. In this temple, Christ is the cornerstone and the apostles are the foundation. God dwells in them not only as individuals but also as a community.

God chose Israel through a covenant with Abraham by circumcision, a physical sign for the Jews to be God's people. God's intention was to reach the world through Israel. Israel failed to fulfil this calling although she was given the Mosaic covenant with the Law to guide her to keep the covenant and to lead the rest of the world to respond to God. Consequently, the Gentiles remained outside God's covenant and law. The Jews considered the Gentiles as those outside God's plan of salvation for His people.

But the Jews, in seeking to be justified by keeping the Law through works, failed to recognise that salvation comes by grace through faith in God and His plan of salvation through His Son. Salvation comes to us through the cross; those in the Old Testament context looked forward to the cross for salvation whilst those in the New Testament look backward to the cross for salvation. In both contexts, it is still by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and His sacrificial, substitutional death on the cross. Through the cross, salvation comes to Jews and Gentiles alike. Reconciliation of the Jews and Gentiles also comes about through the cross and the new covenant God gives with the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Law of God is now written, not on stones, but on the hearts of people who are born again and 'recreated' by God.

Paul said that Jesus set aside in His flesh the law with its commands in reconciling the Gentiles and the Jews to God through the cross? What did he mean? Paul was referring probably to the ceremonial law of the Jews which constituted a serious barrier between the Jews and the Gentiles. Jesus set this aside because in the cross He fulfilled all the types and shadows of the Old Testament ceremonial system. Jesus did not abolish the moral law as a standard of behaviour (this is still relevant to Christians today). Note how Jesus often highlighted

the importance of the ten commandments. But He did abolish the law as a way of salvation. We cannot obey the law perfectly however hard we try. This separates us from God and from each other. Jesus, however, perfectly obeyed the law in His life and bore the consequences of our disobedience by taking upon Himself the “curse of the law” at the cross in order to free us from it.

What is rather tragic is the divisiveness in the church, both then and today. The church sees more barriers set up: racism, nationalism, class divides, personal animosities fueled by pride, prejudice, jealousy and even an artificial differentiation between pastors and laity. We must realize that this is offensive to God. How can we set up barriers when Christ has demolished them? In Christ, through love, understanding and prayer, these barriers can be overcome.

A divided church of God also hinders the world from believing in Christ and the gospel. The church is no longer a visual model and demonstration of the good news of reconciliation and love. We are not saying that the church has to be perfect; but we are certainly saying that the church cannot preach the gospel effectively when she is tolerating racial and social barriers within the church, behaving as if nothing is amiss in God’s eyes.

CHAPTER THREE

Ephesians 3:1-13

We go on now to Paul's elaboration on the 'mystery' made known to him by revelation from God. For thousands of years, God kept a 'secret' in His heart, hidden from the world, the angels and the prophets in the Old Testament until the time came for Him to reveal it through His Son to His holy apostles. The secret or 'mystery' was that there was to be a new creation or recreation, a new living temple, comprised of both Jews and Gentiles alike, a new society and humanity; the Gentiles are to be fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. The 'mystery of Christ' is the complete union of Jews and Gentiles with each other through the union of both with Christ. God revealed this to Paul specifically and also to God's apostles and prophets by the Spirit and through them to the believers. It is now the common possession of the universal Church.

Together with this revelation to Paul came the commission to Paul to preach this good news, particularly as the Apostle to the Gentiles. The Apostle Paul counted this commission as a privilege, especially as he recognized that he was a persecutor of the church and a blasphemer before his conversion, and he truly acknowledged his own unworthiness to fulfill such a role. His humility however did not prevent him from exercising his apostolic authority, in dependence on God's grace.

We must realize the tremendous difficulties and obstacles Paul faced to preach the gospel to the Gentiles as well as to reveal this mystery of Christ to both Jews and Gentiles. Remember that the Jews utterly scorned interaction with the Gentiles.

For Paul, a devout Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, to go to the

Gentiles with the gospel would be unthinkable if not for his conversion, his revelation and calling by God. The Jews, in seeing Paul call Gentiles to God, sought to kill him and to impede him in his quest at every point of his missionary journeys. Even the Jews in Jerusalem who believed in Christ found it hard to believe that God had intended to include the Gentiles in His salvation. Some of them even misunderstood Paul and doubted him. However, the Apostle Paul took his commission seriously. Against all odds, with God's enabling, and a deep love and gratitude to God in his heart, he took the gospel to many shores. Ponder what he communicated to the elders of the church in Ephesus in Acts 20:

“I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus... However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace” (Acts 20:19-21, 24).

Paul suffered a great deal to reach both Jews and Gentiles with the gospel. In 2 Corinthians 11:24, he wrote, “Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.” He received thirty nine lashes five times from the Jews. It was a flogging of a criminal in the Old Testament context. One such flogging of thirty nine lashes would be excruciating and may even cause death in an individual but Paul endured this five times, at the hands of his own Jewish people. It happened over and over again when he preached at the synagogues and was told to refrain from preaching the gospel; Paul went back despite the flogging because he never stopped loving his Jewish kinsmen, and he yearned for them to see what God was doing with regard to creating a new humanity. He longed intensely for them to repent and have faith in the Lord Jesus. He told the Ephesians believers not to be discouraged by his sufferings for their sake, for the message of God's mystery and

eternal plan was constantly burning in his heart.

By creating a new society through the life of the church God manifests His manifold wisdom to the rulers in the heavenly realms. Even angels and the evil spirits did not know the secret counsel of God. When they behold God's mystery unfolded in His salvation plan, they wonder at the wisdom and power of God. They realize that indeed He is sovereign and almighty, that none can discern His will, and none can prevent Him from fulfilling His eternal purpose.

The formation of a multi-racial humanity is a public demonstration of God's power, grace and wisdom. No other human community resembles it in its diversity and harmony. The cosmic powers in the heavenly realm are spectators of this dramatic outworking of God's salvation as they behold the manifold wisdom of God and His eternal purpose realised in the body of Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 3:14-21

And that led Paul to his second recorded prayer in the epistle to the Ephesians. The Apostle Paul has been explaining both Christ's reconciling work which resulted in the creation of the new society and humanity, and his personal involvement in this because of the special revelation and commission he had received. Now he turns from exposition to intercession. Here Paul was praying for the believers to be strengthened with power through the Spirit in the inner being. He prayed that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith and that they would be established and rooted in love. He asked that they may have power to grasp the love of Christ in all its fullness and to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. The benediction ended with to God be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever.

In all likelihood, what Paul prayed for the believers were the very areas he prayed for himself and experienced for himself in his ministry – power through the Spirit, faith in Christ in the depths of the

heart and love for Christ in not only grasping it but experiencing it and rooted in it. He was constantly seeking the glory of God in the church and in the Lord Jesus. These were what kept him going, persevering in the race and mission entrusted to him.

Jesus, when He was on earth, obeyed the law of God perfectly and did so in the power of the Holy Spirit in a fully human way. The Spirit of God led Him into a full, perfect and ‘natural’ humanity. The ministry of the Spirit in the life of our Lord will serve as the paradigm for the ministry of the Spirit in the life of the believer.

Paul probably understood this. So he prayed for a similar power of the Spirit in the lives of the believers, albeit not in the perfection experienced in the Lord Jesus as the perfect man. The key to salvation and assurance lies in the extent to which the Son of God has come near to us in His incarnation, actually entering into our situation, tasting our experience from the inside, and exchanging His strength and confidence for our fears and frailties. Christ is not a spectator of the human condition, but a participant in it. “He took our place and thus became a sinner and subject to the curse, not in Himself indeed, but in us; yet in such a manner, that it became necessary for Him to occupy our place” (John Calvin, *Commentaries on... Galations*, 3:13).

Weak faith will still carry a man to heaven, says John Owen, yet it will never carry him comfortably nor pleasantly thither... The least faith will do its work safely though not so sweetly (Sermon V: The Strength of Faith). When we consider the faith of Apostle Paul, how he learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, to be content whatever the circumstances, we will have an insight into the depth of his faith in Christ. It is no wonder that he also prayed for such a faith for the Ephesians. Faith, according to John Calvin, is a personal relationship to God and to Christ; a sure knowledge of the love and mercy of God in Christ, not a bare assent to truths which are either not understood at all or only half understood. Rather, it is a firm confidence which is opposed to doubt.

Love, according to Paul, is the bond of perfection, and this is so especially in the fellowship of the church. Christians come in different shapes and sizes, spiritually as well as physically, psychologically and socially, but they can be bound together in love, particularly the love of Jesus. Hence Paul prayed for the love of Jesus in the lives of His people which will in turn help them to love one another in His love. The end of all these is the glory of God in His church and in Christ Jesus.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ephesians 4:1-16

Paul, as a prisoner for the Lord, urged the believers to live a life worthy of the calling they had received. Paul often referred to himself as the slave of the Lord and a ‘prisoner’ of Christ bound by chains of love for the master. He also was literally a prisoner for the Lord and His people, imprisoned by the Romans because of his loyalty to God in his mission.

In this section he was particularly focusing on the unity and maturity of the body of Christ. Notice that our unity is anchored on the nature of our calling: there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and lastly one God and Father of all. When God made us alive through His Spirit, we were placed in union with Christ, in His one body characterized by one faith, one baptism, one hope and under one God and Father of all. Our oneness originates in the nature of our calling and the fact that we are in Christ as one body, regenerated through one faith given by God, given one hope and adopted into one family under one heavenly Father and nurtured by one Holy Spirit.

The source from the Father, the transaction through the Lord Jesus and the application by the Spirit all imply that unity has to be the characteristic of the people of God; it cannot be otherwise. Disunity in the church would mean something is amiss; perhaps some really do not belong to that one body or some appear to be brethren but in fact are ‘tares’ rather than ‘wheat’. Those who truly belong to that one body and family would feel and display a kinship that points to the reality that they are ‘family’. They may be young, they may be in a stage of growth but the characteristics of family members are there, seen or vaguely perceived. God expects members of His family to bear His resemblance and to be united with one another under His lordship. To

live a life worthy of His calling would mean living together under Him in love and unity. Take note of the practical aspects in the outworking of unity and love: Paul urges believers to be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love and make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. It has to focus on others, their needs, their level of maturity, and the willingness to give time and space for them to grow spiritually. The hint is given to the indispensable work of God's Spirit and the nurturing of God's love in the heart in order for this to be effected.

Jesus Christ came as the second man and the last Adam, first to restore a community of sinners to fellowship with God, and then to bring a glorious humanity and universe into being, one that surpasses the first creation in its original form. In this, God planned to bring two families into one; the family in heaven consisting of archangels and angels and the family on earth consisting of human beings. Christ thus comes to save sinners, to restore the universe to its stability, and to fill it with glory. Hence Christ brings two families together as one glorious fellowship under the headship of the Son Himself. He would then present this body to the Heavenly Father, and God would be all in all.

John Owen's comments reflect the sentiment of verses 7-10, "The Son of God, in infinite grace, laid aside infinite dignity, in an act of infinite condescension, revealing infinite love and all with a view to producing infinite glory". We see this similarly penned by Apostle Paul in Philippians 2:5-11, a passage that is so familiar with believers. Jesus 'descended' to take our human nature into His person, uniting human and divine natures in the one person. He took the form of a servant, and was made man, but He did not thereby cease to be God. After the finished work at the cross, He was resurrected, and He ascended and was exalted in glory at the right hand of the Father. There, in the fullness of all divine perfection, above the glory of angels and men, still as the God-man, in glorious light, love and power, He continues to intercede for His people and continues His mediational ministry. And Paul added,

He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip His people for the work of service so that the body of Christ may be built up unto maturity, unity and the fullness of Christ.

“To equip His people” is used here not to describe the work of pastors but rather the work of so-called laity, that is, of all God’s people without exception. Ministry is not the prerogative of a clerical elite but is the privileged calling of all the people of God. Although there is a distinctive pastoral ministry for the clergy, the New Testament concept of the pastor is not of a person who jealously guards all ministry in his own hands, and successfully squashes all lay initiatives, but of one who encourages all God’s people to discover, develop and exercise their gifts. His teaching and training are directed to this end, to enable the people of God to be a servant people, ministering actively but humbly according to their gifts in a world of alienation and pain. Thus, instead of monopolizing all ministry himself, he actually multiplies ministries” (John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*).

This concept implies not a single pastor with a passive flock but both a plural oversight and an every-member ministry. The pastor is not “like a little pope in his own church, while the laity are arrayed beneath him in serried ranks of inferiority. It is a totally unbiblical image... there is simply no room in it for a hierarchy or for that kind of bossy clericalism which concentrates all ministry in the hands of one man and denies the people of God their own rightful ministries” (John Stott, *ibid.*).

For the whole body to grow, all its members are to use their God-given gifts. These gifts are beneficial both to those who exercise them faithfully and those who receive their ministry. The end result is that the church becomes steadily healthier and more mature. Remember that it is the exalted Christ who gives gifts to the church, and these gifts are diverse in different individuals. To equip the people of God, the teaching gifts are primary and these are not only the domain of the pastor.

A growing church is one growing in unity, spiritual maturity, doctrinal stability, attractive reality and mutual vitality. It is wrong to put a person into a ministry position without preparing him to serve effectively. To equip the believers, the pastors must recognise that their priority is to be good shepherds. Good pastors actively care for their flock. They see that they are well fed and well led. A good shepherd gets to know each of his sheep intimately. This involves time and commitment and personal interaction with the believers. In a Church with many members, the pastors can shepherd through under-shepherds. It means that the pastors must concentrate on some more mature members and train and equip them to be effective under-shepherds. This can go on to develop into several layers of shepherding leaders who are encouraged to do the same with others in the congregation. It is pertinent to recognise that this involves personal time, commitment, interaction at a deeper level, transmitting of vision and spiritual convictions. It is not to be mistaken to be just some training programmes, some ad-hoc meetings and gatherings. It involves discipling, counseling, prayers, deep study of the Bible and most importantly the transmission of God's values in going through with individuals in their spiritual journey, in their family contexts and work contexts. Without such commitment, which may often involve heartache, sacrifice, love and much time on the part of those who are called to be spiritual shepherds, just putting some people (not equipped) in charge of some committees and ministries would not lead to effective church growth. It may end up with structures without the life of God built in. It may provide a picture of spiritual activity but no actual spiritual ministry. We must heed the warning in the book of Revelation to the church in Sardis: "you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead." The pastors and leaders may be caught up in a hive of activity, but in reality, there is no true spiritual growth unto maturity.

Today's culture focuses on efficiency, productivity and results. We are told to aim for measurable results which can be accounted for in terms of numbers. Adopting such a culture into a Christian context would result in the focus on increase in numbers in attendance at

meetings, in concentrating on events, programmes, buildings and visible goals and tangible results.

Such a focus would leave very little room for concentrated attention on individuals and investing time and effort to equip them for ministry. If top leaders in the church do not give time for such personal work, it is unlikely that there will emerge a culture to invest in individuals as a key aspect of ministry for pastors, teachers and those in various leadership. Pastors and teachers should keep a close tab on their priorities in equipping the believers for the ministry; this would mean not taking on too many speaking engagements, not being involved in so many activities and committees and not being committed to too many people whose needs can be met by others in the church. Personal work in equipping the believers may take time and progress may be rather slow, but it would give rise to long term positive results for spiritual growth of the church. We must remember that our Lord Jesus ministered to the many and the few. Although He ministered to the crowd, He took time to concentrate on the disciples. From the concentrated ministry of the twelve, the early Church grew to “turn the world upside down”.

Paul went on to stress that if the outworking is right, the people of God will no longer be “infants tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every word of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming”. Such a situation in fact describes the general condition of many churches today; the people receive the words of the pastors or leaders as the ‘gospel-truth’ without checking the Word of God, even in contexts where what is taught is clearly unscriptural. On the other hand, pastors may be so busy in administrative duties and preparation of sermons that they hardly have time to interact with their ‘flock’ except for the superficial ‘hi’ and ‘how are you?’ In such a context, we cannot expect the people to be equipped to do the ministry; neither can we expect true unity when the people are confused by the teaching dispensed to them. Likewise when distance is maintained between the sheep and those who are supposed to guide them spiritually. Surely we cannot hope to see the

church being built up unto the fullness of our Lord when pastors and leaders are just involved in organising activities and running from one activity to another. Pastors themselves should focus on their priorities: preaching the gospel and equipping the church to do this ministry, not only in organised evangelistic meetings, but in their daily contexts, at home, in their schools, in their work places and in the community.

“What do we do when people refuse to respond to the gospel?... We are tempted to resort to emotional and psychological techniques to manipulate people into believing, or to manipulate the gospel to make it easier to believe” (John Stott in *Challenges of Christian Leadership*). Stott’s insight for Christian pastors and evangelists is very timely. It mirrors what Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:2: “Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways, we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience.” We must reject manipulation but instead make the plain proclamation of the gospel clearly. Seeking to bring people ‘to Christ’ and increase the number of members in the congregation for the wrong reason and with the wrong approach, subtly manipulating the message of the gospel, only bring mostly ‘tares’ into the congregation. The believers must be taught and helped to know what it means to share the gospel; it is not to increase the number in the congregation per se; it is to fulfil God’s commission to His Church and to do it in God’s way, in honor of Him and to glorify Him in the process. It is not just the words but also the lives that need to be communicated and transmitted.

John Stott again spells clearly the priority of Christian ministers in *The Message of 1 and 2 Thessalonians*: “The very first thing which needs to be said about Christian ministers of all kinds is that they are ‘under’ people (as their servants) rather than ‘over’ them (as their leaders, let alone their lords). Jesus made this absolutely plain. The chief characteristic of Christian leaders, He insisted, is humility not authority, and gentleness not power”.

As we consider the role of Christian ministers and leaders to equip the church to do the ministry, the thoughts expressed by the late John Stott and the words of Scriptures should put us on the right footing in building and equipping the body of Christ unto maturity.

Ephesians 4:17-32

The Apostle Paul then exhorted the believers to no longer live like those who do not know God. The lives of such ones are lived in ignorance, darkened in understanding, with the hardening of their hearts, and given over to sensuality.

The believers, on the other hand, should live as those who are taught by Christ in accordance with the truth in Him. Paul then went on to list the negative ways of living which ought not to be for believers, and the positive and godly ways which should characterize the people of God.

What is noteworthy is that Paul was addressing believers, telling them that what they were before conversion and what they ought to be after believing in Jesus. The reality is that Christians may at times still live like non-believers and behave like them; Christians may not always live out a life worthy of their calling in Christ.

Hence the exhortation: “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (4:22-24).

One aspect of reality is that there are many who profess to be believers but have actually not been regenerated. They may have made decisions for Christ, perhaps an intellectual assent to what was shared with them or a mental and emotional response of the moment when they are moved by the logic of the message or the emotional charged-up environment.

This is illustrated in the parable of the sowing of the seed. Some seed sown did not bear fruit but had been swept away by the evil one. Other seed died because it was choked by the weeds, be it worldly desires and concerns or a lack of commitment and understanding of what it means to follow Jesus. There may also be believers like the Corinthian Christians who allow fleshly desires and allow their immature disposition to affect their proper outworking. But those who continue to live a life that is constantly immoral and ungodly should evaluate whether they are truly born again spiritually. This is starkly demonstrated in Ephesians 5:5, “For this you can be sure: no immoral, impure or greedy person – such a person is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God”.

The necessity of repentance may seem a very simple truth but it is deeply connected with the right views of God, of human nature, of sin, of Christ, of holiness and of heaven. Beginning with the gospel, all must be brought to a sense of their sins, to a sorrow for them, to a willingness to give them up, and to hunger and thirst after the pardon from God. We must bid men repent, and when they have repented, we must bid them repent more and more to their last day. Faith and repentance continue to operate throughout our Christian lives.

But how is it that Christians, who are born again and are a new creation or recreation in Christ, still live like non-believers? What Paul was emphasizing is that we must now throw off all conduct which belonged to our old life. Our new behaviour must be completely consistent with the kind of persons we have become. Paul was not saying that we can now live a perfect life, free from sins and moral failures. We may fail God in our weakness but there is forgiveness in Christ when we repent and come back to Him and to the light (1 John 1:9). In other words, re-creation (effected by God) and repentance (what we do by His grace) belong together and cannot be separated. We must put off the old standards and cultivate the new standards in Christ.

Although regeneration (being made alive spiritually) is

exclusively the work of God, all other aspects of the process of salvation distinct from regeneration involve both God and the believers. We can say that it is both God's work and our task. Sometimes, these various aspects of salvation – repentance, faith, sanctification, perseverance and the like – are described as work of God in which believers cooperate. However, putting it this way will imply that God and we each do part of the work. It would be better and more accurate to say that in these aspects of salvation which are distinct from regeneration, God works and we work. We must note that the human being is both a creature totally dependent on a sovereign God and a person who makes responsible decisions.

Likewise for the Christians, God must sanctify us wholly, but we must work out our salvation and sanctification by perfecting our holiness. It is difficult to harmonize these two apparent contradictory thoughts that God is totally sovereign over our lives and yet we are required to make our own decisions and are held responsible for them. The Bible teaches both and we must accept this, believing that what we cannot square with our finite minds is somehow harmonized in the mind of God.

The call to continually put off the old self and put on the new self like changing our clothes is a task we are expected to do as working out our salvation and sanctification. We have noted that as God works in our lives, we are to work. But this is an area many believers find daunting. Although we apply ourselves to this task, we still find ourselves failing again and again.

To address this issue, we must recapitulate what happened at the cross and the implications for our lives as believers. On the cross, evil did its worst. What happened to Jesus on the cross seemed like the greatest victory for Satan and evil; yet, in reality, everything that the evil of the world could produce, everything that evil powers on earth and in the heavenly realms could accomplish, was let loose at Jesus and all these were exhausted and defeated at the cross, and victory was

won at the point of Jesus' death. It was a victory of love over hatred, a victory that consisted in Jesus' allowing evil to do its worst to Him and He still was not defeated by it. He actually bore the weight of all this evil and sin to the end, and He outlasted it and achieved a victory of weakness over strength. The cross shows the terrible nature of evil and the even more radical measures God had to take to deal with it once and for all. The ultimate outcome of this victory will only be seen and achieved at the second coming of the Lord Jesus when the presence of sin will be abolished and a new humanity is established fully in the new heavens and new earth.

In the meantime, much has already been achieved at the cross. Our understanding of this will help us tremendously to put off the 'old self' and to put on the 'new self', living a life worthy of our calling. The penalty of sin and the guilt of sin has been dealt with at the cross. In Christ, we have the forgiveness of sins and redemption through His blood, which means we are rescued from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of the Son. Furthermore, our sinful nature was put off when we were buried with Him in baptism, in which we were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God. The charge of our legal indebtedness has been taken away and nailed to the cross.

Paul put it this way in Romans 6:8-11: "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, He cannot die again, death no longer has mastery over Him. The death He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life He lives, He lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus". Paul is not saying that we will die to sin only if we believe we have died to sin. He is saying that, if you are a Christian, this is the truth about you. You have died to sin. Therefore, count on it; live in the light of it.

One problem that believers have in connection with sin is the difficulty of persuading them that they are no longer under the dominion or mastery of sin because of what Christ did at the cross! Although the

deliverance from the presence of sin is still forthcoming, the decisive breach with sin has already been accomplished. The nature of sin remains unchanged but the status of sin in the believer is dramatically altered.

It is important to know that we are no longer under the rule of Satan; we have a new master in our Lord Jesus Christ. We are no longer under the dominion of sin; the power of sin has been broken. Although the conflict with the power of indwelling sin continues here on earth, the believer must know that he is no longer under its dominion. We need not obey the devil; we need not surrender to the influence of the world. We must know the power of death to sin in the death of Christ. The Apostle Paul puts it this way: “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal. 5:24)”; “The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”. Paul considered the ‘old Paul’ as dead, crucified with Christ; the ‘new Paul’ lives under a new Master, Christ, who lives in him through the Holy Spirit. The ‘new Paul’, born again and being a new creation, now lives by faith in the Son of God who loves him and died for him (Gal. 2:20).

It is very significant to know that if we are born again, we are placed in Christ, in union with Him. What happened to Him at the cross happened to us in view of our union with Him; we died to the old life and we are a new creation in Christ with the seed of regeneration planted in us. This means that we now have the potential to grow, to develop and to be transformed into the image of our Lord Jesus. It is still a seed and not a full grown and fruitful plant. Nonetheless as a new creation in Christ, we are now under His rule and lordship. We are free from the dominion of sin and the negative influence of the world; we are no longer obligated to listen to the evil one. We are now called to live a new life because we arose with Christ and share His resurrection life with Him (Ephesians 2:4-6). We died with Him to sin and arose with Him to new life. Now we belong to Christ, incorporated as citizens of heaven although we are still in the fallen world and the conflict with Satan and indwelling sin still continues. We can say that the

‘war’ is over. Nevertheless, the battles with the forces of evil, worldly values, and our flesh continue to harass us until Christ comes again and completely defeats the remnant of evil and establishes His new kingdom and humanity. It is however very important that we know we are fighting on ‘victory ground’, from a position of strength. We are in a position to say ‘yes’ to God and ‘no’ to all the temptations and pressures of the enemy. We may lose some ground now and then, because of our lack of alertness, our ignorance and our indwelling sin but we need to know that Christ has already secured the victory. As long as we return to the light and maintain our proper union with Him, we can stand our ground and remain victorious in Christ.

The evil one, however, wants us to believe that we are still under his control. He will try all means, including deception, temptations and persecution, to cause us to doubt God and the promises God has revealed in His Word. Satan has limited time and he seeks to use it intensely to damage God’s kingdom and to lead God’s people astray. Remember that the evil one works tirelessly and continually to hamper the purpose of God and he does it especially well by casting doubts, distorting the Scriptures and polluting the church of God. He is not afraid of activities, even apparent spiritual ones, but he is especially concerned when God’s people make spiritual headway and cause damage to his kingdom and concerns.

Going back to ‘putting off the old self and putting on the new self’, we have seen that God expects us to work at this: - “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil His good purpose (Philippians 2:12(b)-13).” God works in us through His Holy Spirit. By faith we grasp the power of the Holy Spirit which enables us to overcome sin and live for God. Through faith we must appropriate the encouraging truth that by the Spirit we are able to put to death the misdeeds of the body (Romans 8:13) and that if we live by the Spirit we will receive strength to cease gratifying the desires of the sinful nature and to bring forth the Spirit’s fruit (Galatians 5:12, 6:22-23).

Since you have come to know Christ, Paul is saying to the believers in Ephesus, you have been taught once and for all to put off your old self (or “old man”), to be continually made new in the attitude of your minds, and once and for all to put on the new self (or “new man”). A once and for all change of direction is to be accompanied by daily, progressive renewal. The Christian is a new person, but he or she still has a lot of growing to do. To be sure, the renewal is primarily the work of God, but the renewal into greater conformity to God is also, at the same time, the responsibility of man. All Christians are called to increasingly be conformed to the image of Christ who is the perfect image of God. This is our task, our responsibility - a responsibility we can fulfil only as God enables us to do so, but our responsibility nonetheless. We are not able to renew ourselves in our own strength. The image of God can be renewed in us only as we remain in union with Christ. This renewal is not completed during a person’s lifetime. It is a process as long as we live. In this present life, believers are genuinely new but not yet totally new. They are incomplete new persons. It is not until the time of the final glorification of man that the renewal of the image of God will be brought to completion. This final perfection of the image will be the culmination of God’s plan for His redeemed people, the new humanity in Christ. The perfection of the image of God in man is intimately connected with the glorification of Christ. Since Christ and His people are one, His people will also share in His glorification. The final perfection of the image, therefore, will not only be brought by Christ; it will also be patterned after Christ. In the life to come we shall bear the likeness of the man from heaven (1 Cor. 15:49).

Living by the Spirit and walking by the Spirit means living by His guidance and strength. Living by His guidance means waiting on Him, asking what He would have us to do, and where He would have us go. This entails daily study of the Bible, since the Spirit does not lead us apart from the Word of God. The better we know the Scriptures, the better we shall know how to live by the Spirit. Negatively, living by the Spirit’s guidance means to silence the clamour of fleshly voices, to quell the energy of fleshly haste, to restrain every impulse until it has

been proved to be of God. Positively, it means to be guided by Him, to listen to Him as He reveals Himself in His Word, and to yield to Him continually. Living by the Spirit's strength means leaning on Him for the necessary spiritual power. It means believing that the Spirit can give us strength adequate for every need, asking for that power in prayer whenever we need it, and using that power by faith in meeting our daily problems. We have to be always 'plugged in' to Him, to keep in constant touch with Him, for we need Him every hour.

Now what Paul encouraged the people of God to do and not to do makes sense. God works in us through His Spirit to work and to act, and we work through leaning on the Spirit for guidance, strength and enabling. We can work out our salvation because we are no longer under the rule of the evil one and the mastery of sin; we are a new creation, members of God's family, citizens of heaven, bound for glory and honour in Christ Jesus at His second coming.

However, we are still living in a fallen world and we have not been raised with a new resurrected spiritual body; our earthly body is still a natural body subjected to illness, weakness and death. It is also subjected to the influence of indwelling sin (the flesh). Hence we need to put to death (mortify) the deeds of the body, by the Spirit (Rom. 8:13). The flesh must be mortified daily because indwelling sin always abides while we are in the world. It is our participation in the divine nature that gives us deliverance from the pollutions that are in the world. We need to 'employ' the Holy Spirit and our new nature in the battle for our souls. If we do not seek daily to mortify sin, we sin against the goodness, kindness, wisdom, grace and love of God, who has given us the weapons of our warfare. It is sad but true that there is in this generation a growing number of those who profess faith in Jesus Christ, generating a great noise of religion, religious duties in every corner, preaching in abundance, but with little evidence of the fruit of true mortification. Their lives give evidence of a miserable unmortified heart; if pride, envy, worldliness, selfishness and strife are the marks of Christians, we have them among us in abundance.

Let a man pretend what he will, little concern over sin is a serious offence to the grace and mercy of God. Such a life has an evil influence on others. Some may talk spiritually but live vainly; others, viewing their worldly and selfish lives, are stumbled. If mortification is a work of the Holy Spirit alone, how is it that we are exhorted to accomplish it? If only the Spirit of God can do it, why not leave the work wholly to Him? We must know that the Holy Spirit does not so work in us that it is not still an act of our obedience. The Holy Spirit so works in us and upon us, and yet He preserves our liberty and free obedience. He works upon our understandings, wills, consciences, and affections, agreeably to our own natures. He works in us and with us, not against us or without us, so that His assistance is an encouragement as to the accomplishing of the work.

Putting on the new self is equally important as putting off the old self. It is not just dealing with indwelling sin and applying mortification of the flesh in one's Christian life. It is also about the pursuit of holiness and seeking to be more and more conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. In that light, we need to focus on the character of our Redeemer as the perfect exhibition of divinity. As we come before the Lord Jesus daily and moment by moment, beholding His glory and contemplating it, we are transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, and this comes from the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18). The human life of the God-man stands before us as pure demonstration of humility, obedience and love, as an ideal to be reproduced in us. As we contemplate this in the light of the Holy Spirit, and by the opening of our eyes of understanding, it exercises a sanctifying power beyond all other influences. It forms in us by the Spirit and through faith the very image of God which we behold in Him (2 Corinthians 4:6). It is an ideal which reproduces itself in the experience of the enlightened Christian. His example becomes, in the hands of the Spirit, a power used to change us into His image increasingly as we are conformed to His character and image in increasing proportions.

It is the first beginnings of a perfect obedience which will reach its full measure and degree in the celestial state in the new heaven and new earth. At present, it is more in aim and purpose and sincerity than in performance; there is no living perfection here on earth and none should claim it. In the meantime, there is an inner conflict in the life of every Christian, a conflict between the sinful nature and the Spirit, between an old and new nature; there is no perfection of holiness within. While the Christian presses toward the mark, he is never perfect; nor does he ever reach a stage when there is no more conflict, and when he attains performance of God's will without the consciousness of inward opposition. In fact, this conflict is a sign of the Spirit's work in the believer. God expects the Christian, as His child, with the example and intercession of our Lord Jesus and the enabling of the Holy Spirit, to continue to put on the new self (man) and to give glory to God by his life of holiness in increasing measures.

The work of holiness, initially, is like the seed thrown into the earth, being cherished and nourished. It is to take root, to spring up and to bring forth fruit. The seed of God, the principle of holiness, is small at first. It is received in hearts made fertile by the Spirit of God. This seed, nourished and cherished, will take root and produce fruit. The grace of love is capable of degrees and therefore of increase. But we must realise that it grows and thrives by exercise. If the work of holiness is a progressive thriving work, it is required that we give "all diligence" to the increase of grace (2 Peter 1:5), and that we "abound in all diligence" (2 Cor. 7:7), and not only so, but that we show "the same diligence even to the end" (Heb. 6:11). If we grow slack, or give over as to our duty, the work of sanctification will not be carried on in a way of grace.

The pursuit of holiness needs to be accompanied by a right view of God. The Bible tells us that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom and this aspect of the view of God must be nurtured if we desire to put on the new self and be transformed into the image of our Lord Jesus. The proper response to a glorious God is to fear Him, as

the Old Testament and New Testament repeatedly command us. This response is often lacking in Christians as they seek to pursue holiness and this leads to failure in this quest. “Gracious fear causes the heart to stand in awe both of the mercies and judgements of God and keeps it in an attitude of reverence of the heavenly majesty” (John Bunyan in ‘A treatise of the fear of God’). Bunyan, the author of ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’, saw fear as an essential element of true godliness. Without “reverence and awe”, we cannot serve God acceptably (Heb. 12:28). Bunyan also taught that the majestic Lord is also the loving Saviour; he did not believe that Christians should live in bondage to fear. However, he realised that to know the Lord is to fear Him. He perceived that when we see God’s glory, we see ourselves as we truly are. John Calvin also wrote that we humans are self-confident and self-righteous until we begin to have some true thoughts of God. Then, as a man who looks at the sun is overwhelmed with its brightness (Calvin in Commentaries on the Prophet Isaiah, 6:2), so the knowledge of God’s perfect righteousness, wisdom, and power dazzles us, and in that light we see our own wickedness, foolishness and weakness. If we see this clearly, it will only lead to godly fear and reverence. Then, like the saints of old, like Daniel, we become stricken and weak in the presence of the holy almighty God. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

CHAPTER FIVE & SIX

Ephesians 5:1-20

The Apostle Paul has been explaining that because we are God's new society in a new humanity, we must adopt new standards which are appropriate with our new life in Christ. Here Paul adds in more arguments for the needs of these new standards and what they entail in essence. Paul began in this passage to exhort the believers to 1) live a life of love, 2) live a life of holiness, 3) live a life of vigilance, and 4) live a life filled with the Spirit.

As God's new society, a people who have put off the old self and put on the new self, what we are and what we believe should be seen and manifested in how we behave. Holiness is not a condition into which we drift; we are not passive spectators of a sanctification God works in us. In fact we have to purposefully and intentionally 'put off' all conduct that is not compatible with our new life in Christ, and we are to 'put on' a lifestyle that is worthy of God's call. In that light, Paul went on to exhort the believers to live a life which is worthy and appropriate to who we are in Christ, and to keep away from what is unfitting for God's people who are already part of God's new humanity in Christ Jesus.

Firstly, we are to live a life of love, patterned after the life and love of the Lord Jesus, a love displayed in sacrifice and giving. At the heart of Christian maturity is loving fellowship and communion with Jesus, manifested in a life of love for others, in the church, in the family, in relationships and in ministry. Is this what believers are known for? Is this what characterizes ministers and Christian ministry? We have studied various aspects of such a love in 1 Corinthians 13 and we saw how this was highlighted to contrast the problems that arose in the church of Corinth (What is Ailing the Church of God, Quek Koh Choon). Without such a love, the church of Corinth had to deal with

division, pride, immorality, self-centredness, deception, and false teachers. These false teachers distorted the accurate teaching of the cross, spiritual gifts and the ministry of the Spirit. Without love, our gifts amount to nothing and our hard work gain nothing from God's perspective. The new society and humanity God is creating through Jesus is distinctly one of love, immersed in and sustained by God's love.

Paul then focused on a life of holiness. There should be no unwholesome talk, sexual immorality of any kind, greed, impurity or deeds of darkness. Believers were once darkness but now we are light in the Lord; we can no longer live in darkness. Instead, we are to live as children of light, the fruit of which consists of goodness, righteousness and truth. We not only need to live in the light but we are to expose the deeds of darkness, especially among God's people. Here again, the call to speak the truth in love comes in. We should not be afraid to reveal the truth when God's honour is compromised in the name of Christian service. As light of the world, and salt of the earth, believers are to ensure that light continues to shine, to dispel the darkness in society, and to persevere what is good in the eyes of God for the community and the church.

Recall the exhortation of Scriptures: "Be holy, because I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16; Leviticus 11:44). We are individually and corporately the temple of God. The temple must be holy for a holy God to dwell in. Let us not make the same mistake as the Israelites in profaning the temple of God. Do not be presumptuous like them and thought that God would never abandon His temple. Jerusalem was destroyed and God left His temple, causing His people to be exiled by the Babylonians. Likewise, we are corporately a 'bride' of Christ; the bride of Christ ought to be unblemished and pure, reserved for the bridegroom. Let us not indulge in spiritual adultery and deceive ourselves that it does not matter to God.

There is a common notion among believers today that 'sins of the flesh' (like adultery) are more serious than 'sins of the spirit'

(like pride, jealousy, envy and self-centeredness). This is because the Christian view of man has been synthesized with the teaching of man from the philosophy of Plato which teaches that evil has its roots chiefly in the body. Our right understanding of the biblical teaching of man is significant. Man is inescapably related to God and made in the image of God, although this image has been marred and distorted by the Fall. The Christian is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Both body and spirit are to be holy for God to dwell in. The unseen sins of the 'spirit' are equally serious in the eyes of God and should not be dismissed as trivial.

In the resurrection, we shall be totally like the glorified Christ, not only in our spirits but also in our bodies. What will it be like to be glorified? We shall only be able to speak about that future existence in figurative language, as the Bible does, particularly in the Book of Revelation. The perfection of the image of God in man will probably concern, first and foremost, our relation to God. Man will then be wholly directed toward God. We shall then worship, obey, and serve God faultlessly, without any imperfection. Praise and adoration of God will then be as natural and constant as breathing is now. It will also concern our relation to our neighbours. Man will then love and serve his fellow men perfectly; whatever hindrances to such loving which now exist will then be gone. There will then be perfect fellowship in a perfect society. All the barriers that now separate people will be gone; there will then be only one Church, of which Christ will be the head. Christ will be the king over people from all nations. All dwellers on the new earth will be members of the family of God, bound to each other with intimate and unbreakable ties.

Yet in the midst of this oneness there will still be many differences. Glorified believers will not all be alike; they will retain their unique talents and gifts, purged of all imperfection - talents that will be used for the enrichment of all. The perfection of the image will also concern our relationship to nature. Man will rule over and care for nature in the way God intended him to do. Human beings will then be stewards, not exploiters, of the earth, exploring its resources and

admiring its beauty in a way that will bring unending praise to God. We shall then reign perfectly over all creation, with and under Christ. The Bible clearly teaches that the future of the person who is in Christ is everlasting life in a glorified resurrection body - the perfected image. But the same Bible also teaches that the person who rejects Christ and continues to live in rebellion against God without repentance or faith will endure eternal perdition. We must therefore live with ourselves and with each other in the light of that future destiny.

Paul went on to emphasize the need for vigilance and wisdom in the way believers live. There should be no room for debauchery, frivolous living and the wasting of opportunity for doing the will of God, for we are living in evil days. Instead, believers should be filled with the Spirit, manifested in true worship of God in songs, hymns and thanksgivings. Notice that the filling with the Spirit invariably leads to worship, praise and thanksgivings, and it is contrasted with being drunk and losing self-control. One aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is indeed self-control and this should be reflected in orderliness in worship and service.

Self-control and discipline need to be exercised also in the use of time, in appropriating the means of grace given by God in the forms of Scriptural reading and study, the communion with God in prayer, corporate worship and participation in the sacraments with fellow believers.

Ephesians 5:21– 6:9

In the light of our new standing in Christ, the focus now turns to practical outworking of relationships, in the family, the husband-wife relationship, the parent-child relationship, and the master-servant relationship. Determination to have our own way and to do what we like is a great source of unhealthy relationships in the home and community. As members of the family of God, the outworking of relationships in the family should be a positive testimony to those

who are non-believers. What we are at home should reflect what we are in the church and in the market-place. Being very active in Christian service, projecting a wholesome image in that context, and behaving badly at home grieves the Spirit of God, causing much stumbling to others. In contrast, we are to live in the light of our salvation in Christ; the outworking of relationships reflects the new creation we have become in Christ.

The exhortations by the Apostle Paul in relation to all these relationships were in fact revolutionary in the context he was in. Women were looked down upon in society then, and a wife's duty was just to take care of the home and children. Children were expected to be quiet and not be prominent in their behaviour.

The injunctions: "wives, submit to your husbands as the husband is the head of the wife and husbands, love your wives..." may not be taken well by many women. But when the qualification, that husbands must "love their wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy," comes in, the exhortation takes on a different meaning. Further qualifications that husbands should love their wives like they love themselves and their own bodies clearly show that the task for husbands is far from easy. As the head of the wife and the family, the husband has to give an account to God for how he behaves. In relation to children, the children are told to obey their parents; at the same time, parents should not exasperate their children. Wives are to submit to their husbands just as the church submits to Christ. If the husband could love his wife with the same quality of love as Christ loves the church, then surely, the wife would only be too glad to submit, and this is precisely how the Christian husband should pattern his love for his wife.

John Stott's explanation on the definitions of 'submission' and 'love' is very helpful: to submit is to give oneself up to somebody; to love is to give oneself up for somebody. Thus 'submission' and 'love' are two aspects of the same thing, namely of that selfless self-giving which is the foundation of an enduring and growing marriage and the

bedrock of harmony in the family and society.

Paul then addressed the Christian attitudes needed in master-servant relationships. He was not focusing on the evil of slavery; he was more concerned about how believers should behave in such relationships. Specifically, those who are masters or employers must know that they have a master over them, Christ Himself. They would have to give an account to the supreme master for their behaviour towards those working under them. Those who are servants or employees should regard serving their masters or employers as serving the Lord Jesus Himself. In that respect, what should then be their attitude in serving?

Ephesians 6:10-24

Now comes the call to put on the armour of God for spiritual warfare. We are reminded here of the opposition, the unseen enemy with his demons all actively engaged in a spiritual war against God's people, seeking to dislodge God's plan to create a new humanity. We must realize that we are not battling flesh and blood but the principalities and power in the heavenly realms, Satan and his forces. The enemy is not only formidable; he is thoroughly wicked and cunning. To be sure, he has incurred a great defeat at the cross. Nevertheless, he knows that he has limited time and he is determined to cause as much damage as possible to God's people and God's kingdom. Thus, he is working twenty four hours a day to achieve his goal. The enemy never retreats; he is always active; and he strikes when God's people become careless and indifferent.

Hence we hear the call of Paul to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. The urgent call is accompanied by the encouragement to put on the full armour of God to stand against the schemes of the evil one. Here Paul takes the picture of the Roman soldier and his armour and brings forth the metaphor or imagery of the spiritual parallel in the armour of the soldier of Christ.

The first part of the armour is the belt of truth buckled around the waist. The truth referred here may be referring to God's revelation in Christ and in His Word; it may also be referring to integrity. It probably refers to both, for one will not do without the other. It is mandatory that God's truth revealed in the Scriptures should not be compromised; the enemy seeks to constantly distort God's truth in His Word. Right at the beginning in the garden of Eden, he already queried, "Did God say?" God's truth revealed in His Word is in fact an expression of the essence of His character, being, and will. So the soldier of the Lord must uphold this truth and guard it rigorously. Truth in the inner being, integrity, is also important and Christians must at all costs be honest and truthful. Failure in this area can stumble many and cause young believers to be disillusioned. The Christian soldier must have the courage to always do the right thing because it is right, no matter what.

We live in a world where many things are 'broken' and so we crave community and resist anything that draws a line and excludes one group or another. But we need to realise that truth by its very nature divides right from wrong. The clear teaching of Scriptures divides truth from error, authentic Christianity from seductive substitutes. And it is not that we arrogantly claim to have the truth but that we believe in a God who is true and who has revealed Himself in the truth of His Word. If we deny the primacy of truth, we are in fact denying God Himself. There is no endeavour that is more important than truth - not evangelism, not even unity. At the end of the day, the only thing we really have is the truth about who God is and how He restores sinners to Himself. Core doctrine that reflects the clear teaching of Scriptures about the fundamentals of our faith will distinguish truth from error and this invariably lead to apparent 'disunity'; real unity cannot be achieved apart from God's truth, and faithful followers of the Lord know this. Unfortunately, we often quibble more about personal pride, preference, position, or prejudice and these divisive attitudes must be kept out of the lives of believers; let us not however mistake this from upholding

the truth of God's Word and in the process encounter accusations that we are causing disunity and not contributing to unity in God's Church.

The second item of the armour is the breastplate of righteousness. The Apostle Paul often used righteousness to mean justification, that is being made right with God. It refers to Christ's righteousness imputed or credited to us so that we are judicially put into a right relationship with God. Justification protects us from the accusation of the evil one. But righteousness may also be referring to moral righteousness, our character and conduct as believers. Our regeneration through the Holy Spirit causes a seed to be planted in our new creation; God expects this seed to grow and mature into a plant. Our justification must invariably lead to our growth in holiness and righteousness. It is difficult for the enemy to find fault with one who is clothed with 'holiness' and 'righteousness' of God.

Ponder over what J. C. Ryle said in *Day by Day* with J. C. Ryle: "Where there is no 'fruit' of holiness of life and conduct, there is no life... It is a vain notion to suppose that we are living members of Christ, if the example of Christ is not to be seen on our characters and lives... Where there is no fruit of the Spirit to be seen, there is no vital religion in the heart. The Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus will always make Himself known in the daily conduct of those in whom He dwells".

The Christian soldier's boots are the equipment of the gospel of peace. This may refer to the steadiness which the gospel gives to the believer, or it might point to the readiness to announce the good news of the gospel. After all, the effective sharing of the gospel leads to peace with God and peace with one another. It brings life from God and freedom from bondage of the enemy, the flesh and the world; the enemy fears the message of this gospel.

The next piece of equipment is the shield of faith. The enemy delights in throwing darts of accusations, doubt, lust, fear and malice. Thus the shield of faith is needed to protect the soldier of the Lord from these attacks. Faith takes hold of the promises of God and His

power to quench these fiery darts. We cannot have faith in someone of whom we know nothing, or about whom we know the wrong things. We must surely have enough knowledge to know in whom we believe and what Christ has done for us. Without knowledge, there can be no true faith; we cannot afford to be like little children tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. We cannot plead ignorance as an excuse if we do not grow in faith. Faith accepts what the Bible teaches as true; it is also manifested by trust, the crowning aspect of faith. The object of our trust is Jesus; we lean wholly on Him for salvation and we rest on His finished work and on all He has done for us. Trust also includes obedience; faith must lead to obedient service in Christ's kingdom, for faith is active in obedience.

The next item in the armour is the helmet of salvation. Paul has stated earlier that the soldier's helmet is "the hope of salvation"; it is the assurance of future and final salvation. Wearing the helmet gives him the confidence to fight a good fight, for he knows that his hope is not in vain.

The final weapon listed is the sword which is used for attack and defence. It is in fact the sword of the Spirit which refers to the Word of God. God's Word, the Scriptures, illuminated and used by the Spirit of God, can cut through the defence of individuals, prick the conscience of such ones and awake them spiritually. The Spirit can put this sword in our hands to ward off temptations and to counter the attacks of the evil one.

Paul adds prayer as another 'weapon', for the armour without prayer cannot hope to combat the enemy effectively. Prayer is an expression and indication of our dependence on God in this spiritual warfare. It is our lifeline without which we also lose communication with the 'Captain' of the Lord's army. So important is prayer that the Apostle Paul himself requested specifically for the prayers of the saints. Paul encountered much opposition, particularly spiritual opposition, in his ministry, and he knew that without prayer, he could not prevail

against the enemy. Paul asked especially that the believers pray for him to have courage and clarity in his communication as he preached the gospel. Here what was written by John Stott is so helpful:

“Clarity and courage remain two of the most crucial characteristics of authentic Christian preaching. For they relate to the content of the message preached and to the style of its presentation. Some preachers have the gift of lucid teaching, but their sermons lack solid content; their substance has been diluted by fear. Others are bold as lions. They fear nobody, and omit nothing. But what they say is confused and confusing... What is needed at the pulpits of the world today is a combination of clarity and courage”.

Perhaps the most important command for the Christian soldier is to be vigilant and alert. We remember the Lord exhorting His disciples to “Watch and pray!” We need to remember that we fight as an army of God; we do not fight alone. The devil never sleeps; the Christian puts himself in grave danger by falling asleep spiritually. A little chink in the armour can spell disaster in mortal combat. The Christian soldier must ensure that his armour is in pristine order. We are to be especially careful to watch ourselves in those areas where we know we are weak.

The Christian soldier must not break rank or flee in battle. If he remains courageously in his place with the rest of the army, then the army, having done all, shall stand. To stand implies to stand as conquerors, defending the ground that the Lord Jesus has secured. The soldier who stands in order is conscientious toward the whole duty that lies on him in regard to both God and man.

Since we have a formidable enemy and we live in a fallen world with the constant struggle between the spirit and the sinful nature, how can we be sure of the perseverance of true believers? We rest on the unchanging faithfulness of God to His promises; this is what we lean on. We rest finally not on our hold of God but on God’s hold of us. We are urged in Scriptures to persevere in the faith - and this is our

challenge. We can only persevere through God's strength and by His grace. But to teach this doctrine in such a way as to present only its comfort and not its challenge, only the security and not the exhortation, is to teach it one-sidedly. And the Bible constantly warns us against this. In 1 Corinthians 9:26-27, the Apostle Paul himself only felt justified in claiming his spiritual security in Christ as he continued to discipline himself. He did not dare to claim this blessing while being careless and indolent in his daily battle against sin. And neither may we. There is no room for presumption. In 1 Corinthians 13:5, Paul said, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves." We can know this only from our continuation in the life of faith, our perseverance, our standing firm to the end. We may entertain the faith of our security in Christ only as we persevere in faith and holiness to the end. The problem is that there are tares among the wheat (Matt. 3:12), and there are non-fruitbearing branches on the vine (John 15:2). There are also those who have only a form of godliness but who deny its power (2 Tim. 3:5), who claim to be apostles but are not (Rev. 2:2), and who have a reputation for being alive but are dead (Rev. 3:1). The problem is, we do not always know who these people are; we cannot read the heart. If some whom we had thought to be a true Christian becomes apostate, we must assume either that the Lord will still bring them back to His fellowship, or that their faith was not genuine. This much we know; those who have true faith will persevere, not in their own strength, but through the power of God, and they will be among those God welcomes into the new humanity in Christ.

The doctrine of the perseverance of true believers, therefore, is both a comfort and a challenge. But the challenge is based on the comfort. We can be certain that we shall persevere to the end only because God has promised to enable us to do so. And so we rest in Him, now and for eternity, knowing that He will never let us go.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the Introduction, the book of Ephesians has been noted to be “the most profound of them all” in comparison to all the epistles written by Apostle Paul. The epistle was John Calvin’s favourite epistle and many readers have been brought to faith and stirred to good works by its message.

In the concluding remarks, it is in order to pause and consider afresh what is so special about the message in this epistle. Ephesians gives us a vision of a renewed human community and society created by God and this in turn gives a strong and steady stimulus to evangelisation and to the manifestation and display of the glory of God, not only in this earthly realm but also in the heavenly realm.

In Adam, we were members of a fallen race, under the bondage of Satan, under the negative influence of the world, under the bondage of our indwelling sin and the flesh, condemned to eternal perdition and destruction.

However, the God who created us is the God who sought us with an everlasting love and has drawn us to Himself with loving kindness. Even before the creation of the world, He has determined to ‘create’ a people of His own by choosing us in His Son, to bring us back to the ‘fold’ and to form a new society and humanity in His Son. Perhaps, we can say that the most important issue in the doctrine of creation is not the origin of all things but their destiny, the goal and meaning of creaturely existence. We are created out of God’s love, for God’s loving purpose; the meaning of human existence, indeed of the existence of all things, lies hidden in the heart of the Creator until God’s loving heart is revealed in Jesus Christ. The secret purpose of creation has been unmasked in the incarnation of God.

God defines power in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The power of God is revealed in Christ as the irresistible force of God's self-surrender, the strength, the almightiness of God's self-emptying and other-centred love. To understand God's love, we need to understand the fierce, burning power of that love against sin, evil and death; the wrath of God is nothing less than the burning passion of God turned against all those things which threaten to destroy God's good creation. The God we worship then assumed the shape of our suffering humanity in order to deliver us from the darkness and danger that threaten to consume us. Jesus Christ, God incarnate, took on Himself our humanity and became sin for us. Christ, who is Himself without sin, identified so completely with us in our sin, in our alienation from God, put Himself in our place so utterly and profoundly that He was made sin for us, and now when God looks at us, God no longer sees us but Christ in our place. Jesus Christ is both the complete substitution and the full representative for humanity; He became what we are so that we might become what He is. Everything God intended for us to be was accomplished and is now given to us as God's gift by faith in Jesus Christ. Indeed, "for by grace we are saved through faith" and those who believe are united with Christ, placed in Him, adopted as God's children into His family, to be part of this new society and humanity 'recreated' by God. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ came into the world and lived the divine life of unreserved love, and now He shares with us this same life through the same Spirit. The call to discipleship, the call to follow Christ, is the call to enjoy the life and love of Jesus Christ in our human reliance upon God the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit; this culminates in the perfect society and humanity in the new heaven and new earth when Jesus shall present God's new people and society to the Father, and God shall be all in all.

Indeed, He has made us His heritage and appointed us to live for the praise of His glory, and that one day, in the fullness of time, He will finally and completely redeem His people who are His possession, to the praise of His glory!

Other books by Quek Koh Choon on
<http://www.livinginthelastdays.com>

- Living in the Last Days
- 末世敬虔生活
- Keeping the Right Focus in the Last Days
- 在末世中保持正确目标
- Berjaga-Jagalah! Engkau Terus Menetapkan Pusat Perhatianmu Yang Benar Pada Zaman Akhir Ini
(Indonesian translation)
- We Need Not Lose Heart in the Last Days
- 末世不丧胆
- Missing the Mandate in the Last Days
- Following Christ Jesus in the Last Days
- 末世十架路
- Overcoming in the Last Days
Reflections on the Book of Revelation
- 末世得胜之道
《启示录》之默想
- The Great Deception in the Last Days:
Preaching a Different Gospel
- How Should We Live as We Face the End Times?
- No Turning Back from God's Privileged Calling in Christ in the
Last Days:
Reflections on the Book of Hebrews
- Understanding Suffering, Evil and the Unfathomable
Wisdom of God:
Reflections on the Book of Job
- Refleksi Pada Kitab Ayub
Supaya Kita Dapat Memahami Penderitaan, Malapetaka, Dan Hikmat
Allah Yang Tidak Terduga
- What Is Ailing the church of God?
Reflections on the Book of I Corinthians